

# Media Disinformation: Blaming Russia as ‘Flat Fact’

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In-depth Report: [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses a crowd on May 9, 2014, celebrating the 69th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Crimean port city of Sevastopol from the Nazis. (Russian government photo)

The American rush to judgment blaming ethnic Russian rebels and Russian President Putin for the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 continues unabated despite other possible explanations.

As nuclear-armed America hurtles into a completely avoidable crash with nuclear-armed Russia over Ukraine, you can now see the dangers of “information warfare” when facts give way to propaganda and the press fails to act as an impartial arbiter.

In this sorry affair, one of the worst offenders of journalistic principles has been the New York Times, generally regarded as America’s premier newspaper. During the Ukraine crisis, the Times has been little more than a propaganda conveyor belt delivering what the U.S. government wants out via shoddy and biased reporting from the likes of Michael R. Gordon and David Herszenhorn.

The Times reached what was arguably a new low on Sunday when it accepted as flat fact the still unproven point of how Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down. The Times dropped all attribution despite what appear to be growing – rather than diminishing – doubts about Official Washington’s narrative that Ukrainian rebels shot down the plane by using a powerful Russian-supplied Buk missile battery.

U.S. and Ukrainian government officials began pushing this narrative immediately after the plane went down on July 17 killing 298 people onboard. But the only evidence has been citations of “social media” and the snippet of an intercepted phone call containing possibly confused comments by Ukrainian rebels after the crash, suggesting that some rebels initially believed they had shot the plane down but later reversed that judgment.

A major problem with this evidence is that it assumes the rebels – or for that matter the Ukrainian armed forces – operate with precise command and control when the reality is that the soldiers on both sides are not very professional and function in even a deeper fog of war than might exist in other circumstances.

Missing Images

But an even bigger core problem for the U.S. narrative is that it is virtually inconceivable that American intelligence did not have satellite and other surveillance on eastern Ukraine at the time of the shoot-down. Yet the U.S. government has been unable (or unwilling) to

supply a single piece of imagery showing the Russians supplying a Buk anti-aircraft missile battery to the rebels; the rebels transporting the missiles around eastern Ukraine; the rebels firing the fateful missile that allegedly brought down the Malaysian airliner; or the rebels then returning the missiles to Russia.

To accept Official Washington's certainty about what it "knows" happened, you would have to believe that American spy satellites – considered the best in the world – could not detect 16-foot-tall missiles during their odyssey around Russia and eastern Ukraine. If that is indeed the case, the U.S. taxpayers should demand their billions upon billions of dollars back.

However, the failure of U.S. intelligence to release its satellite images of Buk missile batteries in eastern Ukraine is the "dog-not-barking" evidence that this crucial evidence to support the U.S. government's allegations doesn't exist. Can anyone believe that if U.S. satellite images showed the missiles crossing the border, being deployed by the rebels and then returning to Russia, that those images would not have been immediately declassified and shown to the world? In this case, the absence of evidence is evidence of absence – absence of U.S. evidence.

The U.S. government's case also must overcome public remarks by senior U.S. military personnel at variance with the Obama administration's claims of certainty. For instance, the Washington Post's Craig Whitlock [reported](#) last Saturday that Air Force Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, U.S. commander of NATO forces in Europe, said last month that "We have not seen any of the [Russian] air-defense vehicles across the border yet."

Whitlock also reported that "Rear Adm. John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, said defense officials could not point to specific evidence that an SA-11 [Buk] surface-to-air missile system had been transported from Russia into eastern Ukraine."

There's also the possibility that a Ukrainian government missile – either from its own Buk missile batteries fired from the ground or from a warplane in the sky – brought down the Malaysian plane. I was told by one source who had been briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts that some satellite images suggest that the missile battery was under the control of Ukrainian government troops but that the conclusion was not definitive.

Plus, there were reports from eyewitnesses in the area of the crash that at least one Ukrainian jet fighter closed on the civilian plane shortly before it went down. The Russian government also has cited radar data supposedly showing Ukrainian fighters in the vicinity.

### Need for a Real Inquiry

What all this means is that a serious and impartial investigation is needed to determine who was at fault and to apportion accountability. But that inquiry is still underway with no formal conclusions.

So, in terms of journalistic professionalism, a news organization should treat the mystery of who shot down Flight 17 with doubt. Surely, no serious journalist would jump to the conclusion based on the dubious claims made by one side in a dispute while the other side is adamant in its denials, especially with the stakes so high in a tense confrontation between two nuclear powers.

But that is exactly what the Times did in describing new U.S. plans to escalate the confrontation by possibly supplying tactical intelligence to the Ukrainian army so it can more effectively wage war against eastern Ukrainian rebels.

On Sunday, the Times [wrote](#): “At the core of the debate, said several [U.S.] officials — who, like others interviewed, spoke on the condition of anonymity because the policy deliberations are still in progress — is whether the American goal should be simply to shore up a Ukrainian government reeling from the separatist attacks, or to send a stern message to [Russian President Vladimir] Putin by aggressively helping Ukraine target the missiles Russia has provided. Those missiles have taken down at least five aircraft in the past 10 days, [including Malaysia Airlines Flight 17](#).” [Emphasis added.]

