The New York Times and Flight MH17

Bill Van Auken
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In an August 29 editorial calling for the US and NATO to adopt a retaliatory policy against Russia over its alleged "large and unacceptable escalation of ... aggression against Ukraine," the *New York Times* asserts in passing that after rebels in eastern Ukraine "shot down a Malaysian jetliner with a Russian missile ... Russia's involvement became more overt."

What is most striking about this assertion is that it comes after roughly a month in which the *Times*, like the vast majority of the Western media, has gone virtually silent on the downing of Flight MH17, even as the most important evidence, including the plane's black boxes, has become available to investigators.

How is it that the *Times* can assert as an indisputable fact that the anti-Kiev forces in eastern Ukraine and Russia itself are responsible for bringing the airplane down?

There are indisputable facts involved in the MH17 tragedy. The plane, en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on July 17, fell in the war zone of eastern Ukraine, and all 298 passengers and crew members lost their lives.

Beyond these facts, there exist different hypotheses as to the cause of the airliner's crash. One hypothesis, which was developed within barely hours of the disaster, with no more credible support than highly questionable postings on social media, was that the anti-Kiev rebels in eastern Ukraine had shot the plane down with a Russian-supplied Buk surface-to-air missile, a weapon that the rebels denied having or possessing the skill to use.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that this hypothesis found immediate acceptance from not only the *Times*, but virtually all the Western media, because it was tailor-made to further a definite foreign policy agenda being pursued by Washington and its allies in opposition to Russia.

There are, however, other hypotheses. For example, Malaysia's main daily English-language newspaper, the *New Straits Times*, reported on August 7 that compelling evidence points to the plane being brought down by an air-to-air missile and machine-gun fire from a Ukrainian Sukhoi-25 fighter jet. The report cited US intelligence analysts and investigators on the scene as saying that damage to the plane's fuselage indicated it had been "crippled by an air-to-air missile and finished off with cannon fire" from a Ukrainian fighter.

The source of this report made it extremely noteworthy. The *New Straits Times* is a newspaper that reflects the views of the ruling party and government of Malaysia, which runs the airlines and which lost 43 of its citizens in the crash, second only to the Netherlands. Yet the report was blacked out by the *Times*, together with the vast majority of the media in the West.

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not claim to be in possession of irrefutable evidence explaining the MH17 disaster one way or the other. What is striking, however, is the way in which the media, and in particular the *Times*, the supposed newspaper of record, fail to subject the facts of this terrible tragedy to the kind of investigation one would expect in relation to a routine homicide in any major city. Instead, it merely parrots the line put out by the Obama administration and the US State Department.

What characterizes the *Times'* coverage of this event, and really all events that touch in any serious way on the fundamental interests of US imperialism, is the complete absence of critical distance in relation to the US government and the ruling political establishment.

The newspaper does not function as a "watchdog" or "Fourth Estate," adopting a critical and adversarial relationship to the state, but rather acts as its partner and servant. One can find this approach in relation to every major event of the past period, from the events of 9/11 to the preparation of a war of aggression in Iraq, through to the more recent series of global

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interventions and provocations, ranging from Libya to Syria and now Ukraine.

Among the more senior columnists and journalists at the *Times*, the Thomas Friedmans, Roger Cohens, etc., the incestuous relationship with those at the center of power is unconcealed and bolstered by the self-interest of this well-heeled layer. This same outlook pervades the editorial policy of the paper as a whole, turning it into a willing collaborator in disseminating a version of events designed to further Washington's agenda.

The motto inscribed on the newspaper's masthead—"All the news that's fit to print"—would be more truthfully rendered as "all the news that fits the US government's propaganda narrative," and, as the case of flight MH17 shows, when the news fails to meet that criteria, it is blacked out.

The *Times'* promotion of the lies about "weapons of mass destruction" used to drag the American people into a war that claimed a million Iraqi lives and killed nearly 4,500 US troops while wounding tens of thousands more, shows the terrible price that is paid when the media plays this role. It becomes all the more insidious and deadly dangerous in the case of MH17, where the issues at stake carry the seeds of a potential third world war.

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