The Impossible Truth About MH17

The only closure normal citizens will ever get on the MH17 tragedy has already been revealed. We will never know for certain who is responsible for the deaths of 298 innocent passengers. As sad a reality as this is, the world must come to accept it.

A year of propaganda and misdirection has confounded the public over Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. At this point it seems obvious; this was a sort of "strategy" all along. The question that has haunted me since the beginning is, "Why do both sides seem content to let the drama play out?" No matter what the Dutch Safety Board, or the Joint Investigative Team (JIT) report, it will be unbelievable. One haunting fact of this case remains though, many knew what happened from the beginning. Here's my theory as to "why" we cannot know all the facts of this case.

All of you reading this will have already familiarized yourself with the "evidence" on flight MH17. The case of the doomed airline passengers aboard the plane has been aired out in the court of public opinion. The situation we're in now reminds me of another famous trial. The prosecution of dishonored NFL Football star O.J. Simpson over the death of his wife Nicole. The media has made a circus of this tragedy, and the blood of 298 human beings will never be avenged, justice will never be done. That said, we do have evidence as to "why" we know so little. It is circumstantial evidence I'll grant you, but the logic follows if you will bear with me.

When I first learned of MH17 being shot down over separatist territory in East Ukraine, I instantly thought "provocation". I cannot explain why exactly, but rebels holed up, backs to the wall, they just never seemed capable of the crime. As for the BUK missile launcher and the Twitter frenzy, the spliced and diced YouTube "proof"? Well, I can make a mashup to show anything, given the time and money. From the US State Department, The White House, and even from the Kremlin it was crystal clear the "day of" the incident, something was being hidden. To add to this, MH17 became a political football in the United States and abroad. The end fighting and posturing of officials like Senator John McCain and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, it muddied the waters even more. This report from the Mail Online paints President Barack Obama as incompetent, according to McCain at least. Meanwhile the Die Welt story the day of the incident assures Germans the US "secret" agencies knew it was a "surface-to-air" missile which downed the plane. The got their "intel" from the American Federated Press (AFP) the same day! If one observes simply the "timing" of statements and reports in this case, then the whole carnival becomes surreal.

How could the AFP be on top of a story so fast? What does it take communications wise, for Yahoo! News to carry joking passenger blurbs before the sun set on dead bodies in the Donbass? You were all here, live on the Internet, Tweeting and blogging, "liking" this Facebook mention or that, and watching the news unfold on CNN, FOX, BBC, and RT. When did your "BS alarm" go off first? Mine went off as soon as I heard Ukraine's security services had already produced what they said were two intercepted telephone conversations that showed rebels were responsible. Then within a few hours the faked videos began arriving on the social media scene, followed closely by State Department rhetoric to match. Then Secretary of State, John Kerry's "drunken separatists" at the scene of the crash, it was clear the was a lot of "story building", as we call it in our PR practice, going on. But the one story not rising from the ashes of MH17 was the military intelligence version. Those humongous intelligence gathering capabilities
we’ve come to know, the NSA, GCHQ, space weapons galore, and the capability to see anything on or world via Google Earth even, there was utter silence from there. The most costly and controversial technologies every devised by humanity, arrayed to start, or to prevent any chance of World War III being a surprise – these proved useless, when the capability was most needed. Useless!

The reason we cannot know what happened to MH17 involves two aspects. First, any credibility on either side of this puzzle has long since been destroyed. It is my belief this has been by design. This brings us to the second point, unwillingness to reveal the true intelligence and military capabilities of the United States, and of the Russian Federation. The short version of this theory is, neither side can reveal the capabilities at hand to show proof of who killed MH17. Not to be the “all knowing” analyst here, but I suspected this all along. Then the Russian Ministry of Defense released the only credible explanation thus far. This report is important for several reasons, not the least of which is that none of its contentions have been adequately challenged on an official level. Of the report, I can say it was the ONLY attempt so far, from ANY military or other official source. This leads to my earlier question, and the supposition that “capability” is being hidden.

Lieutenant General Andrey Kartopolov challenges his US counterparts to lay down satellite and other technical proof in the case of MH17 in the report of July 21, 2014. If you listen to the broadcast from Russian command central, Kartopolov speaks of an “experimental”

I can make several points here that support my theory. First, General Kartopolov and the Russian Defense Ministry made this report based largely on civil radar information from regional air traffic control in Rostov. While understandable, the use of civilian radar and satellite imagery instead of highly advanced Russian air and space defense units in the region is telling. Even though the ministry goes farther than the Americans in compiling a plausible explanation, much lays hidden beneath the veil of measure-countermeasure strategic capability. It is in scrutinizing so-called Russian Aerospace Defense Forces, that the whole US vs. Russia information strategy over MH17 can be understood. I’ll briefly explain.

