

NYT Enforces Ukraine 'Group Think'

Exclusive: Determined to enforce the “group think” on Ukraine, the editors of The New York Times lashed out at Russia for urging an expanded inquiry into last year’s MH-17 shoot-down. But the Times won’t join calls for the U.S. government to release its intelligence on the tragedy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It’s good that Arthur Conan Doyle didn’t substitute The New York Times’ editorial board for Sherlock Holmes in his stories because, if he had, none of the mysteries would have gotten solved or the wrong men would have gone to the gallows.

Thursday’s editorial on last year’s shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 reveals that the Times’ editors apparently find nothing suspicious about the dog-not-barking question of why the U.S. government has been silent for a full year about what its intelligence information shows.

This reticence of U.S. intelligence is especially suspicious given the fact that five days after the July 17, 2014 tragedy which killed 298 people, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence rushed out a “government assessment” citing “social media” and pointing the finger of blame at ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine and the Russian government.

But once U.S. intelligence analysts had time to evaluate the satellite photos, electronic intercepts and other data, the U.S. government went silent. The pertinent question is why, although that apparently is of no interest to the Times which aimed its editorial against Russia for seeking a more inclusive investigation, which the Times does find suspicious.

“On the face of it, that looks like an accommodating gesture from the government that is backing the Ukrainian separatists believed to have fired the fatal missile on July 17, 2014, and that probably supplied it to them. It’s not.

“The real goal of the draft resolution Russia proposed on Monday at the Security Council is to thwart a Dutch-led criminal investigation of what happened and a Western call for a United Nations-backed tribunal.”

So, the Times castigates the Russians for seeking to involve the United Nations Security Council and the International Civil Aviation Organization in the slow-moving Dutch-led inquiry, which includes the Ukrainian government, one of the possible suspects in the crime as one of the investigators. But the Times takes no notice of the curious silence of U.S. intelligence.

Appeal to Obama

If the Times really wanted to get at the truth about the MH-17 case, its editorial could have cited a public memo to President Barack Obama from an organization of former U.S. intelligence officials who urged the President on Wednesday to release the U.S.-held evidence.

“As the relationship with Moscow is of critical importance, if only because Russia has the military might to destroy the U.S., careful calibration of the relationship is essential,” wrote the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, a group first created to challenge the bogus intelligence used to justify President George W. Bush’s Iraq invasion in 2003.

The memo signed by 17 former officials, including Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, continued: “If the United States signs on to a conclusion that implicates Russia without any solid intelligence to support that contention it will further damage an already fractious bilateral relationship, almost certainly unnecessarily. It is our opinion that a proper investigation of the downing would involve exploring every possibility to determine how the evidence holds up.

“What is needed is an Interagency Intelligence Assessment the mechanism used in the past to present significant findings. We are hearing indirectly from some of our former colleagues that the draft Dutch report contradicts some of the real intelligence that has been collected.

“Mr. President, we believe you need to seek out honest intelligence analysts now and hear them out, particularly if they are challenging or even opposing the prevailing group-think narrative. They might well convince you to take steps to deal more forthrightly with the shoot-down of MH-17 and minimize the risk that relations with Russia might degenerate into a replay of the Cold War with the threat of escalation into thermonuclear conflict. In all candor, we suspect that at least some of your advisers fail to appreciate the enormity of that danger.”

Along the same lines, I was told by one source who was briefed by some current analysts that the reason for the year-long U.S. silence was that the evidence went off in an inconvenient direction, toward a rogue element of the Ukrainian government, rather than reaffirming the rush-to-judgment by Secretary of State John Kerry and DNI James Clapper implicating the ethnic Russian rebels in the days after the shoot-down.

According to Der Spiegel, the German intelligence agency, the BND, had a somewhat different take but also concluded that the Russian government did not supply the Buk anti-aircraft missile suspected of shooting down the passenger

jet. Der Spiegel reported that the BND believed the rebels used a missile battery captured from Ukrainian forces.

Yet, whatever the truth about those intelligence tidbits, it is clear that the U.S. intelligence community has a much greater awareness of what happened to MH-17 and who was responsible than it did on July 22, 2014, when the DNI issued the sketchy report. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[MH-17 Case Slips into Propaganda Fog.](#)"]

No Update for You

When I asked a DNI spokeswoman on July 17, the first anniversary of the shoot-down, if I could get an update on the U.S. intelligence analysis, she refused, claiming that the U.S. government didn't want to prejudice the Dutch-led investigation. But, I pointed out, the DNI had already done that with the July 22, 2014 report.

I also argued that historically investigations into airline disasters have been transparent, not opaque like this one, and that the American public had an overarching right to know what the U.S. intelligence community knew about the MH-17 case given the existential threat of a possible nuclear showdown with Russia. But the DNI's office held firm in its refusal to provide an update.

The New York Times' editorial board could have lent its voice to this need for openness. Instead, the Times used the prime opinion-leading real estate of its editorial page to demand obeisance to Official Washington's prevailing group think on the Ukraine crisis, that everything is the fault of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The editorial stated:

"Throughout it all, President Vladimir Putin has blamed Ukrainian 'fascists' manipulated by the United States and its allies for all the troubles in Ukraine. Nobody outside Russia believes this, and the Russians themselves make little effort to conceal their extensive military support for the separatists.

"The relatives of the people who died on the Malaysian airliner, most of whom were Dutch, deserve answers and justice. There is little question that Russia will block any tribunal. But the Security Council should not be fooled into believing that the Russian counterproposals are an honorable alternative, any more than anyone should be fooled by any of Mr. Putin's lies about Russia's military interference in Ukraine."

The Times' strident editorial bordered on the hysterical as if the newspaper was frightened that it was losing control of the permissible narrative derived from its profoundly biased coverage of the Ukraine crisis from its beginning in February 2014 when a U.S.-backed coup overthrew the democratically elected

President Viktor Yanukovich.

The Times also put the word “fascists” in quotes presumably to suggest that Ukrainian brown shirts are just one of Putin’s delusions. The Times insisted that “nobody outside Russia believes this” suggesting that if you take note of the key role played by Ukraine’s neo-Nazis, you belong in Russia since “nobody outside Russia” would believe such a thing.

Yet, even the Times’ own correspondents have on occasion had no choice but to describe a central reality of the Ukraine crisis that neo-Nazi and other ultranationalist militias provided the muscle for the February 2014 coup and have served as the point of the spear against ethnic Russians in the east who have resisted the U.S.-backed coup regime.

Just this month, Times correspondent Andrew E. Kramer reported on the front-line fighting in which the Kiev government has pitted the neo-Nazi Azov battalion and Islamic militants (some of whom have been described as “brothers” of the Islamic State) against the ethnic Russian rebels. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Ukraine Merges Nazis and Islamists.”](#)]

The neo-Nazis and ultranationalists also have squared off against Ukrainian police and politicians, including firefights and protest marches demanding President Petro Poroshenko’s removal, as [reported by the BBC](#). [Also see Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Mess that Nuland Made.”](#)]

But deviation from the “it’s all Putin’s fault” group think infuriates the Times’ editors into chanting something like the “go back to Russia” insult directed at Americans in the 1960s and 1970s who criticized the Vietnam War. It is just that sort of anti-intellectual conformity that now dominates the debate over Ukraine.

And, unlike Sherlock Holmes who had the astuteness to unlock the mystery of the “Silver Blaze” by noting the dog not barking, the Times editors ignore the curious reticence of the U.S. government in refusing to update its “assessment” of the MH-17 crash. If the editors really wanted to know the truth and achieve some real accountability, the Times would have joined in demanding that the Obama administration end its suspicious silence.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click](#)

[here](#).

Obama Should Release MH-17 Intel

A year ago, the U.S. government issued a sketchy report on the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down citing “social media” and other flimsy data implicating eastern Ukrainian rebels and Russia, but then as hard intelligence became available went silent. Now, U.S. intelligence veterans are demanding release of that intel.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Releasing an Intelligence Report on Shoot-Down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17

It has been a year since the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine, resulting in the death of 298 passengers and crew. The initial response by the U.S. government supported the contention that the likely perpetrators were anti-government forces in southeastern Ukraine (the customary media misnomer for them is “separatists”), and that they were possibly aided directly by Moscow.

On July 29, 2014, we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) suggested that the United States Government report publicly what intelligence it actually had relating to the shoot-down lest the incident turn into another paroxysm of blaming Russia without cause. We are still waiting for that report.

Executive Summary

Tensions between the United States and Russia over Ukraine are fast reaching a danger point. A major contributing factor in the American public’s negative perception of Moscow is last year’s downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.

A public report detailing the investigation of the incident by the Dutch Safety authorities is expected by October but the draft is reportedly already in the hands of the United States government. There is speculation that the report will dovetail with media and leaked government sources that have placed primary blame on the ethnic Russian Ukrainians in southeastern Ukraine opposed to the government put in place after the Western-engineered coup of Feb. 22, 2014, in Kiev.

As the relationship with Moscow is of critical importance, if only because Russia has the military might to destroy the U.S., careful calibration of the relationship is essential. If the United States signs on to a conclusion that implicates Russia without any solid intelligence to support that contention it will further damage an already fractious bilateral relationship, almost certainly unnecessarily. It is our opinion that a proper investigation of the downing would involve exploring every possibility to determine how the evidence holds up.

Currently, the only thing the American public and worldwide audiences know for sure is that the plane was shot down. But the shoot-down might have been accidental, carried out by any one of a number of parties. Or it might have been orchestrated by anti-government forces, with Moscow either conniving in some way in that action or not. It is also possible that the downing was deliberately carried out by the Kiev government or one of Ukraine's powerful oligarchs to implicate the anti-Kiev forces and Russia in this mass murder. And finally, though less likely, it might even be that based on the available intelligence it is impossible to determine who did it.

