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Ahead of Dutch MH17 Report, Russia Blames Ukraine (Again)

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MH17 flight recovery team members examine one of the areas of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 plane crash in the village of Hrabove, Ukraine. **Mstyslan Chernov / AP**

Just two days before the release of a new Dutch report on the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry once again suggested that Kiev forces were responsible.

According to spokesman Major General Igor Konashenkov, the Ukrainian side is withholding crucial radar data. He insinuated that Kiev is to blame, rather than Russian-backed separatists or even Russian servicemen fighting an unacknowledged war in eastern Ukraine.

"It is not by chance that the Ukrainian side is withholding data that would establish a complete picture of the disaster," Konashenkov was quoted by the RIA Novosti news agency

as saying at a Monday press conference.

The flight was tracked by Ukrainian radar and air defenses, and guided by Ukrainian air traffic controllers, Konashenkov said, before pointing out that Kiev's behavior is reminiscent of an incident in 2001 when the Ukrainian military shot down a Russian Tu-154 passenger jet.

During the conference, the Defense Ministry put forth its own radar data — which was allegedly discovered in recent weeks in the memory banks of a civilian radar station near the border with Ukraine — purportedly showing MH17 could not have been shot down from the separatist side, as has been alleged. The new Russian account completely dropped allegations of Ukrainian Su-25 fighter jets in the area.

An investigation into the culprit by the Dutch government is expected to be released on Sept. 28.

The issue of who shot down MH17 has become one of major geopolitical significance, and a point of key contention between Russia and the West over Moscow's role in the ongoing Ukrainian crisis. Each side has offered multiple theories to suit their respective narratives.

Last year, the Dutch Safety Board released findings into the cause of MH17's demise. While a guilty party was not named, the board concluded that the Boeing 777 aircraft was downed by a Russian-built Buk anti-aircraft missile launcher. Both Ukraine and Russia use such systems.

The manufacturer of the Buk system, sanctioned defense firm Almaz-Antey, got ahead of the Dutch report hours before it was released by sharing the results of its own internal investigation. Their conclusion: Only an out of service Buk system used by Ukraine could have been responsible.

The core of Almaz-Antey's claim rested on the shrapnel pattern found in the damaged metal hull of MH17. The company's claim both contradicted findings presented at a press conference three month's earlier, and the findings of the Dutch report.

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