

Malaysian Airlines MH17: US Escalates Threats against Russia over Ukraine Crash

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The Obama administration is intensifying its propaganda campaign against Russia and pro-Russian separatists over the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. Even as it is clear that the US does not know how MH17 crashed or what role Russia played in the tragedy, top administration officials are using the crisis to issue repeated ultimatums against the Russian government.

US Secretary of State John Kerry made multiple television appearances Sunday, issuing bellicose statements and threats. The shooting down of the airline was a “moment of truth” for Russian President Vladimir Putin, he told Fox News.

Kerry provided the US “case” that Russia gave the east Ukrainian forces weapons that could have been used to shoot down MH17.

“There was a convoy several weeks ago, about 150 vehicles with armored personnel carriers, multiple rocket launchers, tanks, artillery, all of which crossed over from Russia into the eastern part of Ukraine and was turned over to the separatists,” Kerry told CNN. “So there’s an enormous amount of evidence, even more evidence than I just documented, that points to the involvement of Russia in providing these systems, training the people on them.”

Even if Kerry’s claims were true and Russia had provided weapons capable of shooting down MH17, this would not prove that the east Ukrainian forces in fact shot down the plane. Citing Mark Galeotti of New York University’s Center for Global Affairs, CNN said that the “evidence is largely circumstantial. NATO’s images did not show the tanks actually crossing into Ukraine.”

Asked on CNN whether Russia was “culpable” in the MH17 crash, Kerry refused to answer. “You know, culpability is a judicial term, and people can make their own judgments about what they read here. That’s why we’ve asked for a full-fledged investigation,” he said.

The recklessness of Kerry’s statements is staggering. The United States’ top diplomat is insinuating that Russia might have helped shoot down MH17, while issuing threats that could lead to international sanctions against Russia and an escalation of the civil war in Ukraine into a global war. As he advances these charges, however, he admits that the administration does not actually know what happened.

In reality, for the Obama administration, matters of fact—what actually happened and who shot down MH17, provided it was shot down—are beside the point. The event was seized on to press longstanding political aims. Washington continued to exploit the issue yesterday to pressure Russia and the United States' imperialist allies in Europe to fall in line with US foreign policy.

Speaking on CNN, US Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Dianne Feinstein (Democrat of California) demanded that Putin “man up” and confess to shooting down MH17. She said, “I think the nexus between Russia and the separatists have been established very clearly. So the issue is, where is Putin? I would say, ‘Putin, you have to man up. You should talk to the world. You should say if this was a mistake, which I hope it was, say it.’”

Feinstein also called on the European Union to impose deep economic sanctions against Russia: “I think Europe has to come together. I think Germany, in particular, has to lead. I think we have to continue with sanctions. It’s difficult, because you need Russian help in so many things.”

For their part, Britain, Germany and France announced on Sunday that they would prepare to increase sanctions against Russia over the plane crash at a European foreign ministers meeting Tuesday.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond on Sunday said Russia “risks becoming a pariah state if it does not behave properly.”

Alluding to divisions within Europe over policy toward Russia—particularly, reluctance from sections of the German political establishment to follow in lockstep behind the US—Hammond said, “Some of our European allies have been less enthusiastic, and I hope that the shock of this incident will see them now more engaged, more willing to take the actions which are necessary to bring home to the Russians that when you do this kind of thing it has consequences.”

While it presses its propaganda campaign against Russia, the US appears to be hedging its bets about what actually happened. In comments Friday in which he denounced Russia, Obama himself made a peculiar reference to a lot of “misinformation” on the MH17 crash, saying that it was necessary for people to “sift through what is factually based and what is simply speculation.”

US claims that Russia is politically responsible for the crash of MH17 are a cynical fraud. Whether the plane was brought down by a missile fired by Ukrainian or Russian-backed forces, the central responsibility for this tragedy lies with Washington, Berlin and their European allies. The civil war raging in east Ukraine, in which one or another side shot down the jetliner, was provoked by their support for the installation of a far-right, pro-Western Ukrainian regime through the fascist-led putsch of February 22 in Kiev.

Since then, CIA officials, mercenaries from the firm previously known as Blackwater, and European intelligence operatives have worked closely with Ukrainian fascist militias, such as Right Sector or the Azov Battalion, to attack and terrorize east Ukrainian cities. It is unclear how much the White House, which has already claimed that the CIA spied on German officials and intelligence agencies without telling Obama, knows about these activities.

Under these conditions, it is impossible to place confidence in any statement coming from

the Obama administration about the MH17 crash. While pro-Russian forces might have shot it down, it is also possible that Ukrainian army forces or fascist militias, working with Western intelligence units or mercenary groups, shot down the plane and blamed it on pro-Russian forces.

Significantly, what reports have emerged about missile batteries active in the region at the time of the MH17 crash point to involvement not by Russia, but by the US-backed regime in Kiev.

US intelligence has claimed that US spy satellites over Ukraine detected an SA-11 Buk missile battery firing a missile shortly before MH17 crashed. Both Russian and Ukrainian army units field Buk missile batteries, which were originally designed in the Soviet Union. The Kiev regime subsequently released a video clip of a Buk missile battery, which it said was being rushed towards the Russian border after the attack, ostensibly in order to escape detection after shooting down MH17.

According to Russian television coverage reported by NBC News, however, the serial number on the missile launcher in question—312—showed that it is in fact operated by the Ukrainian army.

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