In light of the high stakes involved both in terms of our extremely important relationship with Russia as well as in establishing a trustworthy narrative that does credit to the White House, the failure of the Administration to issue a coordinated intelligence assessment summarizing what evidence exists to determine who was responsible is therefore puzzling. If the United States government knows who carried out the attack on the plane it should produce the evidence. If it does not know, it should say so.

In what follows, we former intelligence professionals with a cumulative total of some 360 years in various parts of U.S. intelligence provide our perspective on the issue and request for a second time that the intelligence over the downing be made public to counter the fuzzy and flimsy evidence that has over the past year been served up some of it based on "social media."

The Russian Dimension

It would not be the first time for a tragic incident to be exploited for propaganda reasons with potentially grave consequences. We refer to the behavior of the Reagan administration in the immediate aftermath of the shoot-down of Korean Airlines Flight 007 over Siberia on August 30, 1983.

Hours after the tragic shoot-down on August 30, 1983, the Reagan administration used its very accomplished propaganda machine to manage a narrative emphasizing Soviet culpability for deliberately killing all 269 people aboard KAL-007 in full knowledge that it was a civilian airliner. In reality, the airliner had

been shot down after it strayed hundreds of miles off course and penetrated Russia's airspace over sensitive military facilities in Kamchatka and Sakhalin Island. The Soviet pilot tried to signal the plane to land, but the KAL pilots did not respond to the repeated warnings. Amid confusion about the plane's identity a U.S. spy plane had been in the vicinity hours earlier Soviet ground control ordered the pilot to fire.

The Soviets soon realized they had made a horrendous mistake. U.S. intelligence also knew from sensitive intercepts that the tragedy had resulted from a blunder, not from a willful act of murder (much as on July 3, 1988, the USS Vincennes shot down an Iranian civilian airliner over the Persian Gulf, killing 290 people, an act which President Ronald Reagan dismissively explained as an "understandable accident").

The story of KAL-007 should come to mind when considering the fate of MH-17. There might be legitimate reasons for opposing the increasingly authoritarian government of President Vladimir Putin, but exploiting a tragedy does not equate to constructive statecraft for dealing with an adversary.

At a minimum, the White House and State Department one year ago displayed unseemly haste in deciding to be first out of the starting gate with a narrative implicating Russia, at least indirectly a narrative that may not be based on fact. That twelve months have passed and there has been no effort made to either correct or amplify the record is unacceptable.

Someone Is Lying

Both Russia and Ukraine deny any active role in the MH-17 shoot down. So do the anti-coup forces in southeastern Ukraine. Someone knows something and is lying to conceal a role in the incident. From the U.S. perspective what happened needs to be clarified and become a matter of public record. No other nation has the resources that the U.S. had to come up with an evidence-based answer; and intelligence collection and analysis are the tools that must be used. The information released to date does not bear close scrutiny; it does not permit an informed judgment as to who is lying about the shoot-down of Flight 17.

One year ago today, National Intelligence Director James Clapper authorized a background briefing including some sketchy talking points in a very short "Government Assessment" for selected mainstream journalists. It was just five days after the shoot-down and two days after Secretary of State Kerry pointed the finger of blame at anti-coup Ukrainians and Russia. Understandably, corroboration was being sought.

Like Kerry's presentations on the Sunday talk shows of July 20, 2014, however,

much of the "Government Assessment" was derived from postings on "social media." The July 22, 2014 briefing addressed, inconclusively, the key issue of who fired the Buk anti-aircraft missile widely believed to have downed the airliner on July 17, 2014.

No update to that five-day-after "Government Assessment" has been provided over the past year. Are we asked to believe that one year later the intelligence community still cannot adduce evidence that goes beyond insinuation regarding the Buk missile?

The July 22, 2014 briefing also suggested that the missile might have been fired by a Ukrainian "defector." Has there been no clarification on that point? It is, frankly, very hard for us to believe that the U.S. intelligence community has been unable to expand its understanding of these key issues over the past year.

To be sure, there has long been a tendency in Washington to "fix the intelligence around the policy," to quote the Downing Street memo relating to the inglorious start of the Iraq War. More recently, we note the claim repeatedly made by Secretary of State John Kerry on August 30, 2013, that "we know" the regime of Bashar al-Assad was responsible for the chemical incidents near Damascus nine days before.

In that case, Kerry also cited a "Government Assessment" to support his charges. We saw the introduction of this unique genre of "assessment," instead of the normally required "Intelligence Assessment," as evidence that honest intelligence analysts were refusing to go along with the preferred narrative. In fact, Kerry's accusations turned out to have been based on false and even fabricated intelligence provided by opponents of the Syrian government.

Choosing to Reveal the Truth

If the White House has concrete, probative intelligence regarding MH-17, we strongly suggest that the time is right to approve it for release before the "blame Russia" narrative becomes completely dominant. The American people are perfectly capable of judging for themselves what took place but they need to have all the information presented without bias and without any attempt to evade unpleasant conclusions. And it should be done even given the risk of compromising "sources and methods," as the broader issue of war or peace with Russia is something that should be of paramount concern to every American.

What is needed is an Interagency Intelligence Assessment the mechanism used in the past to present significant findings. We are hearing indirectly from some of our former colleagues that the draft Dutch report contradicts some of the real intelligence that has been collected. Resorting to another "Government (not

Intelligence) Assessment” to sidestep the accountability issue is not appropriate and is itself an insult to the integrity and professionalism of the intelligence community.

Mr. President, we believe you need to seek out honest intelligence analysts now and hear them out, particularly if they are challenging or even opposing the prevailing groupthink narrative. They might well convince you to take steps to deal more forthrightly with the shoot-down of MH-17 and minimize the risk that relations with Russia might degenerate into a replay of the Cold War with the threat of escalation into thermonuclear conflict. In all candor, we suspect that at least some of your advisers fail to appreciate the enormity of that danger.

The courtesy of a reply is requested.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

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Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

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MH-17 Mystery: A New Tonkin Gulf Case?

Exclusive: In 1964, the Tonkin Gulf incident was used to justify the Vietnam War although U.S. intelligence quickly knew the facts were not what the U.S. government claimed. Now, the MH-17 case is being exploited to justify a new Cold War as U.S. intelligence again is silent about what it knows, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

One year ago, the world experienced what could become the Tonkin Gulf incident of World War III, the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine. As with the dubious naval clash off the coast of North Vietnam in 1964, which helped launch the Vietnam War, U.S. officials quickly seized on the MH-17 crash for its emotional and propaganda appeal and used it to ratchet up tensions against Russia.

Shocked at the thought of 298 innocent people plunging to their deaths from 33,000 feet last July 17, the world recoiled in horror, a fury that was then focused on Russian President Vladimir Putin. With Putin's face emblazoned on magazine covers, the European Union got in line behind the U.S.-backed coup regime in Ukraine and endorsed economic sanctions to punish Russia.

In the year that has followed, the U.S. government has continued to escalate tensions with Russia, supporting the Ukrainian regime in its brutal "anti-terrorism operation" that has slaughtered thousands of ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine. The authorities in Kiev have even dispatched neo-Nazi and ultranationalist militias, supported by jihadists called "brothers" of the Islamic State, to act as the tip of the spear. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Ukraine Merges Nazis and Islamists."](#)]

Raising world tensions even further, the Russians have made clear that they will not allow the ethnic Russian resistance to be annihilated, setting the stage for

a potential escalation of hostilities and even a possible nuclear showdown between the United States and Russia.

But the propaganda linchpin to the West's extreme anger toward Russia remains the MH-17 shoot-down, which the United States and the West continue to pin on the Russian rebels and by extension Russia and Putin. The latest examples are media reports about the Dutch crash investigation suggesting that an anti-aircraft missile, allegedly involved in destroying MH-17, was fired from rebel-controlled territory.

Yet, the U.S. mainstream media remains stunningly disinterested in the "dog-not-barking" question of why the U.S. intelligence community has been so quiet about its MH-17 analysis since it released a sketchy report relying mostly on "social media" on July 22, 2014, just five days after the shoot-down. A source briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that the reason for the intelligence community's silence is that more definitive analysis pointed to a rogue Ukrainian operation implicating one of the pro-regime oligarchs.

The source said that if this U.S. analysis were to see the light of day, the Ukrainian "narrative" that has supplied the international pressure on Russia would collapse. In other words, the Obama administration is giving a higher priority to keeping Putin on the defensive than to bringing the MH-17 killers to justice.

Like the Tonkin Gulf case, the evidence on the MH-17 case was shaky and contradictory from the start. But, in both cases, U.S. officials confidently pointed fingers at the "enemy." President Lyndon Johnson blamed North Vietnam in 1964 and Secretary of State John Kerry implicated ethnic Russian rebels and their backers in Moscow in 2014. In both cases, analysts in the U.S. intelligence community were less certain and even reached contrary conclusions once more evidence was available.

In both cases, those divergent assessments appear to have been suppressed so as not to interfere with what was regarded as a national security priority confronting "North Vietnamese aggression" in 1964 and "Russian aggression" in 2014. To put out the contrary information would have undermined the government's policy and damaged "credibility." So the facts or at least the conflicting judgments were hidden.

The Price of Silence

In the case of the Tonkin Gulf, it took years for the truth to finally emerge and in the meantime tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers and millions of Vietnamese had lost their lives. Yet, much of the reality was known soon after

the Tonkin Gulf incident on Aug. 4, 1964.

Daniel Ellsberg, who in 1964 was a young Defense Department official, recounts in his 2002 book *Secrets* how the Tonkin Gulf falsehoods took shape, first with the panicked cables from a U.S. Navy captain relaying confused sonar readings and then with that false storyline presented to the American people.

