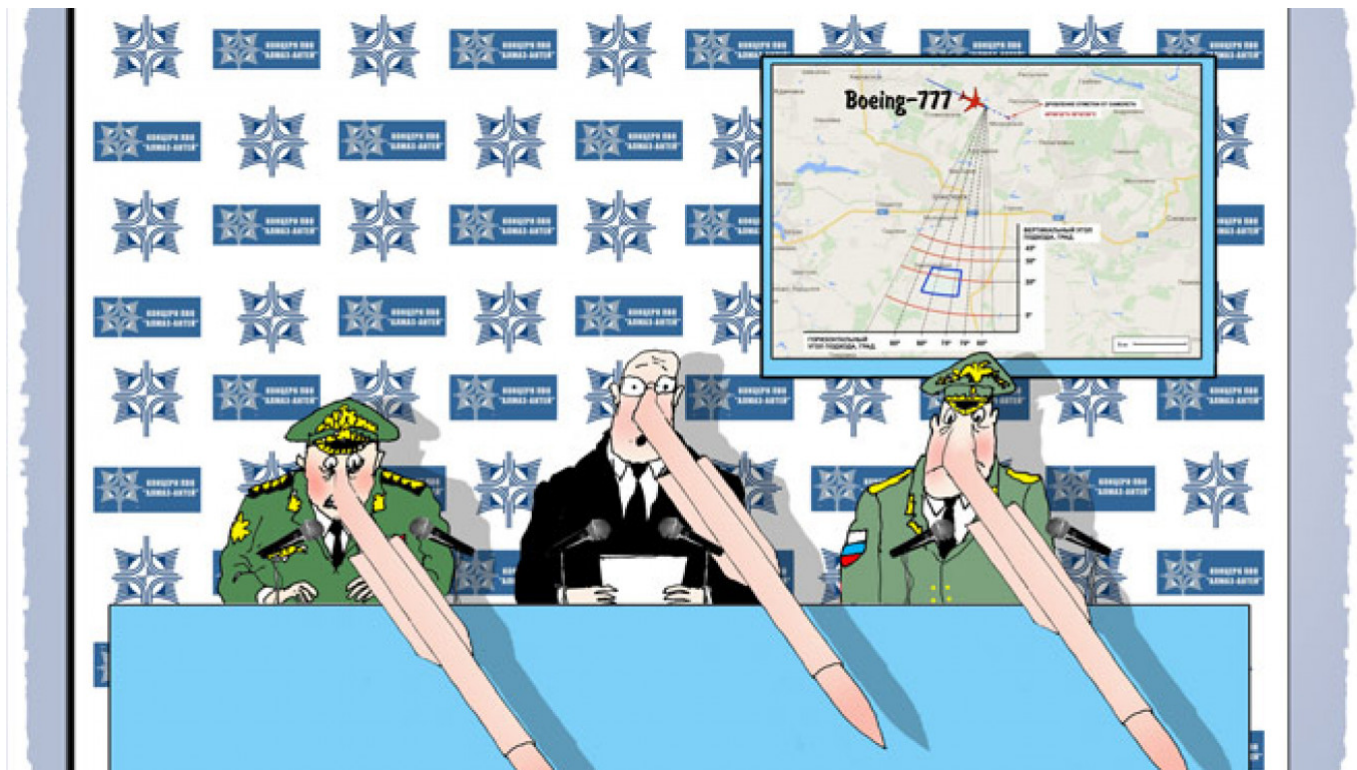


# Kremlin Rushing to Cover Its Tracks on MH17 (Op-Ed)

By [Alexander Golts](#)

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Real experts take their time when conducting an investigation. They begin their work as quickly as possible, and then methodically gather and analyze the evidence — never allowing bias to influence their work — and wait until the time is right to announce their findings.

By contrast, the experts at Russian defense firm Almaz-Antey remained strangely silent when top Defense Ministry generals vehemently blamed Ukrainian attack aircraft for the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over the Donbass 11 months ago.

The Russian experts likewise held their tongues when state-controlled television teamed up with the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper to stir up a commotion over clearly doctored "evidence" showing that air-launched missiles downed the Malaysian passenger plane.

