

Russian Government Book on Ukraine Conflict Illustrated With Fake Photo

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August 04, 2015



A book released by Russia's Investigative Committee.

Russia's Investigative Committee has released a book supposedly documenting the "crimes" of Ukrainian government forces illustrated by a cover photo of a burning city — an image of alleged devastation that was exposed as a doctored "fake" by online activists more than a year ago.

The hard-cover volume — entitled "The Tragedy of South-Eastern Ukraine: A White Book of Crimes" and edited by Investigative Committee chief Alexander Bastrykin — aims to present the "truth about this horrible fratricidal war, unleashed by the nationalist regime in Ukraine," the committee said in a statement announcing the publication Monday.

"This book is unique: It is based on the evidence collected by Russia's Investigative Committee during its investigation into crimes connected with the use of illegal means and methods of war," the statement said.

An apparent sample of the "evidence" against the Ukrainian government troops who are battling pro-Russian separatists in the country's east is presented by the image on the book's cover. It shows the city of Donetsk engulfed in flames, in what the reader may assume is a result of a military strike by Kiev government forces.

The image, however, seems more likely to be a result of manipulations in photo-editing software, and was exposed as a fake after it first began circulating online more than a year ago. Ukrainian activists who run the StopFake.org website, a group dedicated to exposing falsifications by Russian media and officials about the conflict, traced the original photo — which features a panorama of Donetsk, without any flames — to the website of prominent photo studio in the city.

"After that, the photograph was edited by the addition of an image of unnaturally powerfully raging fires," StopFake said in a post on its website in May, 2014.

Commenting on the Investigative Committee's use of the photo in its latest book release, prominent Russian journalist and opposition activist Andrei Malgin quipped in his LiveJournal blog Monday: "That's how they investigate criminal cases, too."

Scores of reports by Russian officials and state-run media have been exposed as fake since the start of the conflict in Ukraine.

One of the best-known examples include a television broadcast by a state-run network that used its own years-old footage of a gunfight in the North Caucasus to illustrate a report about the supposed atrocities by Ukraine's government forces. Another example, offered to Russian television viewers by another state-run network, was a report about Ukrainian forces supposedly crucifying a small boy in the east.

The Investigative Committee said that its latest "white book" was intended to reach beyond a domestic audiences and "attract the attention of the international community and international human rights organizations to the egregious facts of violence against the civilian population, primarily against helpless women and children."

The publication comes shortly after Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have established a tribunal for prosecuting those responsible for the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over rebel-controlled eastern Ukraine last summer.

Kiev and Western governments have blamed the disaster on insurgents firing a Russian-made missile, but Moscow has denied supplying weapons to the rebels, and has proposed an array of theories seeking to implicate Ukrainian government troops in the tragedy.

Some of the photographs that Moscow has presented in support of its theories have also been exposed as fake by independent investigators in Britain.

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