As Ellsberg describes, President Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara announced retaliatory airstrikes on Aug. 4, 1964, telling “the American public that the North Vietnamese, for the second time in two days, had attacked U.S. warships on ‘routine patrol in international waters’; that this was clearly a ‘deliberate’ pattern of ‘naked aggression’; that the evidence for the second attack, like the first, was ‘unequivocal’; that the attack had been ‘unprovoked’; and that the United States, by responding in order to deter any repetition, intended no wider war.”

Ellsberg wrote: “By midnight on the fourth, or within a day or two, I knew that each one of those assurances was false.” Yet, the White House made no effort to clarify the false or misleading statements. The falsehoods were left standing for several years while Johnson sharply escalated the war by dispatching a half million soldiers to Vietnam.

In the MH-17 case, we saw something similar. Within three days of the July 17, 2014 crash, Secretary Kerry rushed onto all five Sunday talk shows with his rush to judgment, citing evidence provided by the Ukrainian government through social media. On NBC’s “Meet the Press,” David Gregory asked, “Are you bottom-lining here that Russia provided the weapon?”

Kerry: “There’s a story today confirming that, but we have not within the Administration made a determination. But it’s pretty clear when there’s a build-up of extraordinary circumstantial evidence. I’m a former prosecutor. I’ve tried cases on circumstantial evidence; it’s powerful here.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Kerry’s Latest Reckless Rush to Judgment.”](#)]

Two days later, on July 22, the Director of National Intelligence authorized the release of a brief report essentially repeating Kerry’s allegations. The DNI’s report also cited “social media” as implicating the ethnic Russian rebels, but the report stopped short of claiming that the Russians gave the rebels the sophisticated Buk (or SA-11) surface-to-air missile that the report indicated was used to bring down the plane.

Instead, the report cited “an increasing amount of heavy weaponry crossing the border from Russia to separatist fighters in Ukraine”; it claimed that Russia “continues to provide training including on air defense systems to separatist

fighters at a facility in southwest Russia"; and it noted the rebels "have demonstrated proficiency with surface-to-air missile systems, downing more than a dozen aircraft in the months prior to the MH17 tragedy, including two large transport aircraft."

Yet, despite the insinuation of Russian guilt, what the public report didn't say which is often more significant than what is said in these white papers was that the rebels had previously only used short-range shoulder-fired missiles to bring down low-flying military planes, whereas MH-17 was flying at around 33,000 feet, far beyond the range of those weapons.

The assessment also didn't say that U.S. intelligence, which had been concentrating its attention on eastern Ukraine during those months, detected the delivery of a Buk missile battery from Russia, despite the fact that a battery consists of four 16-foot-long missiles that are hauled around by trucks or other large vehicles.

Rising Doubts

I was told that the absence of evidence of such a delivery injected the first doubts among U.S. analysts who also couldn't say for certain that the missile battery that was suspected of firing the fateful missile was manned by rebels. An early glimpse of that doubt was revealed in the DNI briefing for several mainstream news organizations when the July 22 assessment was released.

The Los Angeles Times reported, "U.S. intelligence agencies have so far been unable to determine the nationalities or identities of the crew that launched the missile. U.S. officials said it was possible the SA-11 was launched by a defector from the Ukrainian military who was trained to use similar missile systems." [See Consortiumnews.com's "The Mystery of a Ukrainian 'Defector.'"]

The Russians also challenged the rush to judgment against them, although the U.S. mainstream media largely ignored or ridiculed their presentation. But the Russians at least provided what appeared to be substantive data, including alleged radar readings showing the presence of a Ukrainian jetfighter "gaining height" as it closed to within three to five kilometers of MH-17.

Russian Lt. Gen. Andrey Kartoplov also called on the Ukrainian government to explain the movements of its Buk systems to sites in eastern Ukraine and why Kiev's Kupol-M19S18 radars, which coordinate the flight of Buk missiles, showed increased activity leading up to the July 17 shoot-down.

The Ukrainian government countered by asserting that it had "evidence that the missile which struck the plane was fired by terrorists, who received arms and specialists from the Russian Federation," according to Andrey Lysenko, spokesman

for Ukraine's Security Council, using Kiev's preferred term for the rebels.

On July 29, amid this escalating rhetoric, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, a group of mostly retired U.S. intelligence officials, called on President Barack Obama to release what evidence the U.S. government had, including satellite imagery.

"As intelligence professionals we are embarrassed by the unprofessional use of partial intelligence information," the group wrote. "As Americans, we find ourselves hoping that, if you indeed have more conclusive evidence, you will find a way to make it public without further delay. In charging Russia with being directly or indirectly responsible, Secretary of State John Kerry has been particularly definitive. Not so the evidence."

But the Obama administration failed to make public any intelligence information that would back up its earlier suppositions.

Then, in early August, I was told that some U.S. intelligence analysts had begun shifting away from the original scenario blaming the rebels and Russia to one focused more on the possibility that extremist elements of the Ukrainian government were responsible, funded by one of Ukraine's rabidly anti-Russian oligarchs. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Flight 17 Shoot-down Scenario Shifts" and "Was Putin Targeted for Mid-air Assassination?"]

Last October, Der Spiegel reported that the German intelligence service, the BND, also had concluded that Russia was not the source of the missile battery that it had been captured from a Ukrainian military base but the BND still blamed the rebels for firing it. The BND also concluded that photos supplied by the Ukrainian government about the MH-17 tragedy "have been manipulated," Der Spiegel reported.

And, the BND disputed Russian government claims that a Ukrainian fighter jet had been flying close to MH-17, the magazine said, reporting on the BND's briefing to a parliamentary committee on Oct. 8, 2014. But none of the BND's evidence was made public, and I was subsequently told by a European official that the evidence was not as conclusive as the magazine article depicted. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Germans Clear Russia in MH-17 Case."]

Dog Still Doesn't Bark

When the Dutch Safety Board investigating the crash issued an interim report in mid-October, it answered few questions, beyond confirming that MH-17 apparently was destroyed by "high-velocity objects that penetrated the aircraft from outside." The 34-page Dutch report was silent on the "dog-not-barking" issue of whether the U.S. government had satellite surveillance that revealed exactly

where the supposed ground-to-air missile was launched and who fired it.

In January, when I re-contacted the source who had been briefed by the U.S. analysts, the source said their thinking had not changed, except that they believed the missile may have been less sophisticated than a Buk, possibly an SA-6, and that the attack may have also involved a Ukrainian jetfighter firing on MH-17.

Since then there have been occasional news accounts about witnesses reporting that they did see a Ukrainian fighter plane in the sky and others saying they saw a missile possibly fired from territory then supposedly controlled by the rebels (although the borders of the conflict zone at that time were very fluid and the Ukrainian military was known to have mobile anti-aircraft missile batteries only a few miles away).

But the larger dog-not-barking question is why the U.S. intelligence community has clammed up for nearly one year, even after I reported that I was being told that U.S. analysts had veered off in a different direction from the initial blame-the-Russians approach toward one focusing on a rogue Ukrainian attack.

For its part, the DNI's office has cited the need for secrecy even as it continues to refer to its July 22 report. But didn't DNI James Clapper waive any secrecy privilege when he rushed out a report five days after the MH-17 shoot-down? Why was secrecy asserted only after the U.S. intelligence community had time to thoroughly review its photographic and electronic intelligence?

Over the past 11 months, the DNI's office has offered no updates on the initial assessment, with a DNI spokeswoman even making the absurd claim that U.S. intelligence has made no refinements of its understanding about the tragedy since July 22, 2014.

If what I've been told is true, the reason for this silence would likely be that a reversal of the initial rush to judgment would be both embarrassing for the Obama administration and detrimental to an "information warfare" strategy designed to keep the Russians on the defensive.

But if that's the case, President Barack Obama may be acting even more recklessly than President Johnson did in 1964. As horrific as the Vietnam War was, a nuclear showdown with Russia could be even worse.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The

trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

MH-17 Case Slips into Propaganda Fog

Exclusive: Almost a year ago, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine killing 298 people. Yet, instead of a transparent investigation seeking justice, the case became a propaganda game of finger-pointing, with the CIA withholding key evidence all the better to blame Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Dutch investigation into the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine last July has failed to uncover conclusive proof of precisely who was responsible for the deaths of the 298 passengers and crew but is expected to point suspicions toward the ethnic Russian rebels, fitting with the West's long-running anti-Russian propaganda campaign.

A source who has been briefed on the outlines of the investigation said some U.S. intelligence analysts have reached a contrary conclusion and place the blame on "rogue" elements of the Ukrainian government operating out of a circle of hard-liners around one of Ukraine's oligarchs. Yet, according to this source, the U.S. analysts will demur on the Dutch findings, letting them stand without public challenge.

Throughout the Ukraine crisis, propaganda and "information warfare" have overridden any honest presentation of reality and the mystery around the MH-17 disaster has now slipped into that haze of charge and counter-charge. Many investigative journalists, including myself, [have been rebuffed](#) in repeated efforts to get verifiable proof about the case or even informational briefings.

In that sense, the MH-17 case stands as an outlier to the usual openness that surrounds inquiries into airline disasters. The Obama administration's behavior has been particularly curious, with its rush to judgment five days after the July 17, 2014 shoot-down, citing sketchy social media posts to implicate the ethnic Russian rebels and indirectly the Russian government but then refusing requests for updates.

But why the later secrecy? If Director of National Intelligence James Clapper decided that unverified information about the shoot-down could be released five days after the event, why would his office then decide to keep the U.S. public

in the dark as more definitive data became available?