And, of course, those experts held their peace when journalist Mikhail Leontyev began hollering that a previously undisclosed satellite photo documented an aerial attack against the Boeing airliner, pointing to an alleged military aircraft the size of an aircraft carrier.

But now the time for the real experts has come. The Almaz-Antey company that developed the Buk anti-aircraft missile implicated by Western investigators in the crash on July 17, 2014 presented its own findings at a recent news conference.

According to that "investigation," Flight MH17 was struck by a surface-to-air missile type 9M38M or 9M38M1 carrying a warhead type 9M314 or 9M314M1 and fired from a Buk-M1 launcher — a conclusion it claims was easy to prove based on the shape of the debris that bears no resemblance to air-launched anti-aircraft missiles.

Of course, they could have reached that conclusion immediately after the tragedy when the evidence was still fresh. However, the Almaz-Antey experts, having no vested interest and placing honesty above all else, kept quiet until just a few days ago when they suddenly decided to drop their bombshell on the public.

Almaz-Antey technical adviser Mikhail Malyshevsky told a press conference: "The most characteristic damage ... suggests that the crash was caused by the impact of a surface-to-air missile."

However, Almaz-Antey made these slight "modifications" to the truth for two reasons. First, it wanted to show that it was not involved in the tragedy in any way, that the Buk-M1 was made by a factory that stopped producing that missile several years before it became part of Almaz-Antey, and that the European Union's sanctions against the company were therefore unfair.

But the main reason the company launched its own "investigation" was to argue that the missile that downed MH17 was fired from the Zaroshchenskoye township in the Donetsk region where, according to the Russian Defense Ministry, a Ukrainian battery of Buk surface-to-air missiles was stationed at the time.

However, that claim holds about as much water as the original assertion that a Ukrainian aircraft shot down the Boeing. After all, Almaz-Antey just as vehemently refuted earlier press reports that the missile was fired from the village of Snezhnoye in the Donetsk region where separatists were based last summer.

Coming on the heels of Russia's repeated falsifications over the past year, the recent "evidence" from Almaz-Antey is essentially worthless. In fact, it is more of an authorization of "research" carried out by unnamed "defense industry experts" and published in Novaya Gazeta several weeks ago.

In order to add credibility to the idea, Almaz-Antey CEO Yan Novikov announced that the company is prepared to conduct an experiment to prove that MH17 was shot down by a missile fired from the Zaroshchenskoye region. "If necessary, we are prepared to carry out a full-scale field experiment with the participation of independent observers and experts. That is, we are ready to fire a 9M38M1 missile at the angle we indicated in our presentation at a decommissioned aircraft of the same manufacturer and design," Novikov said.

Never mind that it would be next to impossible — if not just plain absurd — for Russia to station such a weapons system on Ukrainian territory, fly an old Boeing into Ukrainian airspace and then shoot it down, together with its pilot.

The funniest part was that on the very next day, an Investigative Committee representative announced that the government had an eyewitness, a Ukrainian mechanic that allegedly saw a Ukrainian fighter taking off on a mission and later returning to the airport without its missiles.

I never cease to be amazed at the way the various government agencies in Russia's much-touted power vertical cannot even coordinate their activities well enough to at least present the same bald-faced lie to the public.

Only one thing can explain all this feverish activity: The Kremlin is very nervously awaiting the international commission's report on the cause of the Boeing crash. Moscow leaders know full well that they might soon become international pariahs — not just as supporters of insurgents fighting for the revival of Novorossia, but as the organizers of a military strike gone awry, an inadvertent terrorist attack that left 300 innocent people dead.

That is why they are unleashing every possible resource to create "white noise" — even enlisting the Almaz-Antey directors, who clearly wanted to steer clear of this vile business right from the start.

That way, when the international commission finally does announce its results, that tireless champion of justice Mikhail Leontyev can cry out: "Why didn't they agree to hold the full-scale field test that Almaz-Antey offered to carry out?" And, at least then, perhaps leaders will not be discredited in the eyes of the Russian people.

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*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

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