

U.S. Military Team in Ukraine to Probe Downing of MH17 Plane

August 06, 2014



Members of a group of international experts inspect wreckage at the site where the downed Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crashed, near the village of Hrabove in Donetsk region.

WASHINGTON — A small U.S. military team has arrived in Kiev to help investigate the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17, the U.S. said, with more direct training support for Ukraine also possible.

The team of about 10 people — which includes special operations, logistics, communications and air planning personnel — will operate from the capital of Kiev and will not visit the crash site in the conflict area of eastern Ukraine, the U.S. said Tuesday.

Last week, the Pentagon announced it would notify Congress of plans to mount a \$19 million program to train several units of Ukraine's National Guard in "internal defense." The request has not yet been approved by legislators.

Washington has a long-running military training relationship with Ukraine but has not sent service personnel to the country aside from its regular embassy presence since the annexation

of Ukraine's Crimea region by Russia in March.

U.S. Navy Captain Gregory Hicks, a U.S. European Command spokesman, said the survey and assessment team would advise the United States Embassy in Kiev over possible U.S. support to the Netherlands, Malaysia and Australia in the MH17 investigation and recovery.

"The team would work in coordination with and support the FBI team already on the ground," he said. "They will not participate in actual recovery operations. The team will be in Kiev for as long as required in support of the overall U.S. contribution to the investigation."

The U.S. believes the Malaysian Boeing 777 was brought down by a Russian-supplied SA-11 missile in the hands of pro-Russian separatists, a charge both Moscow and the rebels deny.

The crash killed 298 passengers and crew, mostly Dutch, Australian and Malaysian.

The U.S. military training program — expected to begin next year providing congressional approval is forthcoming — effectively marks the resumption of a long-running training deal with Ukraine.

It will be conducted in western Ukraine far from the front line, officials say. Training itself will be conducted by the U.S. Army as well as the California National Guard, spokesman Admiral John Kirby said Friday.

Kirby said the training would take place at Ukraine's international peacekeeping and security center where the U.S. has previously taken part in multilateral military exercises.

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