

Pro-Kremlin Media Accuses West of Propaganda War Against Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Members of the Australian Ukrainian community hold placards as they hold a rally in Sydney July 19, 2014, demanding that Russian President Vladimir Putin not be allowed to attend the G20 Leaders Summit in November.

Some said Ukrainian jet fighters tailed the doomed Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17; others speculated that Kiev's forces mistook it for Vladimir Putin's Russian presidential jet.

But while Russia's pro-Kremlin media offered varying accounts of how the Boeing 777 may have been brought down, they agreed on who was responsible: the Ukrainian government.

For Moscow, Kiev and pro-Russian separatist rebels alike, the information war to sway public opinion over who is to blame for Thursday's disaster will be crucial to how the crisis in eastern Ukraine develops.

Hours after the crash that killed 298 people, Putin pointed the finger of blame at his Ukrainian

counterpart Petro Poroshenko, saying it would not have happened if Kiev had not ended a ceasefire with the separatists.

Since then, reporting from Russia's tightly-controlled media, which has favored the rebels throughout the conflict, has largely supported Putin's conclusions, sharply diverging from Western coverage of the tragedy.

Russian media drew parallels with a Russian passenger jet carrying 78 people which was mistakenly shot down by the Ukrainian military in 2001 as it flew over the Black Sea.

An aviation source cited by Kremlin-owned news outlet RT also pushed the idea that Ukrainian forces may have fired a rocket at the Malaysian Boeing, mistaking it for Putin's jet returning from a summit in Brazil.

"The contours of the airplanes are in general similar, the linear dimensions are also very similar and regarding the coloring, from a sufficiently long distance, they are practically identical," the source said.

As is often the case with pro-Kremlin news outlets, the narrative could not be more different from the one reported by Western media, which RT television criticized for "unleashing a post-crash factless blame game against Russia."

Any indication that the rebels shot down the plane with weapons seized either from Russian or Ukrainian stockpiles could raise pressure for stronger action against Russia.

The day before the crash, the U.S. had slapped its toughest sanctions yet on Russia for its role in the separatist conflict that has brought Moscow's ties with the West to their lowest since the Cold War.

Russia's LifeNews online outlet carried a slightly different account, saying witnesses had seen a Ukrainian fighter jet behind the Malaysian airliner, which was flying at an altitude of 10 kilometers — so high it would be barely visible from the ground.

Russian news reports supported their arguments with the alleged Twitter feed of a Spaniard believed to work as an aviation dispatcher at Kiev's Borisypil airport.

"Two Ukrainian jet fighters were noticed next to the airplane before it disappeared from the radar, all of three minutes beforehand," the alleged dispatcher was quoted as saying by Interfax and pro-Russian Twitter accounts.

On Thursday the cited account @Spainbuca had been deleted.

Information Counterattack

Kiev is staging an information counterattack. Officials accused the rebels of using a Soviet-era SA-11 missile system acquired from Russia — offering evidence that they may have believed they were firing on a Ukrainian military aircraft.

The government released recordings it said were of Russian intelligence officers discussing the shooting down of an aircraft by rebels they were supporting.

"Hell," says one of those being recorded. "It's almost 100 percent certain that it's a civilian plane. Bits were falling in the streets ... Bits of seat, bodies."

The separatists in Donetsk, near where the plane went down, boasted to Russian newswire ITAR-Tass last month of having gained an SA-11 Buk, which is believed to have shot down the Boeing. Hours after the crash, however, the premier of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, Alexander Borodai, denied the claim, telling RIA news agency the fighters had no Buk systems that could have brought down the plane.

"We didn't have Buks and don't have them now. Some other kinds of air defense systems were seized," he said.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview on state television that Kiev was spinning the facts and trying to deceive the international community over what was happening in eastern Ukraine.

"A stream of falsehoods is flowing out of Kiev regarding what is happening," said Lavrov, "They are accusing everyone and everything except for themselves."

A Western diplomatic source in Moscow said it would be "very difficult" to convince the international opinion that the separatists were not behind the crash.

Russia has already found some unofficial support from China, where the state news agency said in a commentary that officials from the U.S., Australia and other Western countries had jumped to conclusions in pointing their fingers at the rebels in eastern Ukraine or blaming Russia.

See also:

[Russian Source Claims Putin was Intended Target in Plane Disaster](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/07/19/pro-kremlin-media-accuses-west-of-propaganda-war-against-russia-a37475)

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