

# Fake Evidence Blaming Russia for the Malaysian Airlines MH-17 Shoot-Down?

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*Pointing the finger of blame at Russian President Putin for the Malaysia Airlines shoot-down last July, an Australian news show claims to have found the spot where the Russian BUK missile battery made its getaway, but the images don't match, raising questions of journalistic fakery, writes Robert Parry.*

An Australian television show claims to have solved the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down mystery – the Russians did it! – but the program appears to have faked a key piece of evidence and there remain many of the same doubts as before, along with the dog-not-barking question of why the U.S. government has withheld its intelligence data.

The basic point of the Australian “60 Minutes” [program](#) was that photographs on social media show what some believe to be a BUK anti-aircraft launcher aboard a truck traveling eastward on July 17, 2014, the day of the shoot-down, into what was generally considered rebel-controlled territory of eastern Ukraine, south and east of Donetsk, the capital of one of the ethnic Russian rebellious provinces.



A screen shot from a video of a suspected BUK missile battery traveling on a road in eastern Ukraine after the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. (As shown in Australia’s “60 Minutes” program.)

Citing one image, the program’s narrator says the “launcher is heading east further into rebel territory,” south and east of Donetsk.

However, in mid-July, the ethnic Russian rebels were reeling under a Ukrainian military offensive to the north of Donetsk. Despite shifting their forces into the battle zone, they had lost Sloviansk, Druzhkivka, Kostyantynivka and Kramatorsk. In other words, the lines of control were fluid and chaotic in mid-July 2014 with the possibility that an unmarked Ukrainian government truck, maybe carrying a concealed anti-aircraft battery, could have moved into the titular rebel zone, especially in the lightly defended south.

Another problem with the Australian TV account is that the video and photographic images show the truck heading eastward toward Russia, but there are no earlier images of the truck moving westward from Russia into eastern Ukraine. If the mysterious truck was supposedly so obvious on the day of the shoot-down, why wasn’t it obvious earlier?

For the Australian TV account to be true – blaming the Russians – the launcher would have to have crossed from Russia into Ukraine, traveled somewhere west of Donetsk, before

turning around and heading eastward back toward Russia, yet the trail seems to begin only with photos on July 17 showing the truck headed east.

Indeed, I was told shortly after the MH-17 crash, which killed 298 people including Australians, that one of the problems that U.S. intelligence analysts were having in pinning the blame on the Russians was that they could not find evidence that the Russians had delivered a BUK missile system to the rebels who – until then – were known only to have short-range Manpads incapable of reaching MH-17 flying at around 33,000 feet.

Another part of the Australian TV narrative stretched credulity. If the Russians had somehow snuck a BUK missile system into eastern Ukraine without U.S. intelligence knowing and were moving it back toward Russia, why would the crew stop en route to shoot down a civilian airliner before continuing on the way? There was no military value in destroying a civilian airliner and it was obvious – in the Western media hysteria then surrounding Ukraine – that Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin, would be blamed.

What I was told by a source briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts was that at least some of them – after reviewing electronic intercepts, overhead satellite images and other intelligence – had reached the conclusion that the shoot-down was a provocation, or a false-flag operation, carried out by a rogue element of the Ukrainian military operating under one of the hard-line oligarchs.

However, it was not clear to me whether that was the opinion of just a few U.S. analysts or whether that had become the consensus. When I sought an updated briefing from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in March, [I was told](#) that the U.S. intelligence community had not updated or refined its analysis of the shoot-down since five days after the event, a claim that was not credible given the significance of the MH-17 case to tensions between nuclear powers, United States and Russia.

In reality, Western intelligence services have been hard at work trying to determine who was responsible for the shoot-down. Last October, Der Spiegel reported that the German intelligence service, the BND, had concluded that Russia was not the source of the missile battery – that it had been captured from a Ukrainian military base – but the BND still blamed the rebels for firing it. The BND also concluded that photos supplied by the Ukrainian government about the MH-17 tragedy “have been manipulated,” Der Spiegel reported.


And, the BND disputed Russian government claims that a Ukrainian fighter jet had been flying close to MH-17, the magazine said, reporting on the BND’s briefing to a parliamentary committee on Oct. 8, 2014. But none of the BND’s evidence was made public — and I was subsequently told by a European official that the evidence was not as conclusive as the magazine article depicted. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “[Germans Clear Russia in MH-17 Case](#).”]

#### Possible TV Fakery

There also appears to have been some fakery involved in the Australian documentary. In several instances, as the film crew traveled to eastern Ukraine to seek out scenes from July 17 video showing the truck possibly carrying BUK missiles, images of those sites – then and now – were overlaid to show how closely the scenes matched.


However, for one crucial scene – the image of an alleged “getaway” BUK launcher lacking

one missile and supposedly heading back to Russia after the shoot-down – the documentary broke with that pattern. The program showed the earlier video of the truck moving past a billboard and then claiming – based on information from blogger Eliot Higgins – that the TV crew had located the same billboard in Luhansk, a rebel-held city near the Russian border.

This was the documentary's slam-dunk moment, the final proof that the Russians and particular Vladimir Putin were guilty in the deaths of 298 innocent people. However, in this case, there was no overlay of the two scenes, just Australian correspondent Michael Usher pointing to a billboard and saying it was the same one as in the video.  But the scenes look nothing at all alike if you put them side by side. While Usher is standing in an open field, the earlier video shows an overgrown area. Indeed, almost nothing looks the same, which might explain why the film crew didn't try to do an overlay this time.

A screen shot of the roadway where the suspected BUK missile battery passes after the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, 2014. (Image from Australian "60 Minutes" program)

Correspondent Michael Usher of Australia's "60 Minutes" claims to have found the billboard visible in a video of a BUK missile launcher after the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, 2014. (Screen shot from Australia's "60 Minutes")

 This discrepancy is important because the Russian government placed the scene of the "getaway" BUK launcher in the town of Krasnoarmiisk, northwest of Donetsk and then under Ukrainian government control. Usher dismissed that Russian claim as a lie before asserting that his team had located the scene with the billboard in Luhansk.

The significance of the Australian news show's sleight of hand is that if the BUK launcher was making its "getaway" through government-controlled territory, not through Luhansk on its way back to Russia, much of the Russia-did-it scenario collapses. It also means the Australian audience was grossly misled.

*Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). 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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