

In Leaked Tapes, MH17 Suspects Discussed Buk Transfer Hours Before and After Plane Downing

The leaked tapes also appear to show that MH17 suspect Dubinsky was not aware of the shot passenger plane for hours after the incident.

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Alexander Ermochenko / Xinhua / ZUMA / TASS

Pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine frequently discussed the movements of the Buk missile system that investigators believe was used to down Flight MH17 in July 2014, the Dutch Nieuwsuur current affairs program reported Sunday, citing leaked recordings of their phone calls.

Nieuwsuur obtained tapes of thousands of phone calls made by MH17 suspect Sergei Dubinsky before, during and after the downing of the passenger flight. The conversations were tapped by the Ukrainian secret service. A spokesperson for the Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team

(JIT) told The Moscow Times that they are also in possession of the tapes.

Dubinsky is one of four men being tried in absentia by the JIT over the loss of the Malaysia Airlines jet, which was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when it was downed over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 people on board.

Dubinsky is a former military intelligence officer who fought in Afghanistan and Chechnya before moving to eastern Ukraine and heading the separatists' intelligence services. He is accused by Dutch prosecutors of arranging the transport of the Buk ground-to-air missile launcher that has been at the center of the investigation into the MH17 downing.

In October 2015, a [report](#) by the Dutch safety board concluded that a single, powerful Russian-made Buk missile hit the plane. The JIT has said it has proof the Buk missile system that shot down the plane was brought from Russia.

Russia continues to deny any involvement and has previously suggested that the missile came from a Ukrainian fighter jet.

According to Nieuwsuur, Dubinsky first discussed the transportation of the Buk missile with other separatists the day prior to the downing.

Dubinsky says that there is nothing he can do against the Ukrainian combat aircraft.

“If I can get the Buk system early enough in the morning, I can take it there. Then it’s okay. If not, I’m in the s***,” he says.

Dubinsky later responds to another call: “Well, the Buk is expected tonight. After that, all our problems should be solved.”

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On the morning of the downing, Dubinsky is heard again discussing the Buk missile system’s transportation and safety with his deputy Oleg Pulatov, who is also on trial in The Netherlands.

Dubinsky: “Krot will tow the Buk-M to you any minute now.”

Pulatov: “Yes, understood.”

Dubinsky: “You are to set it up near Pervomayskoye, that Buk-M. And Vostok will send three tanks as security.”

The tapped phone calls contradict earlier statements by Pulatov — the only suspect to be represented by defense lawyers in the Dutch court — who has said he saw no signs of the missile allegedly used to shoot down the plane.

“No I haven't seen a Buk missile and I can also say for sure there was certainly no Buk seen,” Pulatov said in a November 2020 video message to court.

“No Buk nor any Buk-related commands were mentioned” during talks he had with other rebels on the day of the crash, he said.

Confusion after MH17 crash

The tapes also appear to show that Dubinsky was unaware that a passenger plane had been brought down for hours after the events happened.

According to the tapes, Dubinsky spoke with battalion commander Leonid Kharchenko around 30 minutes after the plane’s downing, with the commander informing him they downed a Ukrainian combat aircraft.

Kharchenko: “We are on the spot. We have already brought down a ‘Sushka’.”

Dubinsky: “Well done, big guys! A ‘Sushka’! Well done.”

Since the start of the trial, the prosecution has moved forward the theory that the perpetrators mistook the MH17 passenger aircraft for a Ukrainian Sukhoi military plane, referred to as “Sushka.”

In one of the tapes, hours after the downing, Dubinsky is heard asking Pulatov whether the Buk system was fired or not.

"Tell me, did our Buk fire or not?" Dubinsky can be heard saying.

Pulatov: "The Buk has brought down a ‘Sushka’.”

Dubinsky: “So...”

Pulatov: “But before that, the ‘Sushka’ downed the Boeing. They tried to blame us for that.”

A spokesman for the Dutch public prosecution department told Nieuwsuur that the fact Dubinsky appeared unaware that a passenger plane had been shot down had no impact on the case against him.

“He is guilty of causing an aircraft to have an accident and murdering those on board,” the spokesman said. “There is no need to prove intent.”

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