

Four men charged with murder based on bogus MH-17 investigation

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On June 19, the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) set up in 2014 to investigate the crash of the MH-17 Malaysian Airlines flight over East Ukraine on July 17, 2014, which resulted in 298 deaths, announced the criminal prosecution of four individuals for murder by the Public Prosecution Service of the Netherlands.

The four suspects—Igor Girkin, Sergey Dubinsky, Oleg Yuldashevich (all three Russian) and Leonid Kharchenko (a Ukrainian citizen)—were, and in some cases still are, active as leaders of the Russian-backed eastern Ukrainian separatists. They now face international arrest warrants and will be put on trial on March 9, 2020. Since the Netherlands cannot demand extradition from either Russia or Ukraine, it is likely that they will be tried and sentenced in absentia.

The four men, as well as the Russian government, maintain that they had no involvement whatsoever with the plane crash. Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated Russia's rejection of the JIT commission, saying at a "direct line" Q&A on Russian television on Friday that he "completely disagrees" with the evidence it put forward.

Malaysian President Mahathir Mohamad denounced the charges as politically motivated: "As far as we are concerned, we want proof of guilt. But so far, there is no proof. Only hearsay."

The shooting down of the plane occurred at the height of the Ukraine crisis and civil war in 2014, triggered by the US- and German-backed coup in Kiev in 2014 led by fascist forces and sections of the Ukrainian oligarchy working closely with Washington and Berlin. The Ukrainian and the US governments, the EU and the international bourgeois media rushed to blame Russia for the downing of the plane before any purported evidence was even presented. It was exploited as a new "Gulf of Tonkin," an unclear and dubious military incident that the imperialist powers could use as a pretext for war.

The MH-17 case has fallen out of the limelight in recent years. However, the military build-up against Russia, led by the US and NATO, and US-led economic warfare against the country have accelerated.

The announcement of the criminal prosecution last week came amid an escalation of both the Trump administration's war preparations against Iran, which might trigger a direct conflict with Russia, and the Democratic Party's ongoing campaign against Trump, focusing on his allegedly "soft" stance on Russia. It also comes amid growing conflicts between the European imperialist powers, especially Germany, and the United States, including over Russian gas supplies to Germany through the NordStream2 pipeline.

The Western bourgeois press latched upon the announcement, issuing a flood of commentaries, with the editorial board of the *New York Times* suggesting the plane's downing was nothing less than "state-sponsored murder." International media like *Der Spiegel* largely presented the JIT's announcement and "findings" as facts to their readership.

The *Washington Post* wrote that "international investigators" had "worked diligently to uncover the truth" and were "peeling away Russia's lies about the downed Malaysian Airlines flight." The paper dismissed out of hand evidence of possible Ukrainian involvement presented by Russia as "fabricated."

In reality, the JIT's announcement of the criminal prosecution of these four men is based on old findings that have no credibility. The JIT investigation is heavily biased, and part of a massive campaign to exploit the tragic death of 298 people to escalate anti-Russia war preparations. In almost five years of this "investigation," no proof of Russian state involvement has been presented, and significant evidence pointing to potential Ukrainian involvement has been deliberately suppressed.

The JIT's "finding" that a Russian SA-11 BUK missile

system was allegedly brought by the Russian army to the Russian-backed East Ukrainian separatists was continuously cited as “evidence” of Russian involvement.

A 2016 investigative report by journalist Robert Parry pointed to multiple gaps and contradictions in this version. The second piece of “evidence” are barely audible phone conversations, allegedly tapped from Russian military sources, suggesting that the SA-11 BUK missile system was deliberately delivered to the separatists. However, these phone conversations do not at any point explicitly refer to the missile system nor to transport across the Russian-Ukrainian border.

The fact that not only Russian but also US and Dutch intelligence have found evidence suggesting Ukrainian involvement has been completely omitted from the official press coverage.

In October 2015, the Dutch intelligence service MIVD determined that the only high-powered anti-aircraft missile systems in Eastern Ukraine that could have shot down the MH-17 at 33,000 feet belonged to the Ukrainian military.

An anonymous US intelligence analyst explained in 2015 that “definitive analysis pointed to a rogue Ukrainian operation implicating one of the pro-regime oligarchs.” Malayasian news media reported as early as August 2014 that American intelligence officials assumed that the plane had been shot down by a Ukrainian fighter jet. Russian military officials have also released radar data that seemed to show a Ukrainian Sukhoi-25 jet fighter trailing MH 17 at the time it was shot.

The JIT’s investigation’s primary aim has been to suppress and divert attention from any evidence suggesting Ukrainian rather than Russian involvement. Not a single report produced by the commission in the past five years has even tried to disprove the evidence pointing to Ukrainian military involvement in the shoot-down of the plane. They were simply ignored.

This is no coincidence. Contrary to how it is presented by the media, the JIT is not an independent body of “international investigators.” It includes representatives of the Dutch, Belgian, Malaysian and Ukrainian government and secret services. The Russian government has from the beginning been barred from participating in the investigations.

Though Ukraine should itself have been considered a suspect in any serious investigation, the JIT not only collaborated with Kiev, but also operated under an agreement allowing the Ukrainian government to veto the release of information. There could hardly be a more

glaring conflict of interest.

The Ukrainian secret service (SBU), which was heavily involved in both the imperialist-backed fascist coup in Kiev in February 2014 and subsequent operation of far-right forces in the civil war, was Ukraine’s official representative on the JIT. It massively influenced the investigation.

An internal JIT report from 2016 said: “Since the first week of September 2014, investigating officers from The Netherlands and Australia have worked here [in Kiev]. They work in close cooperation here with the Security and Investigation Service of the Ukraine (SBU). Immediately after the crash, the SBU provided access to large numbers of tapped telephone conversations and other data. ...At first rather formal, cooperation with the SBU became more and more flexible. ‘In particular because of the data analysis, we were able to prove our added value’, says [Dutch police official Gert] Van Doorn. ‘Since then, we notice in all kinds of ways that they deal with us in an open way. They share their questions with us and think along as much as they can.’”

It was the SBU, moreover, that supplied the phone intercepts and other material now universally cited as “evidence” of Russian involvement.

Despite these glaring contradictions and violations of proper investigative procedure, the “findings” and actions of the JIT are presented as credible, definitive “proof” of “Russian guilt.” This testifies yet again to the lengths the bourgeois media and Western imperialists are prepared to go in their criminal and dangerous campaign against Russia—a reckless campaign which could spark a war between the world’s two largest nuclear-armed powers.



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