Over the past 11 months, the DNI's office has offered no updates on the initial assessment, with a DNI spokeswoman even making the absurd claim that U.S. intelligence had made no refinements of its understanding about the tragedy since July 22, 2014.

I'm told that the reason for the DNI's reversal from openness to secrecy was that U.S. intelligence analysts found no evidence that the Russian government had given the rebels sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles capable of downing an aircraft at 33,000 feet, the altitude of MH-17, and that an examination of U.S. satellite and electronic intelligence instead implicated extremists linked to Ukraine's U.S.-backed regime, although not to Kiev's political leadership.

At that point, admitting to an erroneous rush to judgment would have embarrassed the administration and undermined the "public diplomacy" campaign around the MH-17 case. By blaming Russia and its President Vladimir Putin last summer, the Obama administration whipped Europe into an anti-Russian frenzy and helped win the European Union's support for economic sanctions against Russia. Keeping Putin on the defensive is a top U.S. priority.

As one senior U.S. government official explained to me, information warfare was the only area in the Ukraine crisis where Washington felt it had an edge over Moscow, which benefited from a host of other advantages, such as geography, economic and cultural ties, and military pressure.

'False Flags'

It also appears that right-wing Ukrainian political forces, which seized power in the Feb. 22, 2014 coup, have understood the value of propaganda, including "false flag" operations that pin the blame for atrocities on their opponents. One of the most successful may have been the mysterious sniper attacks on Feb. 20, 2014, that slaughtered both police and protesters in Kiev's Maidan square, with the violence immediately blamed on President Viktor Yanukovich and used to justify his overthrow two days later.

Later independent investigations indicated that extreme right-wing elements seeking Yanukovich's ouster were more likely responsible. Two European Union officials, Estonia's Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and European Union foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton, were revealed discussing in a phone call their suspicions that elements of the protesters were responsible for the shootings.

"So there is a stronger and stronger understanding that behind snipers it was not Yanukovich, it was somebody from the new coalition," Paet told Ashton, as reported by the UK Guardian. [A worthwhile documentary on this mystery is

“Maidan Massacre.”]

Even U.S. officials have faulted the new regime for failing to conduct a diligent investigation to determine who was to blame for the sniper attack. During a rousing anti-Russian speech in Kiev last month, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power inserted one criticism of the post-coup regime that “investigations into serious crimes such as the violence in the Maidan and in Odessa [where scores of ethnic Russians were burned alive] have been sluggish, opaque, and marred by serious errors suggesting not only a lack of competence, but also a lack of will to hold the perpetrators accountable.”

In other words, regarding the Maidan sniper massacre, the Kiev regime wasn't willing to reveal evidence that might undermine the incident's use as a valuable propaganda ploy. That attitude has been shared by the mainstream Western media which has sought to glue white hats on the post-coup regime and black hats on the ethnic Russian rebels who supported Yanukovich and have resisted the new power structure.

For instance, since Yanukovich's ouster nearly 1½ years ago, The New York Times and other mainstream outlets have treated reports about the key role played in the coup regime by neo-Nazis and other far-right nationalists as “Russian propaganda.” However, this week, the Times finally acknowledged the importance of these extremists in Kiev's military operations. [See Consortiumnews.com's “Ukraine Merges Nazis and Islamists.”]

A similar propaganda fog has enveloped the MH-17 investigation, with the lead investigators the Dutch, British, Australians and Ukrainians all firmly in the pro-Kiev and anti-Moscow camp. (Specialists from the United States, Russia and Malaysia have also been involved in the inquiry.)

Not surprisingly, leaders in Ukraine and Australia, as well, didn't wait for the investigation to reach a conclusion before placing the blame on Putin. Last October, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott used an Australian football term in vowing to “shirtfront” Putin about his supposed guilt in the MH-17 case.

Media Fakery

Keeping the later U.S. intelligence analysis secret also allows for the Putin-did-it propaganda campaigns to go forward in mainstream media outlets and various propaganda fronts. A good example was the Australian “60 Minutes” report in May presenting bogus video evidence supposedly corroborating “Russia-did-it” claims made by British blogger Eliot Higgins.

While the segment appeared to be authoritative supposedly proving that Putin was responsible for mass murder a closer examination showed that the program had

relied on video fakery to mislead its viewers. The key scene supposedly matching up a video of a getaway Buk anti-aircraft missile battery with landmarks in the rebel-controlled city of Luhansk didn't match up at all. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[You Be the Judge.](#)"]

After I revealed the fraud by showing how the two scenes were almost entirely different, the Australian show fell back on a claim that one utility pole in the getaway video looked like a utility pole that its reporting team had found in Luhansk. It is perhaps a sign of how crazy the anti-Russian propaganda has gotten that a major news program could feel that it can make such an absurd argument and get away with it.

In a rational world, matching up the two scenes would require all the landmarks to fit, when in this case none of them did. Further, to cite similarities between two utility poles as evidence ignored the fact that most utility poles look alike and there was the additional fact that none of the area around the two utility poles matched at all, including a house behind one that didn't appear in the scene of the other. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A Reckless Stand-upper on MH-17.](#)"]

However, as long as the U.S. government's comprehensive intelligence information on MH-17 is kept secret, such sleights of hand can continue to work. I'm told that the Dutch report is likely to contain similar circumstantial claims, citing such things as the possible angle of the fired missile, to suggest that the ethnic Russian rebels were at fault.

Last October, the Dutch Safety Board's initial report answered very few questions, beyond confirming that MH-17 apparently was destroyed by "high-velocity objects that penetrated the aircraft from outside." Other key questions went begging, such as what to make of the Russian military radar purporting to show a Ukrainian SU-25 jetfighter in the area, a claim that the Kiev government denied.

Either the Russian radar showed the presence of a jetfighter "gaining height" as it closed to within three to five kilometers of the passenger plane as [the Russians claimed](#) in a July 21 press conference or it didn't. The Kiev authorities insisted that they had no military aircraft in the area at the time.

But [the 34-page Dutch report](#) was silent on the jetfighter question, although noting that the investigators had received Air Traffic Control "surveillance data from the Russian Federation." The report also was silent on the "dog-not-barking" issue of whether the U.S. government had satellite surveillance that revealed exactly where the supposed ground-to-air missile was launched and who may have fired it.

The Obama administration has asserted knowledge about those facts, but the U.S. government has withheld satellite photos and other intelligence information that could presumably corroborate the charge. Curiously, too, the Dutch report said the investigation received “satellite imagery taken in the days after the occurrence.” Obviously, the more relevant images in assessing blame would be aerial photography in the days and hours before the crash.

The Dutch report’s reference to only post-crash satellite photos was also odd because the Russian military released a number of satellite images purporting to show Ukrainian government Buk missile systems north of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk before the attack, including two batteries that purportedly were shifted 50 kilometers south of Donetsk on July 17, the day of the crash, and then removed by July 18.

Russian Lt. Gen. Andrey Kartoplov called on the Ukrainian government to explain the movements of its Buk systems and why Kiev’s Kupol-M19S18 radars, which coordinate the flight of Buk missiles, showed increased activity leading up to the July 17 shoot-down.

The Ukrainian government countered these questions by asserting that it had “evidence that the missile which struck the plane was fired by terrorists, who received arms and specialists from the Russian Federation,” according to Andrey Lysenko, spokesman for Ukraine’s Security Council, using Kiev’s preferred term for the rebels.

Lysenko added: “To disown this tragedy, [Russian officials] are drawing a lot of pictures and maps. We will explore any photos and other plans produced by the Russian side.” But Ukrainian authorities have failed to address the Russian evidence except through broad denials.

Where’s the Intelligence?

On July 29, 2014, amid escalating rhetoric against Russia from U.S. government officials and the Western news media, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity called on President Obama to release what evidence the U.S. government had on the shoot-down, including satellite imagery.

“As intelligence professionals we are embarrassed by the unprofessional use of partial intelligence information,” the group wrote. “As Americans, we find ourselves hoping that, if you indeed have more conclusive evidence, you will find a way to make it public without further delay. In charging Russia with being directly or indirectly responsible, Secretary of State John Kerry has been particularly definitive. Not so the evidence. His statements seem premature and bear earmarks of an attempt to ‘poison the jury pool.’”

However, the Obama administration has failed to make public any intelligence information that would back up its earlier suppositions or any new evidence at all. One source told me that U.S. intelligence analysts are afraid to speak out about the information that contradicts the original rush to judgment because of Obama's aggressive prosecution of whistleblowers.

If the Dutch final report emerges with carefully circumscribed circumstantial evidence implicating the pro-Russian rebels, the nuances will surely be carved away when the report is fed into the existing propaganda machinery. The conventional wisdom about "Russian guilt" will be firmed up.

A sense of how that will go can be seen in a recent New York Times [article](#) by David Herszenhorn on June 29: "Pro-Russian separatist leaders in the eastern Ukrainian region of Luhansk have blocked access to Dutch law enforcement officials pursuing an investigation into the downing of a Malaysian jetliner nearly a year ago, the Netherlands Public Prosecution Office said.

"The obstruction by separatist officials prompted the investigators, from the Dutch National Police and Ministry of Defense, to cut short their field work in Ukraine without conducting research into cellphone towers and cellular networks in the region, the public prosecution office said.

"Based on preliminary analysis and intelligence, including from the United States government, the aircraft was widely believed to have been destroyed by a surface-to-air missile fired from territory controlled by Russian-backed separatist forces."

While the thrust of Herszenhorn's article made the ethnic Russian rebels look bad and foreshadows some of the points likely to be featured in the Dutch investigative report perhaps the most significant word in the story is "preliminary." While it's true that the U.S. government's "preliminary" report on July 22, 2014, implicated the rebels, the more pertinent question not asked by the Times is why there has been no refinement of that "preliminary" report.

The Dutch Safety Board issued [a brief progress report](#) on July 1 noting that it had submitted a draft of its final report to "accredited representatives of the participating States on June 2," giving them 60 days to submit comments before a "definitive final" report is published in October.

Meanwhile, Dutch prosecutors handling the criminal investigation say they have no specific suspects, but lead investigator Fred Westerbeke claims the probe has a number of "persons of interest." Westerbeke said the criminal probe will likely run through the end of the year or later.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for

The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

More Video Fakery on MH-17

Exclusive: Australia's "60 Minutes" program refuses to admit the obvious: that it messed up in determining the location where the "getaway" video was taken after last July's Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down. Instead, the show presented an update with more deceptive video, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

After being caught red-handed presenting misleading video about the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down, Australia's "60 Minutes" program could have acknowledged its obvious error and apologized to its viewers. Instead, the program has resorted to hurling insults toward me for noting the discrepancies and engaging in more video sleights-of-hand to compound the journalistic malfeasance.

In [an update](#) posted on YouTube on May 24, the program's host Michael Usher acknowledged that the original amateur video of a possible BUK anti-aircraft missile battery after the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of MH-17 did not match up with the program's video attempting to replicate that scene in the eastern Ukrainian city of Luhansk.

But Usher insisted that was just because his crew couldn't get access to the location where the "getaway" video was shot. He dismissed the obvious differences as simply a case of using a different camera angle.

Yet, then, Usher pulled two fast ones on his viewers. The first was to present a view of the intersection in Luhansk taken by a traffic camera "just before the shooting" and then matching it up with video taken by his crew. Usher noted that his crew's video contained many of the same landmarks, including a church in the background.

But that's irrelevant to the question of whether the July 17 "getaway" video matched up with the same intersection. Usher is trying to trick you as in a shell game by pretending that the fact that he and his crew found a scene

matching what you see in a traffic camera is the same as finding the scene matching the “getaway.” They’re two entirely different points and nothing significant in the “getaway” video matches the scene of Usher’s intersection.

Usher then moved to his second sleight-of-hand by showing the one thing that supposedly does match up: a non-descript utility pole. In the update, he claimed that his crew found that matching pole along the roadway in Luhansk. Yet, except for some unexceptional electronic device strapped to the pole there is nothing else that looks the same.

Indeed, the key landmark in that part of the “getaway” video is a house in the background to the left of the pole. But Usher’s video doesn’t show a house. Instead, Usher’s video added an insert showing the pole from the “getaway” video that conveniently obscures the spot where the house should be.

At this point, one has to wonder how premeditated Usher’s manipulation of the program’s viewers has become. You would think that showing the house would have been the slam dunk proof that Usher’s crew did find the right location. Instead, the program obscures exactly that spot.

Also, in the long-range view from the traffic camera, what you see is a commercial intersection with no house matching the house in the “getaway” video. The “getaway” scene after the MH-17 shoot-down clearly depicts a much woodsier setting than Usher’s intersection.

And, look at the two images of the poles and the surrounding areas. Except for the fairly routine electronic devices strapped to the poles, there really isn’t anything that looks the same. Below the pole in the “getaway” video there appears to be one band, yet in Usher’s there appear to be two. And, note the intense foliage to the right of the pole in the “getaway” video. It’s not there in Usher’s scene.

Yet, as Usher’s update rushes these images past the viewers, it’s hard for them to grasp all the quick editing moves that seem designed to deceive them. These deceptions are what Usher offers to seal the deal with his viewers.

Those camera tricks and the flurry of smug insults delivered by Usher (referring to skeptics of his presentation as “Kremlin stooges” and “Russian puppets”) reveal a newsman and a news show that are less than objective or professional.

If Usher had real evidence showing that he had found the spot where the “getaway” video was taken, why did he include something as irrelevant as the traffic-camera video while pretending that it was somehow probative, when it wasn’t?

And, why is his key evidence a non-descript pole that sits on a roadway that doesn't match with the scene in the "getaway" video? And, why did his producers insert that "helpful" inset that obscures what would have been the only meaningful landmark in the "pole scene" the house that doesn't appear to be there?

Initially, I had thought that blogger Eliot Higgins simply had given Usher and his team bad coordinates and they had made a serious but honest mistake. Generally, in journalism, before we accuse someone of mass murder even a demonized figure like Russian President Vladimir Putin we like to have real evidence, not misleading images. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Fake Evidence Blaming Russia for MH-17?](#)" and "[You Be the Judge.](#)"]

I had assumed that Usher and his team may just have gotten overly excited and jumped to a faulty conclusion. However, with the update and the additional fakery it now appears that they are engaged in a willful fraud.

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Nuland's Mastery of Ukraine Propaganda

Exclusive: In House testimony, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland blamed Russia and ethnic-Russian rebels for last summer's shoot-down of MH-17 over Ukraine, but the U.S. government has not substantiated that charge. So, did Nuland mislead Congress or just play a propaganda game, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

An early skill learned by Official Washington's neoconservatives, when they were cutting their teeth inside the U.S. government in the 1980s, was how to frame their arguments in the most propagandistic way, so anyone who dared to disagree with any aspect of the presentation seemed unpatriotic or crazy.

During my years at The Associated Press and Newsweek, I dealt with a number of now prominent neocons who were just starting out and mastering these techniques at the knee of top CIA psychological warfare specialist Walter Raymond Jr., who

had been transferred to President Ronald Reagan's National Security Council staff where Raymond oversaw inter-agency task forces that pushed Reagan's hard-line agenda in Central America and elsewhere. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Victory of 'Perception Management.'](#)"]

One of those quick learners was Robert Kagan, who was then a protégé of Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams. Kagan got his first big chance when he became director of the State Department's public diplomacy office for Latin America, a key outlet for Raymond's propaganda schemes.

Though always personable in his dealings with me, Kagan grew frustrated when I wouldn't swallow the propaganda that I was being fed. At one point, Kagan warned me that I might have to be "controversialized," i.e. targeted for public attack by Reagan's right-wing media allies and anti-journalism attack groups, like Accuracy in Media, a process that did indeed occur.

Years later, Kagan emerged as one of America's top neocons, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century, which opened in 1998 to advocate for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, ultimately gaining the backing of a large swath of the U.S. national security establishment in support of that bloody endeavor.

Despite the Iraq disaster, Kagan continued to rise in influence, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a columnist at the Washington Post, and someone whose published criticism so alarmed President Barack Obama last year that he invited Kagan to a White House lunch. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Obama's True Foreign Policy Weakness.](#)"]

Kagan's Wife's Coup

But Kagan is perhaps best known these days as the husband of neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, one of Vice President Dick Cheney's former advisers and a key architect of last year's coup in Ukraine, a "regime change" that toppled an elected president and touched off a civil war, which now has become a proxy fight involving nuclear-armed United States and Russia.

In an interview last year with the New York Times, Nuland indicated that she shared her husband's criticism of President Obama for his hesitancy to use American power more assertively. Referring to Kagan's public attacks on Obama's more restrained "realist" foreign policy, Nuland said, "suffice to say that nothing goes out of the house that I don't think is worthy of his talents. Let's put it that way."

But Nuland also seems to have mastered her husband's skill with propaganda, presenting an extreme version of the situation in Ukraine, such that no one

would dare quibble with the details. In prepared testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee last week, Nuland even slipped in an accusation blaming Russia for the July 17 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 though the U.S. government has not presented any proof.

Nuland testified, "In eastern Ukraine, Russia and its separatist puppets unleashed unspeakable violence and pillage; MH-17 was shot down."

Now, it's true that if one parses Nuland's testimony, she's not exactly saying the Russians or the ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine shot down the plane. There is a semi-colon between the "unspeakable violence and pillage" and the passive verb structure "MH-17 was shot down." But anyone seeing her testimony would have understood that the Russians and their "puppets" shot down the plane, killing all 298 people onboard.

When I submitted a formal query to the State Department asking if Nuland's testimony meant that the U.S. government had developed new evidence that the rebels shot down the plane and that the Russians shared complicity, I received no answer.

Perhaps significantly or perhaps not, Nuland presented similarly phrased testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday but made no reference to MH-17. So, I submitted a new inquiry asking whether the omission reflected second thoughts by Nuland about making the claim before the House. Again, I have not received a reply.

However, both of Nuland's appearances place all the blame for the chaos in Ukraine on Russia, including the 6,000 or more deaths. Nuland offered not a single word of self-criticism about how she contributed to these violent events by encouraging last year's coup, nor did she express the slightest concern about the actions of the coup regime in Kiev, including its dispatch of neo-Nazi militias to carry out "anti-terrorist" and "death squad" operations against ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Nuclear War and Clashing Ukraine Narratives."]

Russia's Fault

Everything was Russia's fault or as Nuland phrased it: "This manufactured conflict, controlled by the Kremlin; fueled by Russian tanks and heavy weapons; financed at Russian taxpayers' expense, has cost the lives of more than 6,000 Ukrainians, but also of hundreds of young Russians sent to fight and die there by the Kremlin, in a war their government denies."

Nuland was doing her husband proud. As every good propagandist knows, you don't present events with any gray areas; your side is always perfect and the other

side is the epitome of evil. And, today, Nuland faces almost no risk that some mainstream journalist will dare contradict this black-and-white storyline; they simply parrot it.

Besides heaping all the blame on the Russians, Nuland cited in her Senate testimony some of the new “reforms” that the Kiev authorities have just implemented as they build a “free-market state.” She said, “They made tough choices to reduce and cap pension benefits, increase work requirements and phase in a higher retirement age; they passed laws cutting wasteful gas subsidies.”

In other words, many of the “free-market reforms” are aimed at making the hard lives of average Ukrainians even harder by cutting pensions, removing work protections, forcing people to work into their old age and making them pay more for heat during the winter.

Nuland also hailed some of the regime’s stated commitments to fighting corruption. But Kiev seems to have simply installed a new cast of bureaucrats looking to enrich themselves. For instance, Ukraine’s Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko is an expatriate American who before becoming an instant Ukrainian citizen last December ran a U.S. taxpayer-financed investment fund for Ukraine that was drained of money as she engaged in lucrative insider deals, which she has fought to keep secret. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Ukraine’s Finance Minister’s American ‘Values.’”](#)]

Yet, none of these concerns were mentioned in Nuland’s propagandistic testimony to the House and Senate not that any of the committee members or the mainstream press corps seemed to care that they were being spun and even misled. The hearings were mostly opportunities for members of Congress to engage in chest-beating as they demanded that President Obama send U.S. arms to Ukraine for a hot war with Russia.

Regarding the MH-17 disaster, one reason that I was inquisitive about Nuland’s insinuation in her House testimony that the Russians and the ethnic Russian rebels were responsible was that some U.S. intelligence analysts have reached a contrary conclusion, according to a source briefed on their findings. According to that information, the analysts found no proof that the Russians had delivered a BUK anti-aircraft system to the rebels and concluded that the attack was apparently carried out by a rogue element of the Ukrainian military.

After I published that account last summer, the Obama administration went silent about the MH-17 shoot-down, letting stand some initial speculation that had blamed the Russians and the rebels. In the nearly eight months since the tragedy, the U.S. government has failed to make public any intelligence information on the crash. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Danger of an MH-17](#)

'Cold Case.'"]

So, Nuland may have been a bit duplicitous when she phrased her testimony so that anyone hearing it would jump to the conclusion that the Russians and the rebels were to blame. It's true she didn't exactly say so but she surely knew what impression she was leaving.

In that, Nuland appears to have taken a page from the playbook of her husband's old mentor, Elliott Abrams, who provided misleading testimony to Congress on the Iran-Contra Affair in the 1980s and even though he was convicted of that offense, Abrams was pardoned by President George H.W. Bush and thus was able to return to government last decade to oversee the selling of the Iraq War.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

President Gollum's 'Precious' Secrets

Exclusive: Despite promises of "openness," President Obama has treated information that could inform American democracy like Tolkien's character Gollum coveted his "precious" ring. Obama is keeping for himself analyses that could change how the public sees the crises in Syria and Ukraine, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

President Barack Obama promised a "transparent" administration, reviving democracy by letting Americans see into the inner workings of their government as much as possible, an implicit criticism of the excessive secrecy of his predecessor, George W. Bush. But instead Obama's presidency has been one of the most opaque and deceptive in modern history.

Not only has Obama continued to wrap the carry-over anti-terrorism wars in maximum secrecy but he has taken unprecedented steps to shut down leaks by prosecuting whistleblowers who talk to the press. And, he has left standing his administration's misleading rushes to judgment on key issues after U.S. intelligence analysts have refined or reversed the first impressions.

Whether on the Syrian sarin attack in 2013 or pivotal incidents in the Ukraine crisis who was behind the sniper attacks in Kiev last Feb. 20 and who shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 last July 17 Obama has withheld evidence developed by U.S. government analysts rather than undercut the propaganda value of the initial accusations.

In the sarin incident, Secretary of State John Kerry and others rushed to blame President Bashar al-Assad's government bringing the U.S. military to the brink of war and similarly the State Department exploited the two most iconic events of the Ukraine crisis by blaming then-President Viktor Yanukovich for the sniper killings and Russia and ethnic Russian rebels for shooting down MH-17 killing all 298 people onboard.

After the State Department had squeezed out the propaganda value of those accusations, U.S. intelligence analysts came to more detailed conclusions with their findings conflicting with the hasty finger-pointing after the events. But instead of refining or correcting the record, the Obama administration typically went silent, leaving the initial impressions in place even when the President knew better.

In the context of Ukraine, I asked one senior administration official about this behavior and he responded that Russia held most of the advantages there by nature of proximity and history but that one advantage the United States wielded was "information warfare" and it made no sense to surrender that edge by withdrawing accusations that had put Russian President Vladimir Putin on the defensive.

Thus, in this Orwellian world that seems to have swallowed America's major institutions, what mattered most was how "information" including false or misleading propaganda could be deployed for geopolitical purposes even if it also involved deceiving the U.S. public. Or, one might say, especially if it deceived the U.S. public.

'Perception Management'

This attitude toward manipulating rather than informing the American people has a long and grim history. For instance, President Lyndon Johnson won congressional support for his disastrous Vietnam War escalation by citing the Tonkin Gulf incident, a false claim about North Vietnamese aggression which has since been debunked but still is used historically by the Defense Department to justify the millions killed in that conflict.

After the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, President Ronald Reagan set up inter-agency task forces devoted to the concept of "perception management," essentially how

to get the American people to “kick the Vietnam Syndrome” and get back into line behind U.S. military interventions abroad, a CIA-inspired campaign that proved stunningly successful. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “[The Victory of ‘Perception Management.’](#)”]

Last decade, the American people got their perceptions managed once more regarding Iraq’s non-existent WMD, leading to another catastrophic war which continues to spread chaos and death across the Middle East to this day. One might think that with that bloody history, President Obama would want to fulfill his promises of “transparency.”

According to [a memorandum](#) instructing Executive Branch department heads, Obama wrote: “My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.”

Instead, Obama has clamped down more than ever on openness and transparency, including the prosecution of more government whistleblowers than all the previous presidents combined and sitting on U.S. intelligence reports that would change how Americans understand major international crises.

By and large, Obama has continued the excessive secrecy of President George W. Bush, including withholding from the American people 28 pages of the 2002 congressional investigation into the 9/11 attack that relate to Saudi financing for al-Qaeda terrorists.

Obama also has refused to give the U.S. public access to the updated intelligence analyses of more current crises, including the near American military entry into the Syrian civil war in 2013 and the potential nuclear showdown with Russia over Ukraine in 2014. So, even when American lives are being put at risk by rushes to judgment, Obama doesn’t believe that the people have a right to know the facts.

The Pathology of Secrecy

I spoke with one person who has known Obama since he was a senator from Illinois who suggested the President is fearful that if he does release these secrets and some negative consequences result that he’ll be blamed. In other words, Obama in practice is too scared to live up to his commitment about “transparency.”

Another less generous explanation is that Obama is at heart an elitist who likes to surround himself with secrets but doesn’t want to share them with common citizens who are best treated like the proverbial mushrooms kept in the dark and

fertilized.

Or put differently, Obama is like the character Gollum in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series who is entranced by the power of the One Ring and obsessively pursues it, what he calls "my Precious." In that analogy, Obama can't part with his precious secrets despite his promises to the American people about government openness.

Surely, Obama does get warnings against letting the public in on what the U.S. government knows about pivotal events. Government bureaucrats can always find reasons to keep information secret. But presidents have the ultimate say in what is kept secret and what is released.

And, except for a flurry of disclosures immediately after taking office, including Bush's legal memos justifying torture, Obama has done less about opening up the federal government's archives than many recent presidents. For instance, President Bill Clinton declassified Cold War-era files on U.S. participation in Guatemala's decades of brutal repression.

Obama has shown less enthusiasm for giving Americans back their history. More importantly, however, Obama has withheld crucial information about current crises, such as the Syrian sarin attack and events that drove the Ukrainian civil war. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Collapsing Syria-Sarin Case](#)" and "[The Danger of an MH-17 Cold Case.](#)"]

In both areas, his administration rushed to judgment based on fragmentary information and as more detailed data became available challenging the earlier claims Obama clamped down on what the American people were allowed to hear.

Much like the Tonkin Gulf case, war hawks in the U.S. government found the misimpressions useful, so they didn't want to correct the record. All the better to get an edge on foreign "adversaries" and manage the perceptions of the American people.

And, for whatever his reasons, President Obama couldn't let go of his "Precious."

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The Danger of an MH-17 ‘Cold Case’

Exclusive: The Obama administration continues to drag its feet on releasing U.S. intelligence evidence on who shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 six months ago, a failure that has given the guilty parties time to scatter and has created a new breeding ground for conspiracy theories, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Now more than six months after the shoot-down of a Malaysia Airlines plane over Ukraine, the refusal of the Obama administration to make public what intelligence evidence it has about who was responsible has created fertile ground for conspiracy theories to take root while reducing hopes for holding the guilty parties accountable.

Given the U.S. government’s surveillance capabilities from satellite and aerial photographs to telephonic and electronic intercepts to human sources American intelligence surely has a good idea what happened on July 17, 2014, when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 crashed in eastern Ukraine killing all 298 people onboard.

I’m told that President Barack Obama has received briefings on what this evidence shows and what U.S. intelligence analysts have concluded about the likely guilty parties – and that Obama may have shared some of those confidential findings with the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak when they met on Dec. 24 in Hawaii.

But the U.S. government has gone largely silent on the subject after its initial rush to judgment pointing fingers at ethnic Russian rebels for allegedly firing the missile and at the Russian government for supposedly supplying a sophisticated Buk anti-aircraft battery capable of bringing down the aircraft at 33,000 feet.

Since that early flurry of unverified charges, only snippets of U.S. and NATO intelligence findings have reached the public and last October’s interim Dutch investigative report on the cause of the crash indicated that Western governments had not shared crucial information.

The Dutch Safety Board’s interim report answered few questions, beyond confirming that MH-17 apparently was destroyed by “high-velocity objects that penetrated the aircraft from outside.” Other key questions went begging, such as what to make of the Russian military radar purporting to show a Ukrainian SU-25 jetfighter in the area, a claim that the Kiev government denied.

Either the Russian radar showed the presence of a jetfighter “gaining height” as it closed to within three to five kilometers of the passenger plane as the Russians claimed in a July 21 press conference or it didn’t. The Kiev authorities insisted that they had no military aircraft in the area at the time.

But the 34-page Dutch report was silent on the jetfighter question, although noting that the investigators had received Air Traffic Control “surveillance data from the Russian Federation.” The report also was silent on the “dog-not-barking” issue of whether the U.S. government had satellite surveillance that revealed exactly where the supposed ground-to-air missile was launched and who may have fired it.

The Obama administration has asserted knowledge about those facts, but the U.S. government has withheld satellite photos and other intelligence information that could presumably corroborate the charge. Curiously, too, the Dutch report said the investigation received “satellite imagery taken in the days after the occurrence.” Obviously, the more relevant images in assessing blame would be aerial photography in the days and hours before the crash.

In mid-July, eastern Ukraine was a high priority for U.S. intelligence and a Buk missile battery is a large system that should have been easily picked up by U.S. aerial reconnaissance. The four missiles in a battery are each about 16-foot-long and would have to be hauled around by a truck and then put in position to fire.

The Dutch report’s reference to only post-crash satellite photos was also curious because the Russian military released a number of satellite images purporting to show Ukrainian government Buk missile systems north of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk before the attack, including two batteries that purportedly were shifted 50 kilometers south of Donetsk on July 17, the day of the crash, and then removed by July 18.

Russian Claims

Russian Lt. Gen. Andrey Kartoplov called on the Ukrainian government to explain the movements of its Buk systems and why Kiev’s Kupol-M19S18 radars, which coordinate the flight of Buk missiles, showed increased activity leading up to the July 17 shoot-down.

The Ukrainian government countered these questions by asserting that it had “evidence that the missile which struck the plane was fired by terrorists, who received arms and specialists from the Russian Federation,” according to Andrey Lysenko, spokesman for Ukraine’s Security Council, using Kiev’s preferred term for the rebels.

Lysenko added: "To disown this tragedy, [Russian officials] are drawing a lot of pictures and maps. We will explore any photos and other plans produced by the Russian side." But Ukrainian authorities have failed to address the Russian evidence except through broad denials.

On July 29, amid escalating rhetoric against Russia from U.S. government officials and the Western news media, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity called on President Obama to release what evidence the U.S. government had on the shoot-down, including satellite imagery.

"As intelligence professionals we are embarrassed by the unprofessional use of partial intelligence information," the group wrote. "As Americans, we find ourselves hoping that, if you indeed have more conclusive evidence, you will find a way to make it public without further delay. In charging Russia with being directly or indirectly responsible, Secretary of State John Kerry has been particularly definitive. Not so the evidence. His statements seem premature and bear earmarks of an attempt to 'poison the jury pool.'"

However, the Obama administration failed to make public any intelligence information that would back up its earlier suppositions. In early August, I was told that some U.S. intelligence analysts had begun shifting away from the original scenario blaming the rebels and Russia to one focused more on the possibility that extremist elements of the Ukrainian government were responsible.

A source who was briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that they had found no evidence that the Russian government had given the rebels a BUK missile system. Thus, these analysts concluded that the rebels and Russia were likely not at fault and that it appeared Ukrainian government forces were to blame, although apparently a unit operating outside the direct command of Ukraine's top officials.

The source specifically said the U.S. intelligence evidence did not implicate Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko or Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk but rather suggested an extremist element of the armed forces funded by one of Ukraine's oligarchs. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Flight 17 Shoot-down Scenario Shifts" and "Was Putin Targeted for Mid-air Assassination?"]

But then chatter about U.S. intelligence information on the shoot-down faded away. When I recently re-contacted the source who had been briefed by these analysts, the source said their thinking had not changed, except that they believed the missile may have been less sophisticated than a Buk, possibly an SA-6.

What was less clear was whether these analysts represented a consensus view within the U.S. intelligence community or whether they spoke for one position in an ongoing debate. The source also said President Obama was resisting going public with the U.S. intelligence information about the shoot-down because he didn't feel it was ironclad.

A Dangerous Void

But that void has left the debate over whodunit vulnerable to claims by self-interested parties and self-appointed experts, including some who derive their conclusions from social media on the Internet, so-called "public-source investigators." The Obama administration also hasn't retracted the early declarations by Secretary Kerry implicating the rebels and Russia.

Just days after the crash, Kerry went on all five Sunday talk shows fingering Russia and the rebels and citing evidence provided by the Ukrainian government through social media. On NBC's "Meet the Press," David Gregory asked, "Are you bottom-lining here that Russia provided the weapon?"

Kerry: "There's a story today confirming that, but we have not within the Administration made a determination. But it's pretty clear when there's a build-up of extraordinary circumstantial evidence. I'm a former prosecutor. I've tried cases on circumstantial evidence; it's powerful here." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Kerry's Latest Reckless Rush to Judgment.](#)"]

But some U.S. intelligence analysts soon offered conflicting assessments. After Kerry's TV round-robin, the Los Angeles Times [reported](#) on a U.S. intelligence briefing given to several mainstream U.S. news outlets. The story said, "U.S. intelligence agencies have so far been unable to determine the nationalities or identities of the crew that launched the missile. U.S. officials said it was possible the SA-11 [a Buk anti-aircraft missile] was launched by a defector from the Ukrainian military who was trained to use similar missile systems." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Mystery of a Ukrainian 'Defector.'](#)"]

In October, Der Spiegel reported that the German intelligence service, the BND, had concluded that Russia was not the source of the missile battery that it had been captured from a Ukrainian military base but still blaming the rebels for firing it. The BND also concluded that photos supplied by the Ukrainian government about the MH-17 tragedy "have been manipulated," Der Spiegel reported.

And, the BND disputed Russian government claims that a Ukrainian fighter jet had been flying close to MH-17 just before it crashed, the magazine said, reporting on the BND's briefing to a parliamentary committee on Oct. 8, which included

satellite images and other photography. But none of the BND's evidence was made public, and I was subsequently told by a European official that the evidence was not as conclusive as the magazine article depicted. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Germans Clear Russia in MH-17 Case](#)."]

So, it appears that there have been significant disagreements within Western intelligence circles about precisely who was to blame. But the refusal of the Obama administration and its NATO allies to lay their evidence on the table has not only opened the door to conspiracy theories, it has threatened to turn this tragedy into a cold case with the guilty parties whoever they are having more time to cover their tracks and disappear.

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Germans Clear Russia in MH-17 Case

Exclusive: For months, Western governments and media have accused Russia of supplying the anti-aircraft missile that brought down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 killing 298 people. But now German intelligence has reportedly determined the missile came from a Ukrainian military base, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The West's case blaming Russia for the shoot-down of a Malaysia Airlines plane over Ukraine last July appears to be crumbling as the German foreign intelligence agency has concluded that the anti-aircraft missile battery involved came from a Ukrainian military base, according to [a report](#) by the German newsmagazine Der Spiegel.

The Obama administration and other Western governments have pointed the finger of blame at Russia for supposedly supplying a sophisticated BUK missile system to ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine who then allegedly used the weapon on July 17 to shoot down what they thought was a Ukrainian military plane but turned out to be Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, killing all 298 people onboard.

The Russians denied providing the rebels with the weapon and the rebels denied

shooting down the plane. But the tragedy gave the U.S. State Department the emotional leverage to get the European Union to impose tougher economic sanctions on Russia, touching off a trade war that has edged Europe toward a new recession.

But now the narrative has shifted. The German intelligence agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst or BND, asserted that while it believes rebels were responsible for shooting down the plane, they supposedly did so with an anti-aircraft battery captured from a Ukrainian military base, according to Der Spiegel.

The BND also concluded that photos supplied by the Ukrainian government about the MH-17 tragedy “have been manipulated,” Der Spiegel reported. And, the BND disputed Russian government claims that a Ukrainian fighter jet had been flying close to MH-17 just before it crashed, the magazine said.

None of the BND’s evidence to support its conclusions has been made public – and I was subsequently told by a European official that the evidence was not as conclusive as the magazine article depicted.

Der Spiegel said the information given to members of a parliamentary committee on Oct. 8 included satellite images and other photography. What’s less clear, however, is how the BND could determine the precise command-and-control of the anti-aircraft missile system amid the chaotic military situation that existed in eastern Ukraine last July.

At the time, the Ukrainian army and allied militias were mounting an offensive against ethnic Russian rebels who were resisting a U.S.-backed coup regime that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich last February, touching off what quickly became a nasty civil war.

Spearheading Kiev’s summer offensive were pro-government militias, some of which were filled with neo-Nazi extremists and financed by Ukrainian billionaire oligarchs including Ihor Kolomoisky, who had been appointed governor of the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk Region. The ethnic Russian rebels also were a disorganized lot with poor command and control.

Rushing to Anti-Russian Judgment

Yet, the Obama administration was quick to pin the blame for the MH-17 crash on Russia and the rebels. Just three days after the crash, Secretary of State John Kerry went on all five Sunday talk shows fingering Russia and the rebels and citing evidence provided by the Ukrainian government through social media.

On NBC’s “Meet the Press,” David Gregory asked, “Are you bottom-lining here that

Russia provided the weapon?"

