

Russia vetoes MH17 tribunal push by US allies

Mike Head
30 July 2015

The Obama administration and five US allies, Australia, Malaysia, Netherlands, Ukraine and Belgium, provocatively pushed for a vote on the UN Security Council yesterday to establish an international criminal court to prosecute those allegedly responsible for the July 2014 shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17.

The resolution moved by the five governments demanded a UN-appointed tribunal despite the fact that two investigations are still continuing into the tragedy and have apparently produced no evidence implicating Russia or Russian-backed Ukrainian separatists.

Bringing forward the vote was a calculated step to escalate the US-led pressure on Moscow, knowing that the Russian government intended to veto the resolution. Of the 15 current members of the Security Council, 11 voted for the motion and Russia voted against, while three abstained—China, Angola and Venezuela.

The resolution is part of the campaign launched by the US and its partners a year ago to politically exploit the still-unexplained downing of the plane. MH17 crashed in an area of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russian-backed separatists during an offensive by the pro-Western Kiev regime, which was installed via 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. Washington and its supporters seized upon the deaths to ramp up the military encirclement and economic sanctions against Russia, raising the risk of war between nuclear-armed powers.

While US officials were noticeably muted during the July 17 anniversary of the disaster, the US ambassador to the UN Samantha Power struck an aggressive tone in

response to yesterday's Russian veto. She said "by vetoing this resolution Russia has tried to deny justice to the 298 victims on that plane" and "callously disregarded" the victims of MH17.

Claiming to identify with the victims' families, "who have already endured more than any of us can fathom," Power told the Security Council "no veto will stand in the way of this heinous crime being investigated and prosecuted." This amounts to a thinly-veiled threat to accuse Russian President Vladimir Putin or his supporters of criminal responsibility for the deaths.

Yet, if Washington had any evidence of Russian involvement in the plane's downing, it would have been produced long ago. None of the supposed "intelligence" reports implicating Russian-backed forces have been made public. Instead, a Dutch Safety Board preliminary report released last September did not ascribe blame. That body's final report is not due until October.

Malaysia's *New Straits Times* reported last year that American intelligence officials concluded that MH17 was shot down by a Ukrainian fighter jet, and Russian military officials released radar data that appeared to show such a Ukrainian jet trailing MH17 at the time it was hit.

Despite the lack of any evidence to support a tribunal, Malaysian, Dutch and Australian representatives joined the US denunciations of Russia's veto. Once again, as has been the case for the past year, the Australian government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott was among the most vociferous, directly accusing Russia of shielding the perpetrators.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who attended the UN session, insisted:

"The exercise of the veto today is an affront to the memory of the 298 victims of MH17 and their family

and friends. Those responsible may believe that they can now hide behind the Russian federation's veto. They will not be allowed to evade justice."

Bishop signalled that Australia and a Joint Investigation Team (JIT), created in partnership with Malaysia, Netherlands, Belgium and the Ukrainian regime, would initiate an alternative prosecution mechanism. JIT members were actively involved in lobbying for yesterday's UN resolution, making a mockery of claims to be conducting an independent investigation.

Hours before the Security Council vote, Putin had publicly reaffirmed Russia's opposition to the creation of a criminal tribunal. The other council members rejected a Russian counter-resolution calling for a greater UN role in an investigation into what caused the downing of the aircraft.

Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin noted that the tribunal resolution was submitted for a vote with the knowledge it would be vetoed. "This in our view indicates the fact that political purposes were more important for them than practical objectives." This was "regrettable," he said.

Churkin stated that his government stood ready to "cooperate in a full, independent and objective investigation," but the JIT investigation was being conducted "in a closed fashion." He asked: "What are the grounds to be assured of the impartiality of the investigation?" Churkin added that the guilty parties had effectively been named in advance, amid "the aggressive propaganda backdrop in the media."

The Russian ambassador said there were "no grounds" for a tribunal because the UN last year classified the crash as "not a threat to international security." No criminal tribunal had ever been established by the UN to deal with an air crash, Churkin pointed out.

Over the past year, the Australian government has played a frontline role in Washington's aggressive moves against Russia. Last year, Abbott threatened to "shirt-front" (i.e., physically assault) Putin over the issue.

For the July 17 MH17 anniversary, Abbott's government staged a nationally-televised memorial service in the national parliament's Great Hall, and unveiled a garden plaque inscribed with the names of the Australian victims. The plaque was sited close to a

similar one commemorating the 88 Australians who died in the 2002 Bali terrorist bombing, suggesting a connection between the MH17 crash and terrorism.

In all these efforts, the Liberal-National government has benefitted from the unstinting support of the Labor Party opposition. Last night, Labor leader Bill Shorten quickly joined the government in condemning Russia's veto. "Labor supports the government's efforts to see that justice is done," he said. "Russia's actions show no respect for families of the 298 innocent people killed—enduring unimaginable grief and waiting too long for answers."

Repeated claims by the government and the Labor Party to speak on behalf of the families have been at odds with the sentiments expressed by family members themselves. In media interviews, Paul Guard, whose parents Roger and Jill Guard died in the crash, said his main priority was to see a "peaceful resolution to the conflict," not an individual paraded to the world as being responsible for bringing down MH17.

Nevertheless, the MH17 tragedy is being used by the US and its closest supporters to help justify increasing deployments of US and NATO troops and military hardware throughout Eastern Europe and the Baltics, right up to Russia's borders, bringing the world closer to a catastrophic war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact