

MH17: An examination of evidence from social media

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Introduction

A number of photos and videos exist that show Buk launcher traveling through rebel-controlled territory. What is the story behind each of this material? Does it really implicate rebels? Was some of it digitally altered? What other important but little-known information exists related to MH17? Did anyone benefit from this catastrophe? This paper answers all of these questions.

The language barrier, the complexity of the conflict in Ukraine, and disinformation are just some of the obstacles that one faces when trying to find or verify certain material regarding MH17 incident and Ukrainian conflict. Some pieces of the puzzle would have only been apparent to those who closely monitored the conflict before the catastrophe. This paper includes many links to articles, videos, and to sources that have additional information. In many cases, this allows the reader to verify the provided or translated material. No expert knowledge is required in order to understand the main parts of the paper.

Most of the articles and videos have been archived. This archived data is stored in mh17_archives.zip file that has the following SHA-256 checksum:

BA13F0411356D97E830CF35D87C9707E72274A9659BE4B434FDAD39F46DF731A

Chapter 1: No evidence of rebels possessing sophisticated anti-air systems

No photo or video evidence seems to exist at all (May 2015) that would show: (a) Buk launcher with nearby rebels; (b) just the Buk launcher prior or after July 17–18, 2014 that allegedly belonged to rebels. This makes the likelihood that rebels had Buk and used it to shoot down MH17 very low. What exists is a photo from Twitter of allegedly captured Buk (see “Buk from Twitter”) and the known three videos and four pictures, all allegedly taken on July 17–18. These videos and pictures, which show the Buk vehicle, but no nearby rebels, will be discussed in another chapter.

Here we look at the origin of some of the rumors that rebels had Buk prior July 17, 2014. All of those rumors were of a captured Ukrainian Buk, not of it being provided by Russia. Kiev also denied that any of its Buk vehicles were captured.

Captured Ukrainian air defense base

On June 29, 2014, a number of Russian mainstream news sites (for example, [Tass](#), [RIA Novosti](#)), reported, citing rebel representative, that rebels captured Ukrainian base, A-1402, which allegedly hosts air defense systems in Donetsk region, including Buk systems.

[Tass](#) wrote that the quantity and the state of the captured vehicles (or if any were captured at all) is unknown. Neither these or similar articles from Russian mainstream media included pictures or videos of the captured base or of captured air defense systems.

On the same day, Alexey Dmitrashovsky, a spokesperson for the “anti-terrorist operation (ATO),” told [Ukrainian Pravda](#) that the attackers managed to capture part of the territory of the air defense base, as well as part of the personnel. He said that two trucks were stolen. Answering Ukrainian Pravda’s question, he said there was a Buk complex in the base in a non-working condition, and that all the working ones are located at other strategic sites.

On June 29, a picture of an allegedly captured Buk from this base appeared on Twitter. We look at it in another section (“Buk from Twitter”).

On June 30, [Ukrainian Press](#) news site wrote, citing Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, that extremists could not have captured military equipment from air defense divisions. The site also provided a quote from Ukrainian Ministry of Defense: “On June 29, air defense systems from the air defense base were relocated to a certain place. Only old and unusable automotive vehicles were left behind at the base, which the military purposely damaged even more. Later, terrorists entered the base.”

On July 18, Ukrainian attorney general told [Ukrainian Pravda](#) that “terrorists” (rebel forces) did not have Ukrainian Buk or S-300 systems. On the same day, [Financial Times](#) wrote that Ukrainian Ministry of Defense has accounted for all 60 of Buk launchers that it operates.

Chapter 2: No evidence of Buk's involvement in Ukrainian air casualties

There is a [website](#), which keeps track of, on top of other things, confirmed military aircraft casualties in the Ukrainian conflict. It shows that more than 20 Ukrainian military aircrafts were destroyed: about half of that before the MH17 incident, half later. No video or photo proof seems to exist at all that any Ukrainian military aircrafts were shot down by anything other than MANPADs. It seems rebels did not have problems taking them down without sophisticated air defense systems, such as Buk.