Kerry: "There's a story today confirming that, but we have not within the Administration made a determination. But it's pretty clear when there's a build-up of extraordinary circumstantial evidence. I'm a former prosecutor. I've tried cases on circumstantial evidence; it's powerful here." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Kerry's Latest Reckless Rush to Judgment.](#)"]

But some U.S. intelligence analysts offered conflicting assessments. After Kerry's TV round-robin, the Los Angeles Times [reported](#) on a U.S. intelligence briefing given to several mainstream U.S. news outlets. The story said, "U.S. intelligence agencies have so far been unable to determine the nationalities or identities of the crew that launched the missile. U.S. officials said it was possible the SA-11 [anti-aircraft missile] was launched by a defector from the Ukrainian military who was trained to use similar missile systems." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Mystery of a Ukrainian 'Defector,'](#)"]

A source who was briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that some analysts had concluded that the rebels and Russia were likely not at fault and that it appeared Ukrainian government forces were to blame, although possibly a unit operating outside the direct command of Ukraine's top officials.

The source specifically said the U.S. intelligence evidence did not implicate Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko or Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk but rather suggested an extremist element of the armed forces funded by one of Ukraine's oligarchs.

Regarding the alleged Russian role, the source said the U.S. analysts had found no evidence that the Russian government had given the rebels a BUK missile system, which would be capable of shooting down a commercial airliner at 33,000 feet, the altitude of MH-17.

According to the Der Spiegel story, the BND reached the same conclusion, that Russia was not the source of the missile battery. But the BND and these U.S. analysts apparently differ on who they suspect fired the fateful missile. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Flight 17 Shoot-down Scenario Shifts](#)" and "[Was Putin Targeted for Mid-air Assassination?](#)"]

What has been curious about the handling of the MH-17 case is the failure of the Obama administration and other Western governments to present whatever evidence they have, whether satellite, electronic or telephonic so the investigation can proceed more quickly in determining who was responsible.

By withholding this evidence for nearly three months, the West has benefited from keeping alive the anti-Russian propaganda blaming Moscow and President

Vladimir Putin for the tragedy but the secrecy has given the perpetrators time to scatter and cover their tracks.

With Der Spiegel's report, it's now clearer why the delay and the secrecy. If the missile responsible for bringing down MH-17 came from a Ukrainian military base not from the Russian government then a very potent anti-Putin propaganda theme would be neutralized. More attention also would focus on whether the missile battery was really under the control of a rebel unit, as the BND suggests or was in the hands of anti-rebel extremists.

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Obama's Propagandistic UN Address

Exclusive: The longer President Obama has been in office the less honest he has become, a problem growing more apparent in his second term as he reads speeches containing information that he knows to be false or at least highly misleading, Robert Parry recounts.

By Robert Parry

During President Barack Obama's first term, he generally was careful in making comments about world affairs not that he was always completely honest but he was circumspect about outright lying. Over the past two years, however, he appears to have lost any such inhibitions.

That's the case even when he is engaged in something as serious as addressing the United Nations General Assembly on issues of war or peace as occurred both last year and this year. In September 2013, Obama made what he knew was a deceptive comment about the mysterious Sarin gas attack in Syria a month earlier. He did something similar on Wednesday in describing the Ukraine crisis.

Regarding the Sarin case, Obama knew before his 2013 speech that many of his own intelligence analysts believed Syrian rebels were behind the Aug. 21 attack that killed several hundred people outside Damascus. These analysts suspected the incident was part of a scheme to blame the government of President Bashar al-

Assad and get the U.S. military to attack Assad's forces. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Fixing Intel Around Syria Policy](#)" and "[Was Turkey Behind Syria-Sarin Attack?](#)"]

Despite this knowledge, Obama delivered a formal [address](#) to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2013, declaring: "It's an insult to human reason and to the legitimacy of this institution to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack."

Similarly, Obama knew the complex reality in Ukraine when he took to the podium on Wednesday. He knew that the crisis was instigated not by Russia but by the European Union and the United States. He knew that the elected President Viktor Yanukovich had been targeted for "regime change" by officials within the U.S. State Department, led by neoconservative Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who literally [hand-picked the new leadership](#) with the aid of U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who described the need to "midwife this thing."

Obama knew that Nuland had told Ukrainian business leaders that the U.S. government had invested \$5 billion in support of their "European aspirations" and that the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy had subsidized scores of "non-governmental organizations" to help destabilize the Yanukovich government. He also knew the key role played by Ukraine's neo-Nazi militias in seizing presidential buildings on Feb. 22 and forcing Yanukovich's officials to flee for their lives.

Obama was aware, too, that the ethnic Russians of eastern Ukraine had rejected this coup regime and rose up in resistance to the imposition of what many saw as illegitimate authority. He knew that the people of Crimea faced with this coup regime in Kiev voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a move the Russian government supported and accepted.

Obama knew that the Kiev regime brutalized southern and eastern Ukraine, with the regime's activists burning alive dozens of ethnic Russian protesters in Odessa and its military killing thousands with heavy weaponry fired into towns and cities of eastern Ukraine. The coup regime in Kiev even dispatched Nazi militias, such as the Azov battalion, to engage in bloody street fighting the first time since World War II that any government had deployed armed Nazi forces to attack a European population. Obama knew that, too. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ukraine's 'Romantic' Nazi Storm Troopers.](#)"]

Obama also knew that some of his own intelligence analysts had concluded that extremist elements within the Ukrainian government were probably responsible for the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, possibly using anti-

aircraft missiles deployed close to rebel-controlled territory and aided by one or more Ukrainian fighter planes in the air. Obama knew, too, that the Ukrainian military attacked the crash site, driving investigators away and apparently setting fire to a wheat field containing remnants of the plane. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Flight 17 Shoot-down Scenario Shifts](#)."]]

Obama's Ukraine Tale

Yet, this is how [Obama presented](#) the Ukrainian crisis to the world: "Recently, Russia's actions in Ukraine challenge this post-[World War II] order. Here are the facts. After the people of Ukraine mobilized popular protests and calls for reform, their corrupt president fled. Against the will of the government in Kyiv, Crimea was annexed. Russia poured arms into eastern Ukraine, fueling violent separatists and a conflict that has killed thousands.

"When a civilian airliner was shot down from areas that these proxies controlled, they refused to allow access to the crash for days. When Ukraine started to reassert control over its territory, Russia gave up the pretense of merely supporting the separatists, and moved troops across the border.

"This is a vision of the world in which might makes right – a world in which one nation's borders can be redrawn by another, and civilized people are not allowed to recover the remains of their loved ones because of the truth that might be revealed.

"America stands for something different. We believe that right makes might – that bigger nations should not be able to bully smaller ones, and that people should be able to choose their own future. And these are simple truths, but they must be defended. America and our allies will support the people of Ukraine as they develop their democracy and economy.

"We will reinforce our NATO Allies and uphold our commitment to collective self-defense. We will impose a cost on Russia for aggression, and we will counter falsehoods with the truth. And we call upon others to join us on the right side of history for while small gains can be won at the barrel of a gun, they will ultimately be turned back if enough voices support the freedom of nations and peoples to make their own decisions."

Becoming Bush

An honest person would have described all these events very differently, including what "America stands for." There could have been at least some acknowledgement of how the United States in the post-World War II era has often relied on "the barrel of a gun" or cruise missiles and smart bombs to impose its will on other countries, including "regime change" in Iraq in 2003 and in Libya

in 2011.

Obama could have acknowledged, too, that the United States has often used coups d'état to unseat governments not to its liking, even when the leaders have been popularly elected. A partial list would include Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Allende in Chile in 1973, Aristide in Haiti twice, Chavez in Venezuela briefly in 2002, Zelaya in Honduras in 2009, Morsi in Egypt in 2013, and now Yanukovych in Ukraine in 2014.

But instead Obama chose to present a simplistic, propagandistic version of what has transpired in Ukraine. Essentially he's saying: It's all Russia's fault and everyone on the U.S. side is a good guy, on "the right side of history."

It is interesting, however, that Obama did not come out directly and implicate Russia and the eastern Ukrainian rebels in the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. Given his access to detailed U.S. intelligence on the topic, he should have been able to point the finger directly, if indeed that's what the facts showed. Instead, he played word games to create the impression that the rebels and Russia were to blame without actually spelling out any evidence against them.

This was similar to how President George W. Bush gave speeches in 2002 and 2003 juxtaposing the names Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden to create the perception among Americans that the two were joined at the hip when they were, in fact, bitter enemies. Now, President Obama has come to replicate these Bush-like deceptions.

There is also new evidence of how the supposedly "popular" government in Kiev has been developing its democracy – by incarcerating people who dare to protest against its policies. As the New York Times' Andrew E. Kramer reported on Thursday, the Kiev regime has been padding its prisoner exchanges by throwing in political dissidents arrested far from any battlefield.

Kramer wrote: "The Ukrainians, widely understood to be lacking enough prisoners of their own to effect a one-for-one exchange, set free a motley group of men, women and teenagers wearing tracksuits or dirty jeans, and taken, they said, from jails as far away as Kiev.

"Soon enough, many of them were objecting to anybody who would listen there on the highway that they had never fought for pro-Russian separatists, and in fact had no idea how they ended up in a prisoner exchange in eastern Ukraine. "In interviews at their point of release and in a dormitory where former detainees are housed in Donetsk, a dozen men freed in exchanges over the weekend by the Ukrainian Army gave similar accounts. Some said they were arrested months

ago in other parts of Ukraine for pro-Russian political actions, such as joining protests calling for autonomy in eastern Ukraine or for distributing leaflets.” In other words, the Kiev regime does not only send Nazi storm troopers to attack people in eastern Ukraine but it jails citizens elsewhere who pass out leaflets. Recognizing some of these darker truths rather than simply reciting a litany of shiny propaganda could have given President Obama’s UN address more credibility. Perhaps the old Obama would have made a stab at greater intellectual honesty but the new one has taken on the personality of his predecessor, who famously didn’t do nuance.

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