

One year since the crash of MH17

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21 July 2015

July 17 marked one year since the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 near the village of Grabovo in eastern Ukraine. The plane crashed in an area controlled by Russian-backed separatists amidst an offensive by the pro-Western Kiev regime, which had been brought to power in a fascist-spearheaded coup in February 2014.

The crash resulted in the death of all 298 people on board, including residents of the Netherlands, Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the Philippines, New Zealand and Canada.

The still unexplained tragedy was provocatively used by the United States and its allies to escalate their campaign of military encirclement and economic pressure against Russia, threatening the prospect of war between the world's two largest nuclear-armed powers.

The long delayed report from a Dutch-led investigation into the crash is expected to be released in October.

The one-year anniversary of the event was marked last week with official memorial ceremonies in Ukraine, Australia, Malaysia and the Netherlands. American officials, who might have been expected to exploit the anniversary to sabre-rattle against Russia, were notably absent from these ceremonies.

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott laid a wreath at a memorial in Canberra set in soil brought back from a field that contained plane debris. In an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation last week, Abbott spoke of the Russian-backed rebels "deliberately shooting out of the sky what they knew was a large aircraft." He said he had no doubts that the missile that shot down the plane had been supplied by the Russians.

In a televised address on the eve of the anniversary, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko described the crash as the result of a "terrorist attack launched from the territory occupied by Russian-backed militants in

the east of Ukraine."

Provocatively, Poroshenko claimed that the downing "would not have happened without the participation and an order from top political and military leaders of the neighboring state," referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top Russian officials.

Comparatively, the response of the American political establishment and media has been extremely muted. Secretary of State John Kerry released a statement last week in which he avoided ascribing any blame to Russia or the Ukrainian separatists. "We believe that MH17 was shot down by a surface-to-air missile fired from separatist-controlled territory in eastern Ukraine," Kerry said. "A year later, we strongly reaffirm our commitment to a thorough and independent international investigation to identify the full facts of what happened that day, and, most importantly, to see that those responsible are held accountable."

This stands in stark contrast to statements made by Kerry in the days following the crash, when he declared there was an "enormous amount of evidence" that Russia had provided the separatists with the weapon as well as the training necessary to shoot down MH17. He called the crash a "wake-up call" for European countries that had been reluctant to place greater military and economic pressure on Russia.

US officials were quick to make the claim that MH17 had been shot from the sky by a Russian-made SA-11 BUK missile fired by Ukrainian separatists. American intelligence agencies claimed that, based on satellite data, they had determined the plane had been shot down by a ground-to-air missile.

Charges of Russian responsibility were accompanied by bloodcurdling calls for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be held accountable. Punishing economic sanctions, first implemented by the US and the European Union in response to Moscow's annexation

of Crimea in March, were deepened, and the crash was used as a justification for the escalation of NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe.

However, a year later, none of the intelligence data supposedly collected by the US confirming the role of either the rebels or the Russians has been made public. Highly dubious social media postings remain the only "evidence" provided to confirm the official line. If the US had incriminating information pinning the blame on the Russian-backed separatists, Washington would certainly have released it.

The pro-government propagandists and stenographers who comprise the American and European media establishment have shown little interest in investigating reports that contradict the official narrative spun in the hours after the crash. Separatist and Russian officials continue to maintain their innocence in the downing of MH17.

Former Associated Press correspondent Robert Parry, writing for ConsortiumNews.com, reported last week that an anonymous source briefed by US intelligence analysts said "the reason for the intelligence community's silence is that more definitive analysis pointed to a rogue Ukrainian operation implicating one of the pro-regime oligarchs." If such conclusions were made public, the official narrative utilized to pressure Russia would completely break down.

The Malaysian *New Straits Times* reported in August 2014 that American intelligence officials had concluded that MH17 had been shot down by a Ukrainian fighter jet. A preliminary report by the Dutch Safety Board released in September did not ascribe blame and concluded only that the plane had been hit by a number of "high energy objects," consistent with a ground-to-air missile, an air-to-air missile or machine gun fire from a jet fighter.

Russian military officials released radar data last year that appeared to show a Ukrainian Sukhoi-25 jet fighter trailing MH17 at the time it was shot down.

A video released last week shows separatist fighters arriving at the MH17 crash scene expecting to find a downed Sukhoi and expressing shock at finding a commercial jumbo jet instead. A rebel commander at the scene can be heard saying he believed a Sukhoi had brought down the passenger jet.

To this point, no information has been released

clearly establishing responsibility for the criminal downing of the passenger jet. But one thing can be said for certain: no substantive evidence has been produced supporting the virtually universal assertions by Western governments and media at the time that Moscow was either directly or indirectly to blame.

Western declarations of Russian guilt in the MH17 tragedy played a crucial role in transforming the entire region into a tinder box. Eastern Europe today bristles with US and NATO military equipment and soldiers involved in military exercises all along Russia's western border. Reports of dangerously close encounters between Russian aircraft and NATO forces have become increasingly common.

NATO has tripled the size of its reaction force aimed at Russia, while the US is engaged in an inflammatory military training program in western Ukraine. Most recently, the US announced that it will station heavy military equipment in the Baltics and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. One year after the crash of MH17, the American and European campaign against Russia has pushed the world closer to war than at any time since the height of the Cold War.



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