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MH17 Was Not Shot Down by Russian Missile – Russian Defense Firm

By Matthew Bodner

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Debris of Malaysia Airlines passenger jet crashed in Ukraine in pro-Russian rebel-held territory last July.

The Russian maker of an anti-aircraft missile widely thought to be behind the destruction of a civilian airliner over east Ukraine last summer presented evidence Tuesday that suggested that Ukrainian forces were responsible for the attack.

Almaz-Antey, Russia's largest defense contractor, announced its findings as the basis for a court appeal against EU sanctions placed on the firm last year in the wake of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 disaster, which caused the death of 298 people.

Evidence Breakdown

The Moscow Times

In a series of technical slides, Almaz-

Antey expert Mikhail Malyshevsky explained to reporters on Tuesday how the company arrived at its conclusions that an out-of-production Buk-M1 missile, fired from the town of Zaroshenskoe, downed flight MH17.

Malyshevsky first identified the likely cause of MH17's crash as a surface-to-air missile, which explodes sideways and leaves distinctive blast patterns.

Then, Malyshevsky explained the blast patterns found on MH17. These patterns are distinct to a specific type of missile built for the Buk-M1, the 9M38-M1, he said.

Malyshevsky explained that the Defense Ministry declassified the information about the 9M38-M1's warhead damage because the missile is no longer in use in Russia.

After identifying the type of missile fired, he set out to explain how the company determined Zaroshenskoe was the launch site, and not Snizhne, as Western investigators have said.

According to Malyshevsky, the shrapnel that destroyed the plane entered from just above the pilot's head and traveled mostly down the length of the plane, with other debris hitting the left engine and control surfaces on the wing and tail.

As such, the missile had to approach MH17 from the direction of Zaroshenskoe — and not dead on, as is contended in the Snizhne scenario.

Once this had been established, Almaz-Antey traced back the missile's most probable flight path to Zaroshenskoe, which Russia's military has said was controlled by Ukrainian forces at the

time.

Based on the findings of a technical study of the MH17 wreckage, the firm concluded that a missile not used in Russia but found in Ukraine's arsenal destroyed the plane, and that the launch location was in territory allegedly held by Ukrainian forces.

But the appeal may fall on deaf ears. A report issued Sunday by a well-known team of citizen journalists concluded that similar claims made by the Russian Defense Ministry last summer were based on altered satellite photographs.

Old Missile

Almaz-Antey at its press conference Tuesday concluded that an outdated missile, no longer used in Russia but widely sold abroad, was likely responsible for the plane's destruction.

The holes found in the skin of MH17 were characteristic of a specific type of missile once built for the Buk-M1 system — the discontinued 9M38-M1 — said Mikhail Malyshevsky, a technical adviser to the company who led the presentation.

"If MH17 was shot down by a surface-to-air missile, it could only have been done by a 9M38-M1 missile fired from a Buk-M1 launcher," air defense firm Almaz-Antey's CEO Yan Novikov told reporters.

The 9M38-M1 missile went out of production in 1999 and all stocks have been sold abroad, Novikov said. Ukraine was a large buyer of the weapons, he added.

Ukrainian Territory

After examining the direction of the shrapnel penetrations, the Almaz-Antey study also concluded that the missile could not have been launched from the town of Snizhne, a rebel-held territory that international investigators have identified as the likely site of the Buk launch.

Instead, the missile had to be fired from the south of the Zaroshchenskoye township, Malyshevsky asserted.

Malyshevsky and Novikov declined to answer questions concerning who controlled Zaroshchenskoye at the time, but Russia's military earlier said that Ukrainian forces held power in the area.

Ukraine's General Staff issued a statement later Tuesday saying it was not in control of Zaroshchenskoye on July 17, news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Novikov told reporters that the firm was so confident in its findings that it would go out of pocket to recreate their version of the incident using a real Boeing 777 and a Buk-M1 armed with a 9M38-M1 missile.

Breaking Sanctions

Novikov and Malyshevsky presented the company's findings as an attempt to clear the air of some of the wilder conspiracies surrounding MH17's crash and appeal against EU sanctions imposed last year on the firm over its alleged role in supplying pro-Russian separatists with the missile.

Almaz-Antey was created in 2002, and cannot be held responsible for a missile built in 1999, especially those sold abroad, Novikov argued. An appeal has been filed to the EU Secretariat and a lawsuit filed to the General Court of the European Union to annul the sanctions.

Novikov said that Almaz-Antey's business was not suffering from the sanctions, but that it has been forced to look to other component suppliers "who won't tell us no" when orders are placed. He did not specify who the alternate suppliers were.

Conspiracies Abound

Almaz-Antey's new theory may be met with skepticism in the EU, where the majority of MH17 victims were from.

Dutch investigators in charge of a high-profile investigation have said that the destruction of the plane by a Buk missile launched from rebel-held territory was the "most realistic and important scenario," The Wall Street Journal reported in March.

A report published by respected citizen journalist website Bellingcat on Sunday, meanwhile, cast doubt on Russian Defense Ministry satellite images released last summer that allegedly showed a unit of Ukrainian Buk-M1 launchers leaving their base and moving into the flight path of MH17.

The satellite photos were doctored, Bellingcat said, and in fact appeared to be more similar to Google Earth satellite images of the territory taken the month before.

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