Assuming the US and Russia mutually possess similar strategic and intelligence capability, we can begin to understand why the MH17 downing was not solved early on. Neither nation can afford to reveal the depth of technologies involved or the lack of capability if there are shortcomings. It is my belief that certain “technology leaps”, may well negate any possibility of Russia coming through with damning satellite imagery of this crash. By “leaps” I simply mean, showing high resolution media or imagery of the event (for instance) would betray “exact” military capability to the Americans. The fact that Aerospace Defense Command has a station North of Ukraine in Hantsavichy, Belarus that watches everything that moves near Russia, opens up this whole discussion. This “Volga” class radar facility is mostly secret, but obviously capable of identifying the launch of any missile anywhere in Ukraine.

However capable these controversial ABM era systems may have been though, the more advanced Voronezh radars' advancements virtually assure the MH17 event was framed like a Van Gogh handing in the Louvre museum. And neither Russia, nor America will be willing to be seen betraying ABM missile treaties, let along total military capability in space at this stage of the game. Suffice it to say here, that advanced phased array UHF and VHF radar overlap in Russia and within the Joint CIS Air Defense System can detect an object the size of a soccer ball flying in pitch dark blackness. This does not even take into account General Kartopolov’s hinting at the recently deployed Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) by the US, nor does it tell of Russian Air and Space Forces having delivered “mysterious” payloads (satellites) into orbit in 2014. Whether or not the alleged Kosmos-2499 now in orbit is a “ghost” killer satellite, or not, is irrelevant. We would be naive to believe Russian or American generals are not at war constantly, on the drawing board at least.

We have no need here of dissecting the capabilities of active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar systems, space based weapons, or other technological advancements in the US or Russian arsenals. The probability any missile was launched at an airliner near Russia territory unnoticed electronically, is virtually impossible. What is more likely, are the technology “gaps” I mentioned earlier having the effect of stalemating this investigation. Russia cannot show the missile or aircraft cannon riddling MH17 with projectiles, and neither can the Pentagon. Both capability and weakness can be revealed in IMAX-like video of the plane being hit, and then falling to Earth.

At the end of the day, we have the escalating military drills and maneuvers by NATO, and by Russia accordingly, to illustrate the intensification of international friction. The recent “Topol” ballistic missile test at the Kapustin Yar range was about more than costly saber rattling, as was reported by Western media. The lead up to hydrogen bomb
warhead tipped missiles buzzing about, it began as a supposed peaceful revolution in Kiev. Now the full fledge arms race stewing underneath all these years shines brightly. This research report (PDF) by Research Associate, Jana Honkova of the George C. Marshall Institute tells us more of US and Russian attitudes toward space based weaponry, and so on. Entitled, “The Russian Federation’s Approach to Military Space and Its Military Space Capabilities”, the document unveils such classified military topics as anti-satellite weapons programs, and so forth. For the sake of this argument the reader need only focus on two aspects of this “space warfare” document. First, the fact the United States and Russia have continually engaged in “space based” strategic innovation. Secondly, that Russia would be negligent to reveal any weakness in capability. It is the latter issue that bears scrutiny, for Washington seems somewhat assured in US superiority at present. To quote the think tank study:

"Russia’s military officials, including the Deputy Commander of the Russian Space Forces for Armaments General Oleg Gromov, criticized Russian EW satellites for being “hopelessly obsolete” in 2005. Kommersant hence concluded that the 2012 US-KMO (last of the obsolete K satellites) launch “hardly strengthened” Russia’s EW (early warning) capabilities."

Let’s be clear here. This report deals with so-called “space based” early warning systems. The radar systems I have previously discussed are land based. So you see a point of “vulnerability” in this one instance. By the nature of MH17 evidence provided, should Moscow be determined to reveal, the United States and NATO would gain advantage. Either Russian EWS capabilities might be given away, or gaps in the missile defense systems of the entire country could be discerned. I could find no data yet on the new satellite imaging capabilities of Russia via programs like the recently launched Kondor satellite, or a new program under construction by Lavochkin Aerospace. These newer satellite systems have sub-meter optical resolution capability, which would be on a par with current US capabilities. Regardless of such capability, revealing it is another story militarily.

It is in this realm of strategic intelligence, where the truth about the downing of MH17 has been stymied. At least this is one theory that has not been adequately explored in my view. Now as to ultimately responsibility for the MH17 tragedy, we can still only speculate as to where the US or Russia has more to lose or gain form supplying the full picture. We only have America’s unusual insistence Russia is somehow guilty, and without any real proof.

Phil Butler, is a policy investigator and analyst, a political scientist and expert on Eastern Europe, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook“.