Nevertheless, one incident needs to be looked at more closely. AN-26 was shot down just three days before MH17 near Ukraine-Russia border. What's peculiar about this incident is that Ukraine President's site specifically said that it was shot down at 6500 meter altitude and said that a more powerful missile system was used. As we look more closely, no proof that it was shot down at 6500 meter altitude or that a sophisticated system, such as Buk, was used exists.

IL-76 destroyed on June 14, 2014

Though IL-76 is a big passenger jet that can fly at a high altitude, where MANPADs cannot reach, it was destroyed [as it was about to land](#) at Luhansk airport. Ukrainian coordinator of the "Information Resistance" blog, Dmytro Tymchuk, said, according to [Ukrainian Press](#), that three MANPADs were found not far from the airport. Neither side said that it was or could have been destroyed by a sophisticated air defense system, such as Buk or S-300.

AN-26 shot down on July 14, 2014

Three days before the incident with MH17, on July 14, Ukrainian AN-26 was allegedly shot down near Ukraine-Russia border.

The same day, [Press Service of the President of Ukraine](#) wrote: "Minister of Defense Valeriy Heletey reported to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko that the crew of AN-26, which was taking part in the ATO ["anti-terrorist operation"] and shot down, has made contact with the headquarters. It was also highlighted that, taking into account that the plane was flying at an altitude of 6500 meters, it would be impossible to destroy it with MANPADs, therefore a more powerful missile system was used, mostly likely, from the territory of Russian Federation. At the moment, search and rescue operation is taking place to transfer the crew of Ukrainian Air Force back to territory controlled by Ukrainian forces."

Russian state-owned [Rossiya 24](#) news agency reported about the shot down AN-26, didn't say what type of weapon was used, but provided a quote from Ukrainian press center of ATO, confirming that AN-26 was shot down. Their article also includes a [YouTube video](#) of a damaged plane in the sky and says that, most likely, this is the same AN-26.

[Russian Spring](#) published two YouTube links, which allegedly show the damaged AN-26 (one video is practically the same as in Rossiya 24 article).

LNR [Luhansk People's Republic] leader Igor Plotnitsky told [RIA Novosti](#) that AN-26 was taken down by MANPADs, that few people of the crew were captured, that the altitude of 6500 meters would be too high for good air surveillance, troops don't jump [plane doesn't unload] at such altitude, and he thinks the aircraft was flying at an altitude not higher than 3000 meters.

[Vzglyad](#) website, citing “rebels from social media,” said that this AN-26 was shot down with Buk. Vzglyad editor has omitted certain very important words from that social media post (read “Vzglyad article” section for more details).

No video and photo materials seems to exist that anything other than MANPADs were used to bring this AN-26 down. The use of rockets, such as Buk, would probably destroy the plane in the air along with all of the crew, and the Buk rocket would leave a trail, but as is written on Ukrainian President’s site, some of the crew safely parachuted and contacted the HQ, and no video or photo of the trail seems to exist.

After this incident, on July 14, Ukraine has issued [new restrictions](#) in its air space (NOTAM).

It’s unclear why the passenger jets were even allowed to fly in the area of conflict, especially after this incident, where Kiev thinks that their plane was shot down with a “more potent missile.”

Chapter 3: These pictures and videos do not prove that Buk belongs to rebels

Overall, as of May 2015, only three videos (Luhansk, Snizhne, Zuhres) and four pictures (Snizhne, Torez, two Donetsk/Paris Match photos) of what looks like some sort of Buk vehicle, moving allegedly through the rebel territory or being transferred by a truck, are known to public.

The location of each photo and video is known as well. A link to Google map with coordinates is provided under each material in the following sections. Based on this information, we notice an interesting pattern: all videos were filmed practically at the respective cities' entrances (or at the edge of the city), while all photos were taken deep within the cities.

The Paris Match photos show clear signs of photo manipulations. The other two (Torez, Snizhne) could have been manipulated as well: They are of relatively low resolution and low quality. The objects of interest are of small size, making it hard to verify whether the Buk and truck are real or were inserted with a photo manipulation tool. Another indirect evidence that proves the pictures are most likely fake is the lack of other videos or photos recorded by anyone in the cities, where there pictures were taken (except the very first video that was filmed in Snizhne, but only by the entrance). As of May 2015, no such additional material is publicly available (everything what's in the [official JIT video](#) related to Buk is examined in this paper).

