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Bellingcat Investigators Identify Russian GRU Officer Linked to MH17 Downing

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A report by the open-source Bellingcat investigative team has identified a Russian military intelligence officer as the suspect sought by Dutch prosecutors for transporting the missile launcher that shot down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014.

The announcement came a day after a Dutch-led interim report by prosecutors said that the missile that shot down the plane was fired from a launcher in Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Brigade. On Friday, the Dutch foreign minister said Amsterdam holds Russia responsible for the missile that killed 298 people, a claim that Moscow rejects.

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Oleg Ivannikov, a high-ranking officer at Russia’s GRU military intelligence service,

“supervised the procurement and transport of weapons across the Russia-Ukraine border,” Bellingcat announced Friday.

“He held these functions at the time of the downing of MH17,” the investigative outlet said, using open-source phonebook data and forensic voice analysis to identify Ivannikov.

Bellingcat said Ivannikov was one of the two individuals that Dutch police were looking for in their investigation. In 2016, Dutch police called for witnesses to step forward with information on two people reportedly involved in the downing, identifying one of them as “Andrei Ivanovich, alias Orion.”

“On the basis of all collected evidence [...] Bellingcat and its reporting partners conclude with very high certainty that Oleg Vladimirovich Ivannikov, born on 2 April 1967, is the person of interest whose identity was sought by the [Dutch-led international investigation],” the outlet said.

"The findings in this report for the first time establish the direct or indirect involvement of a high-ranking Russian military officer on active duty operating on the territory of Ukraine in the destruction of the airliner," it added.

The Kremlin on Friday rejected allegations of any Russian involvement in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov telling reporters that Russia could not trust the investigation’s findings because it had not been its fully-fledged participant.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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