

Devils' Dance on the Malaysian Plane Tragedy

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It is interesting to watch that after a week of full-blown Russia-bashing following the Malaysian Boeing crash in Donbas sky that took 298 innocent lives, there is an intriguing lull in the international media in its campaign to malign Kremlin for the tragedy.

There were irresponsible and unfounded accusations by the US, Ukraine and international media that made Russia directly responsible and then targeted the pro-Russian rebels in the east of Ukraine for the Malaysian Boeing crash that took place on July 17, 2014.

The Ukraine Government used some bogus taped conversation between the pro-Russian rebels in the east of Ukraine and Russian intelligence agency representatives to prove Russian involvement in the shooting of the plane, which turned out to be absolutely fake. After that Kiev is maintaining stoic silence over the fabricated tape.

Then the Ukraine Government claimed that they have caught Russian military experts on the border; involved in firing the Buk missile to shoot down the Malaysian passenger plane, which was subsequently proved to be a blatant lie. Later there were accusations that the pro-Russian rebels were destroying evidence and deliberately delaying the collection of dead bodies and creating obstacles for the arrival of international experts at the crash site. But the truth is that the representatives of the self-proclaimed Donetsk Republic, who control the crash site, were asked by the OSCE representatives not to collect the dead bodies till international experts arrive on the spot, and these OSCE representatives have testified that the accusation against the rebels destroying evidence was unfounded. The rebels were accused of handing over the flight black box to Moscow and tampering with the same. Malaysian experts, to whom the black boxes were handed over by the rebel representatives, have confirmed that the black boxes were absolutely intact, and those have been handed over to the Netherlands officials, who on their part have testified that the black boxes were not tampered with by any means.

The Netherlands handed over the black boxes for examination to a laboratory in Britain, a close ally of the US that looks increasingly to be behind the provocation. It is difficult to believe that Britain would withstand the pressure exerted on it by the US for the sake of manipulating the findings of the black boxes of the flight, although it may not be all that easy. In any case, Russian experts have raised their eyebrows over the fact that the Netherlands handed over the black boxes to Britain for decoding.

A new series of sectoral sanctions has been imposed on Russia as if its complicity in shooting down the Malaysian jet has been established even before the start of the international investigation. These sanctions—affecting energy, defence, banking sectors—would hit the Russian economy badly. There is a famous Russian proverb that says

bez vini vinobat which means 'to declare somebody a criminal without any crime'. Indeed Russia has been declared a criminal without its crime being proved so far in the Malaysian aircraft tragedy. It looks increasingly clear that the whole conspiracy to nail Russia and punish it for a crime that it has not committed. Some Russian experts strongly believe that the entire conspiracy, of course not without US connivance, had the sole objective of holding Russia responsible for the tragedy by any means.

But unsurprisingly, the devils' dance on this human tragedy through the orchestrated media hysteria against Russia has suddenly come to a halt, triggering suspicions about its motive. The media trial of Russia on the tragedy has abruptly ended, generating suspicious thoughts about a well-planned provocation. Moreover, ten days after the tragedy the US, which was earlier insisting that Ukraine had neither the possibility nor the motivation for shooting the Malaysian plane, has confirmed the authenticity of the satellite data presented in the special briefing by the Russian Defence Ministry on July 21 when it was revealed that the Ukraine Army's anti-air defence system near Donetsk had four divisions of Buk-M1 complex. White House spokesperson Josh Earnest in a statement has said that a rocket was fired from the rebel-controlled territory at a time when Ukraine's anti-air defence system was not in operation. Thus the US has now indirectly admitted for the first time about the presence of Ukraine's anti-air defence system on Donetsk territory, said a highly placed source in the Russian Defence Ministry.

In the meantime, Russia has raised a number of issues in connection with the Malaysian plane tragedy. Along with the presentation of 'objective control' data of its satellite monitoring, the Russian Defence Ministry has asked ten questions, while Rusavia, Russia's official aviation body, has raised as many as 26 questions, which remain unanswered till date by both the US as well as Ukraine. The Russian Defence Ministry presentation has made it clear to the US as well as Ukraine that Moscow has certain evidence at its disposal about what had happened in the Donbas sky on that fateful day.

Russia has officially, with impeccable technical evidence, rebutted the US allegations about its complicity in the air tragedy. Interestingly, Washington has recently toned down its accusation of Russian complicity in the tragedy by stating that the US does not have any evidence of Russian complicity in the incident and about the direct evidence of Russian presence at the site of firing of the rocket that hit the Malaysian plane or that Russia helped the rebels to operate the Buk missiles. More than that, the US intelligence has recently admitted that it has no evidence of movement of Buk missile systems across the Russian-Ukrainian border to the Ukrainian side. However, all pertinent questions raised by the Russian side remain unanswered till date.

The US State Department representative Merry Harf's claim that they have "huge amount of evidence from open as well as secret sources about Russian complicity" in the air crash has fallen flat in the backdrop of the US failure to produce any evidence in that direction. As if US President Obama never accused Russia in the Malaysian plane tragedy.