The videos, however, are much harder to fake. They are real. However, an important detail needs to be taken into account: Someone who closely followed the Ukrainian conflict would know that Kiev launched a massive offensive (probably in the beginning of summer, when the new Ukrainian government received more legitimacy), and that rebel-controlled territory was rapidly shrinking. It seems as if Kiev wanted to solve this conflict as fast as possible with force by a symbolic date of Ukraine's Independence Day. Another detail is rebel forces had much fewer people than they have now.

If we watch one of July 18's official Ukrainian [press conferences](#), we will see that Kiev showed what looks like a military map of this conflict:



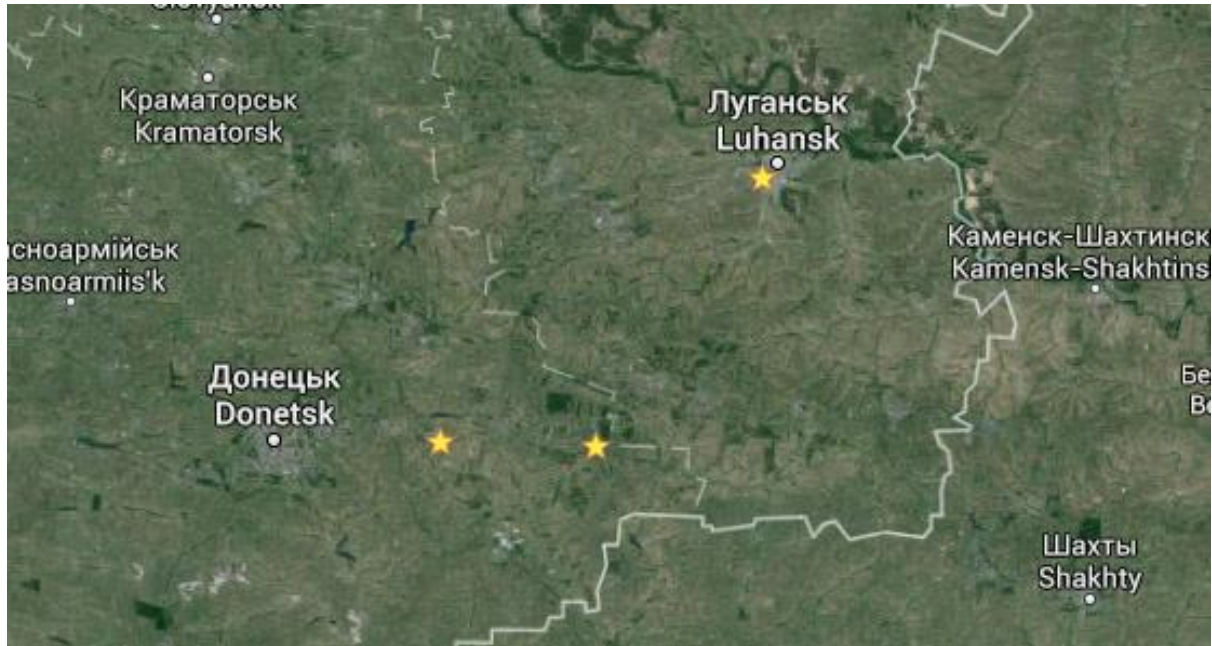
(English) Andriy Lysenko. UCMC, 18th of July 2014

 Ukraine Crisis Media Center

Picture 1: A screenshot from a video of July 18's Kiev's press conference showing a military map

The territories, marked blue and yellow, show us land that was under the control of Kiev's forces. The rest was allegedly controlled by rebels. What's important is that according to this Kiev's own map, we can see that Kiev's forces were right by Luhansk, where the most important video of the Buk with a missing rocket was made. We can also see that Kiev controls all territory South of rebel's. Kiev's forces are practically by Snizhne, too. Zuhres, where the third video was made, is about 40 kilometers to the West from Snizhne. And as an example, other maps [exist](#) showing how rebel-controlled territory changed in July, August, and September. Therefore, it is possible that, when the videos were made, rebels did not control those towns or parts of towns (videos were taken by the cities' entrances).

The three stars on the following map show exactly where the three videos were filmed:



Picture 2: Yellow stars showing the locations of the three known Buk videos (from left: Zuhres, Snizhne, Luhansk)

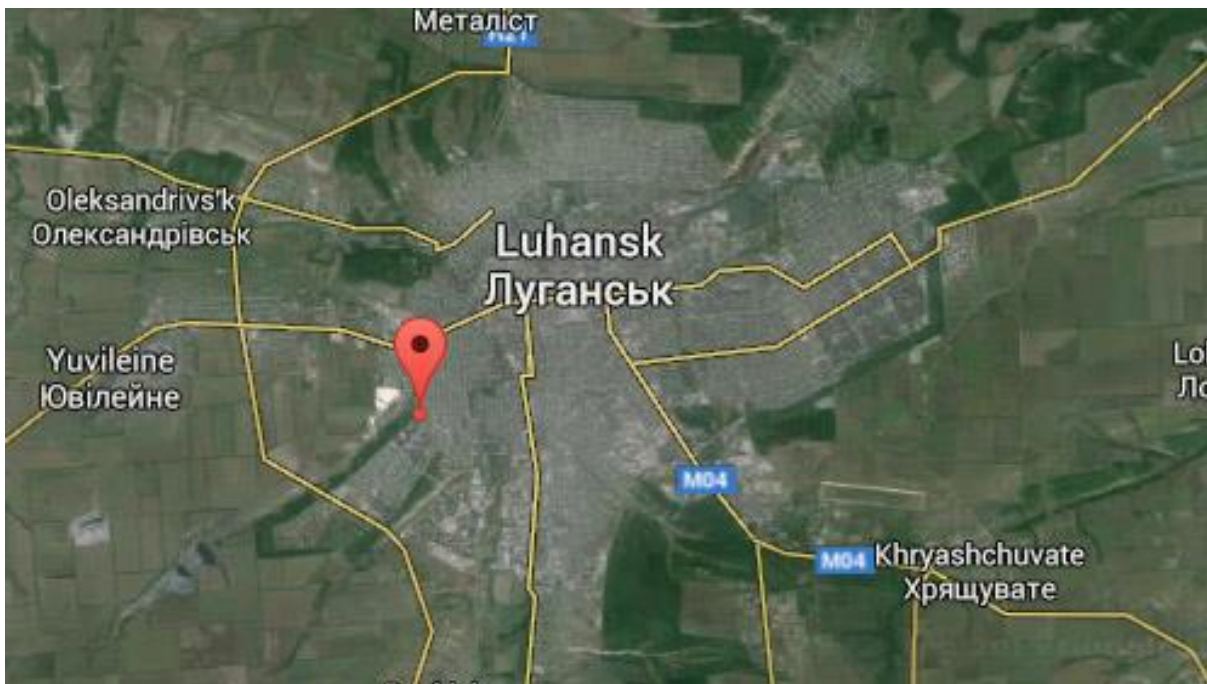
As is the case with the photos, the lack of other public videos or photos (as of May 2015) of this Buk travelling, for example, through Donetsk, through Luhansk, from Snizhne to Luhansk, or from Luhansk to somewhere else, suggests that the Buk wasn't transferred through these territories. There's not even photo or video evidence at all where you could see the Buk vehicle with rebels being nearby that would prove that rebels had Buk at any point. Therefore, the Buk vehicle was probably moved to these three areas by Kiev's forces to make short videos. The Buk vehicles filmed in Zuhres, Snizhne and the one filmed in Luhansk are probably different ones altogether. The "unique" truck, as seen in Luhansk and Zuhres videos, doesn't mean that the Buk is the same (for more info, read "The white truck").

Let us closely examine each publicly known photo and video that show suspected Buk vehicle, allegedly belonging to rebels.

Luhansk video released by Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs



Picture 3: Buk with a covered back and a missing rocket, filmed in Luhansk



Picture 4: The location of where the Luhansk video was made

[Google map of the building it was allegedly filmed from](#)

On July 18, 2014, Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov made a [post](#) on Facebook in Russian and presented a link to a [video](#) with the title: “militants are moving ‘Buk’ complex towards Russian border.”

