

Malaysian Plane Crashes in Conflict-Torn Eastern Ukraine

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July 17, 2014



Workers sifting through debris at the site of a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 plane crash in Donetsk Region in Ukraine's conflict-riddled east on Tuesday.

A Malaysian passenger plane carrying 295 people crashed near the Russian border in Ukraine's conflict-torn east on Thursday.

The aircraft departed from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport at 12:14 p.m. local time, en route to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There were 280 passengers and 15 crew on board. The plane disappeared from radars at about 5:20 p.m. Moscow time. It was traveling at an altitude of 10,000 meters.

[Follow our liveblog on developments around the passenger plane crash.](#)

Although in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy it remains impossible to discern what caused the plane crash, Ukrainian authorities in Kiev and pro-Russian insurgents in Donetsk

wasted no time blaming the incident on each other. Each side accused the other of having downed the plane.

News about a passenger airliner crashing on the Russian-Ukrainian border exploded on social networks Thursday evening, with speculation swirling in thousands of Russian tweets and Facebook comments about the catastrophe.

"Oh my God, a passenger plane was shot down! They got innocent people even in the sky, Ukraine is becoming a real nightmare for others," Elena (@helenwitt) wrote Thursday evening.

"I was told that during my step session that a Malaysian plane was shot down near Thorez. I have only one question: Who?" Margarita (@iri4ka89) wrote.

Just like Ukrainian officials and Russia-aligned separatists, netizens engaged in frantic finger-pointing late Thursday, blaming the insurgents or the Ukrainian military for downing the plane with 295 people aboard.

"Previously, separatists had stated that they knocked down another transport plane of the Ukrainian navy. Later we have a crashed Boeing passenger jet. What a mess!" Vladimir Lepsayev (@lepsyaya) wrote.

Selena (@selena70007) suggested it could be an anti-Russian provocation.

"The tragedy with the plane is terrible. My heart is aching. But the consequences disturb me as well. It's not so simple. Provocation. Kiev and the State Department may blame the Russian Federation for that!" she wrote.

And yet another popular sentiment after the tragedy: war fatigue and pacifism.

"The war has gone too far. Now not even my neighbors, citizens of Ukraine, have died — those passengers were complete strangers! People! Come to your senses! Stop!" Natalya Chesnova (@Nany_Nalatty) wrote Thursday.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said at a meeting of the country's security and national defense council: "This is not an incident, not a catastrophe, but a terrorist act." The quote was posted with a photograph on his official Twitter account.

The authorities of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, who have denied any involvement in the incident, accused Ukrainian forces of having downed the Malaysia Airlines plane.

"The aircraft was downed by the Ukrainian side," Sergei Kavtardze, a member of the self-proclaimed republic's security council, told Interfax. "We do not have the anti-aircraft technology to do this. Our portable air-defense system can only hit targets 3,000 to 4,000 meters away. Boeings fly much higher than that."

In late June, ITAR-Tass reported the insurgents have captured a military base in the city of Donetsk that had a Buk missile system in its stock. The system can reach target at an altitude of up to 22 kilometers.

The Donetsk People's Republic tweeted on June 29 that they had taken possession of the Buk missile system.

Deputy Prime Minister of the People's Donetsk Republic Andrei Purgin told Interfax on Thursday, however, that the separatists do not have Buk missile systems at their disposal.

Purgin also said that the black boxes from the airplane will be given to the Moscow-based International Aviation Committee.

In addition, rebel leader Igor Strelkov reported through his Vkontakte account that an An-26 military transport aircraft had been shot down by the rebels just 1.5 hours before news broke about the Malaysian airline crash. A Su-25 fighter jet had also been downed earlier in the day, Strelkov said. He later deleted the post from his account.

After news of the plane crash broke, Strelkov added via Vkontakte, "the Malaysian airliner was downed by a Ukrainian fighter jet. The airspace of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions has been closed by the Ukrainian government. The airliner could violate the closed airspace for two reasons: 1) Ukraine provocation [or a] 2) dispatcher's mistake."

Overall pro-Russian insurgents in Ukraine have claimed to have downed at least 15 military fighter jets and transport planes.

The Ukrainian government vowed to create an international commission to investigate the circumstances of the incident.

Anton Gerashenko, an advisor to Ukraine's interior minister, wrote on his Facebook page that Ukrainian authorities were not "excluding the possibility that the plane was downed and stressed that the armed forces of Ukraine did not commit any action against targets in the air."

President Vladimir Putin has informed U.S. President Barack Obama about the crash in a phone call on Thursday night, Kremlin's press service said. Obama has instructed his staff to keep him updated on the developments

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak tweeted on Thursday evening, "I am shocked by reports that an MH plane crashed. We are launching an immediate investigation."

Shortly after news broke of the crash, Russia's Investigative Committee predicted via Twitter that an information war would promptly ensue, and that both sides would accuse each other, but that this would not bring back the lives that have been lost.

"This will be a game-changer for the whole conflict. [If anyone is] found culpable, his position will be completely discredited," Alexei Makarkin, an analyst from the Center for Political Technologies, said in a phone interview.

"The Malaysian side will demand an international investigation, I think it will be fairly easy to establish the guilty side, but both will point fingers at each other regardless of its outcome," he said.

Sergei Oznobishev, director of the Institute of Strategic Assessment, a Moscow-based think tank said that the tragedy can divert more international attention to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

"Because of the tragic nature of this incident it is possible that it will serve as a push for final and fundamental conflict-resolution in Ukraine," said Sergei Oznobishev, director of the Institute of Strategic Assessment, a Moscow-based think tank.

At the same time, it will be difficult to prove the guilt of one side against the other. They both use the same Soviet-era weapons, they were both fighting in the area," he said in a phone interview.

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