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Russian Troops Moved Toward Ukraine Border Ahead of MH17 Crash, New Reports Say

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Alexander Ermochenko / Zuma / TASS

Newly discovered documents suggest that at least 170 Russian troops were deployed near the Ukrainian border shortly before Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was shot down there five years ago, Russia's investigative Novaya Gazeta newspaper said, supporting previous reports.

MH17 was shot down in July 2014 over territory held by pro-Russian separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people onboard. A team of Dutch-led prosecutors said in May 2018 that the Buk anti-aircraft system used to bring down the passenger plane came from Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, a claim Moscow has repeatedly rejected.

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The unclassified documents allegedly indicate that escorted air defense troops with the 53rd brigade were moving toward the Ukrainian border with the Buk system two days ahead of the MH17 crash, corroborating reports by the Bellingcat investigative website and the Dutch-led team.

The troops' arrival near the Ukrainian border on July 15 "deepens suspicions and justifies questions asked by investigators last year," Novaya Gazeta said.

A document dated June 22, 2014 orders regional troops to escort the 53rd brigade from the Russian city of Kursk to the town of Millerovo near the Ukrainian border, Novaya Gazeta reported on Wednesday.

A list of the vehicles involved with the escort reportedly mentions a KamAZ truck that Bellingcat previously reported had been caught on camera hauling the Buk system near the border on June 23-25, 2014.

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One of the brigade's vehicles was soon spotted on the Ukrainian side of the border, Novaya Gazeta reported.

The Russian Defense Ministry has not yet commented on the report.

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