In his post, a full translation of which is available [here](#), he wrote, among other things, that: (a) the video was taken on July 18, at 4:50 am by Ukrainian MIA units of covert surveillance; (b) his wording about the location was such that it would make the reader think that it's moving through Krasnodon (50 km from Luhansk), towards Russian border; he did not mention Luhansk at all for some reason, but he surely knew the exact location; the true location (Luhansk) wasn't known to the public at least [until July 22](#) (a day after Russian MoD briefing, which assumed the video is from Krasnoarmeysk; the reason as to why the MoD guessed wrong will be discussed in a chapter dedicated to Russian MoD briefing).

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, neither the fact that the video was taken somewhere in Luhansk (this road, parts of Luhansk might have been under Kiev's control at that time) nor the truck with its "unique" features (see "The white truck") point directly at rebels.



Picture 5: The location of where Luhansk video was made, but more zoomed in, marked by red balloon; it is right by the town's edge, with a nearby field that could have been used as a point of entry and exit for the truck with the Buk vehicle

In this Luhansk video, we can see that at least one rocket is missing (extra space is visible between rockets, and Mr. Avakov said so in his post). A vigilant observer will notice that the back of the Buk is also covered.

According to Mr. Avakov, this video was filmed almost 12 hours after MH17 was shot down. Thus, a question arises: why this Buk vehicle is being paraded in public, with the driver being fully aware that MH17 was shot down, having Buk's back covered, but not the missiles, as if advertising the missing missile to the world?

Other issues exist: The lack of HD version of the video (even though it was filmed allegedly by "Ukrainian units of covert surveillance"), no other videos or pictures are available of this Buk travelling later between Luhansk and either Russia or Krasnodon; more possible problems on this [page](#). Why Mr. Avakov misinformed the public regarding where the video was filmed? [Daily Mail](#) and [Paris Match](#) still write (more than 10 months later) that this video was filmed in Krasnodon, with Paris Match [insisting](#) that they have on record Ukrainian source saying Krasnodon is the location.

First Paris Match photo



Picture 6: A photo of a Buk vehicle that appeared in the Paris Match article on July 25, 2014

[Google map coordinates](#)

On July 25, 2014, Paris Match wrote an [article](#) that included this photo, which, until then, was never before seen (refer to the article for a bigger size of the photo).

As of May 2015, these Paris Match photos is the only photo/video material available that show suspected Buk with “fingerprints” — features that are unique to a Buk vehicle. However, Buk in this picture looks completely out of place: Buk looks unclear, as if it was stretched out with software, while the truck’s white cabin is very clear. If, in the original photo of Paris Match article, you will look at the place where Buk’s wheels are supposed to be, you will notice an even bigger nonsense, especially considering that it seems to be a bright day. You can read the telephone number, but you can’t see the details, where Buk’s wheels should be? Other than Buk looking out of place, the resolution of the photo is low. Some parts of the photo (Buk, trees) look like they have been significantly stretched out using software, while others (left-most tower, cabin) look much clearer. It looks like a significant portion of the picture has been manipulated (most importantly, Buk). Yet, this picture is being [used](#) to convince us that Buk was in Donetsk city and that Buk is from Russia.

If this Paris Match picture would have been a still from a low resolution video, then all parts of the picture would have the same display quality as Buk. Moreover, Buk doesn’t look blurry (the effect that you might get when taking a picture during motion), it looks like it was manipulated/stretched out using software. As an example, the picture below is a screenshot taken from a [video](#) of an Ukrainian Buk, paused when the blurring effect is visible, filmed at practically dead night, with low lighting, much further away, with the quality/resolution on YouTube selected as 480p (640 x 480). The picture looks blurry in all places, and this blurring effect is not like the one we see in the Paris Match photo:



Picture 7: A screenshot from a video, demonstrating the blurring effect, visible in every part of the photo (this is Kiev's Buk filmed in March 2014)