The link provided by the Times’ online version of the story connects to an earlier Times’ story that attributed the accusations blaming Russia to U.S. “officials.” But this new story drops that attribution and simply accepts the claims as flat fact.

The danger of American “information warfare” that treats every development in the Ukraine crisis as an opportunity to blame Putin and ratchet up tensions with Russia has been apparent since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis – as has been the clear anti-Russian bias of the Times and virtually every other outlet of the mainstream U.S. news media. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Will Ukraine Be NYT’s Waterloo?”](#)]

Since the start of the crisis last year, U.S. officials and American-funded non-governmental organizations have not only pushed a one-sided story but have been pushing a dangerous agenda, seeking to create a collision between the United States and Russia and, more personally, between President Barack Obama and President Putin.

The vehicle for this head-on collision between Russia and the United States was the internal political disagreement in Ukraine over whether elected President Viktor Yanukovych should have accepted harsh International Monetary Fund austerity demands as the price for associating with the European Union or agree to a more generous offer from Russia.

Angered last September when Putin helped Obama avert a planned U.S. bombing campaign against Syria, American neocons were at the forefront of this strategy. Their principal need was to destroy the Putin-Obama collaboration, which also was instrumental in achieving a breakthrough on the Iran nuclear dispute (while the neocons were hoping that the U.S. military might bomb Iran, too).

So, on Sept. 26, 2013, Carl Gershman, a leading neocon and longtime president of the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, took to the op-ed page of the neocon-flagship Washington Post to urge the U.S. government to push European “free trade” agreements on Ukraine and other former Soviet states and thus counter Moscow’s efforts to maintain close relations with those countries.

The ultimate goal, according to Gershman, was isolating and possibly toppling Putin in Russia with Ukraine the key piece on this global chessboard. “Ukraine is the biggest prize,” Gershman [wrote](#). “Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

To give the United States more leverage inside Ukraine, Gershman’s NED paid for scores of projects, including training “activists” and supporting “journalists.” Rather than let the

Ukrainian political process sort out this disagreement, U.S. officials, such as neocon Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and neocon Sen. John McCain, also intervened to encourage increasingly disruptive demonstrations seeking to overthrow Yanukovych when he opted for the Russian deal over the EU-IMF offer.

Though much of the ensuing violence was instigated by neo-Nazi militias that had moved to the front of the anti-Yanukovych protests, the U.S. government and its complicit news media blamed every act of violence on Yanukovych and the police, including a still mysterious sniper attack that left both protesters and police dead.

On Feb. 21, Yanukovych denied ordering any shootings and tried to stem the violence by signing an agreement brokered by three European nations to reduce his powers and hold early elections so he could be voted out of office. He also complied with a demand from Vice President Joe Biden to pull back Ukrainian police. Then, the trap sprang shut.

Neo-Nazi militias overran government buildings and forced Yanukovych and his officials to flee for their lives. The State Department quickly endorsed the coup regime – hastily formed by the remnants of the parliament – as “legitimate.” Besides passing bills offensive to ethnic Russians in the east, one of the parliament’s top priorities was to enact the IMF austerity plan.

#### White Hats/Black Hats

Though the major U.S. news media was aware of these facts – and indeed you could sometimes detect the reality by reading between the lines of dispatches from the field – the overriding U.S. narrative was that the coup-makers were the “white hats” and Yanukovych along with Putin were the “black hats.” Across the U.S. media, Putin was mocked for riding on a horse shirtless and other indiscretions. For the U.S. media, it was all lots of fun, as was the idea of reprising the Cold War with Moscow.

When the people of Crimea – many of whom were ethnic Russians – voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, the U.S. media declared the move a Russian “invasion” although the Russian troops were already in Ukraine as part of an agreement with previous Ukrainian governments.

Every development that could be hyped was hyped. There was virtually no nuance in the news reporting, a lack of professionalism led by the New York Times. Yet, the solution to the crisis was always relatively obvious: a federalized system that would allow the ethnic Russians in the east a measure of self-governance and permit Ukraine to have cordial economic relations with both the EU and Russia.

But replacement President Petro Poroshenko – elected when a secession fight was already underway in the east – refused to negotiate with the ethnic Russian rebels who had rejected the ouster of Yanukovych. Sensing enough political support inside the U.S. government, Poroshenko opted for a military solution.

It was in that context of a massive Ukrainian government assault on the east that Russia stepped up its military assistance to the beleaguered rebels, including the apparent provision of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles to fend off Kiev’s air superiority. The rebels did succeed in shooting down some Ukrainian warplanes flying at altitudes far below the 33,000 feet of the Malaysia Airlines plane.

For a plane at that height to be shot down required a more powerful system, like the Buk anti-aircraft batteries or an air-to-air missile fired by a fighter jet. Which brings us to the mystery of what happened on the afternoon of July 17 and why it is so important to let a serious investigation evaluate all the available evidence and not to have a rush to judgment.

But the idea of doing an investigation first and drawing conclusions second is a concept that, apparently, neither the U.S. government nor the New York Times accepts. They would prefer to start with the conclusion and then make a serious investigation irrelevant, one more casualty of information warfare.

*Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America's Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).*

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