However, if the US and Ukraine are thinking that they would get away by throwing dust in the eyes of the international community on the issue, that is not going to happen. The thief's tactics of shouting 'to hold the thief', adopted by the US and Ukraine, is most likely going to be exposed in the coming days and weeks. Meanwhile, UN SC resolution No 2166 on the air crash, while condemning the incident, has demanded an independent comprehensive international investigation of the tragedy in accordance with the principles of international civil aviation; it has called for immediate ceasefire in the territory around the

air crash in order to ensure security for facilitating inter-national investigation.

Apparently the Ukraine side has violated the resolution by intensifying flights in the territory as it is clear that the insurgents are just defending their positions against the attacks launched by the Ukrainian forces. Latest reports suggest that the Ukrainian forces have succeeded in capturing part of the territory around the crash site. Heavy fighting around the crash site would no doubt hamper the work of the international inspectors.

This resolution, originally moved by Australia, is a result of compromise after Russia's demand for involving the International Civil Aviation Committee for ensuring impartial investigation was incorporated into it. Russia's Permanent Representative at the UNSC, Vitaly Churkin, in his address emphasised on the leading role of the International Civil Aviation Committee along with all those interested in establishing the truth. He demanded that all material evidence including the black boxes be kept under strict control of the international civil aviation organisation for promoting unbiased international investigation, and called for creating all necessary conditions to ensure full security that would facilitate the work of the international investigators at the crash site. Churkin has alleged that the shock emanating from the Malaysian plane tragedy is unfortunately being used by Ukraine for intensifying its punitive operations in the east of the country. Dozens of innocent people are being killed every day as a result of the use of heavy artillery and air strikes by the Ukrainian forces, notwithstanding the UNSC statement that Kiev would maintain 'restraint' in its military operations.

Vitaly Churkin, speaking in the UNSC, raised certain questions before Ukraine regarding the activities of its aviation dispatchers and reasons for the transfer of Ukrainian Buk missile battery in the region adjacent to the territory controlled by the rebels. Why did the battery leave the region immediately after the air-crash on July 17? Why did the Radio-Location System of Ukraine's anti-air defence system work with maximum intensity on July 17? The Russian Defence Ministry has asked several more questions related to the issue to Ukraine on the basis of images received from its satellites. These questions include why did the Ukrainian dispatchers give the instruction for deviating from the designed air corridor and lower the altitude of the flight? What was the reason for relocation of the Ukrainian radio-location station 9C 18 "Kupol—MI" of the Buk missile system on July 17? What was the objective of Ukraine's SU-25 military aircraft flying close to the Malaysian passenger plane?

The Ukrainian authorities are absolutely silent on the issues, and have apparently imposed a ban on disclosing its dispatchers data. In the meantime, the man working as dispatcher in Kiev's Borispol airport, who had revealed about SU-25 military aircraft flying next to the Malaysian flight have reportedly gone missing along with some dispatchers at Dnepropetrovsk ground service controlling the Malaysian flight.

One of the most intriguing questions is: why is the US silent about the images of its own satellite that was flying over Donetsk region on the fateful day. Russia has proof of the US satellite's presence over the crash site. What is that the US is trying to hide from the international community, although the satellite images can definitely shed light on many crucial issues? The well-orchestrated vilification campaign against Russia on the shooting down of the Malaysian plane has done huge damage to Russia's international prestige, and most importantly helped Washington in imposing new sanctions that would no doubt affect the Russian economy adversely.

In this backdrop, India has done well by opposing imposition of sanctions, calling them

counter-productive. But this cannot be enough given the special and privileged nature of our strategic partnership. Some foreign policy experts and national dailies have advised that the Government of India should use its strategic partnership to exert pressure on Russia not to interfere in Ukraine.

These experts should not forget that the Soviet Union was the first country that had extended its support and solidarity to us when Sikkim was merged with India. It was the Soviet Union which exercised its veto power in the UNSC time and again to defend India on the Kashmir issue. It is Moscow that had provided enormous assistance to India during the Bangladesh war in 1971 when India was absolutely isolated in the world in the backdrop of the emergence of the US-China-Pakistan axis designed against India and the presence of the US 7th fleet in the Bay of Bengal.

Again it is Russia alone which opposed the international sanctions imposed on India in the wake of the Pokhran II nuclear tests and went ahead in providing assistance for building the Kudankulam nuclear plant. It is time for India to repay the debt by extending more tangible support to Russia and President Putin who are now victims of a well-calculated and well-conceived vilification campaign. The Indian Government should take a clearer stand in defence of Russia, and the Indian public at large should raise their voice against the way Russia and President Putin are being demonised, discredited by the international media through a media campaign based on half-truths and blatant lies. Our policy-makers need to have a better understanding of the US game-plan in Ukraine which is nothing but the containment of Russia.

We should show sensitivity to the security concerns of our closest strategic partner, Russia, on the Ukrainian issue at the moment. This policy would pay us handsome dividends in the long run while strengthening our autonomy in the domain of foreign policy-making.

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