As mentioned before, the Paris Match photo (thanks to “the side skirt fingerprints”) was used by, for example, Bellingcat to [link](#) the Buk vehicle with the one that was, at some point, photographed in Russia. The author of the Paris Match photo has probably found a picture of a Russian Buk that was available at that time on the internet (probably of a Buk that was in a specific Russian region). He used it to create this “Russian trace” by [bending](#) the photo, as shown in Bellingcat’s [article](#), but in a reverse way. An added bonus is the clearly visible telephone number, and some parts of the photo [link the Buk to Donetsk city](#) — a rebel stronghold. The photo manipulator killed three rabbits with one shot: created evidence pointing at Russia, made the telephone number visible, and linked Buk with Donetsk city, producing “stronger” evidence that tie rebels with Buk.

Other issues: (a) the photo was released 8 days after MH17 was shot down; (b) initially, Paris Match said this photo was [taken in Snizhne](#) (but it was, apparently, [geo-located](#) to Donetsk); (c) Paris Match are not disclosing the name of the photographer; (d) Paris Match has been allegedly [caught](#) manipulating photos years ago.

Second Paris Match photo

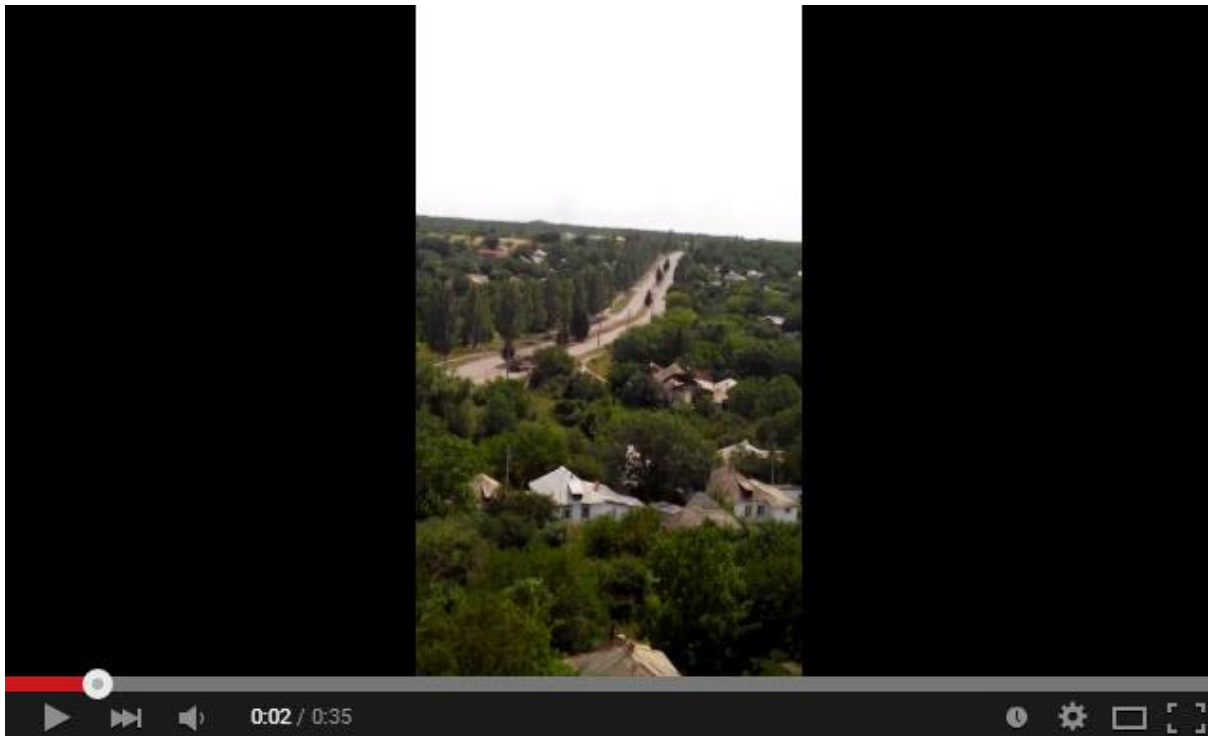


Picture 8: Second Paris Match photo, which "appeared" probably somewhere in January 2015

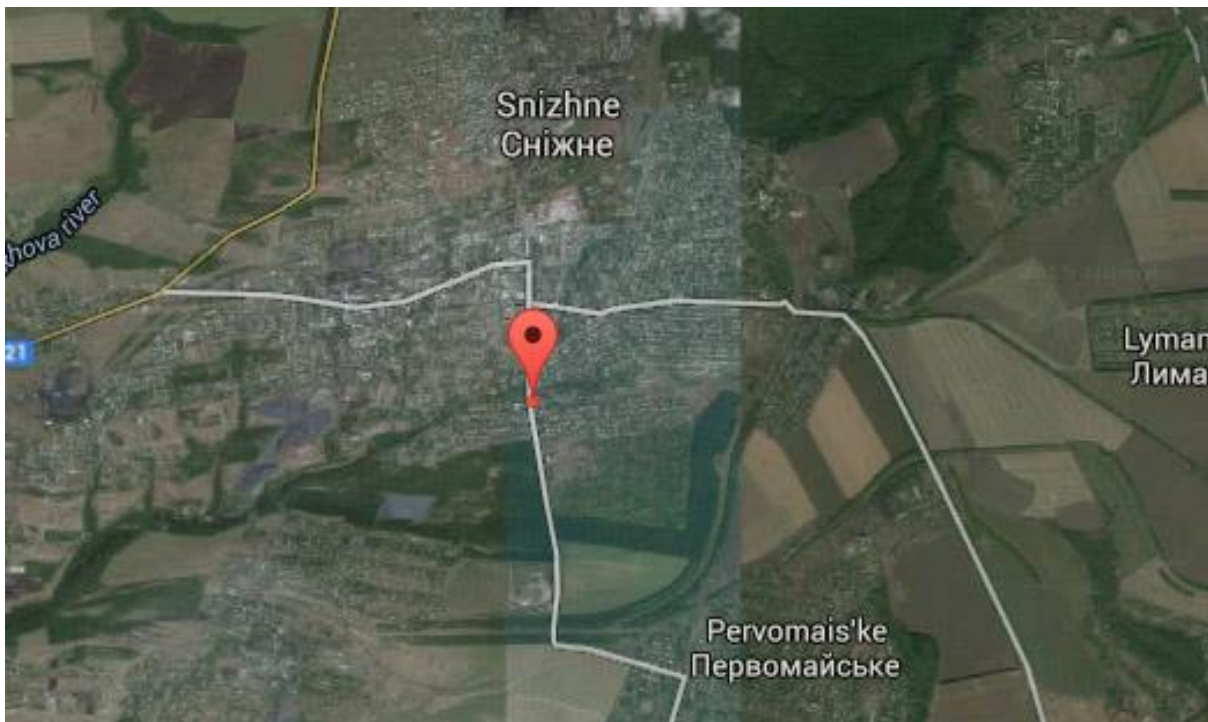
Most likely, in January 2015, a [second Paris Match photo](#) emerged, looking slightly better than the first one, but still exhibiting clear signs of photo manipulation, due to the reasons mentioned in the "First Paris Match photo."

Half a year gives plenty of time to create a similar photo to the original. This second photo was probably made to show more details of Buk (for example, the "netting covering" discussed in the Bellingcat [article](#)) and to give the original Paris Match photo "more authenticity."

Snizhne video



Picture 9: A military vehicle that might be the Buk launcher is moving in Snizhne allegedly on July 17



Picture 10: The approximate location of where the Snizhne video was made; it is right by the town's entrance

[Google map of approximate vehicle's location](#)

The [video](#) was uploaded to YouTube on July 17, 2014. It was [geo-located](#) to Snizhne, not far from Southern entrance. It was also [shown](#) by the head of Ukrainian Security Service Valentyn Nalyvaichenko on July 18 in a press conference.

The low quality video (360p) shows some sort of military vehicle at a significant distance, not being carried by a truck, but driving by itself. It may be the Buk launcher or the Buk loader. It is hard to see the details: for example, whether it is carrying any rockets or is covered. A car is also seen driving nearby, which looks like it's escorting the military vehicle.

As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, there are no guarantees that Snizhne or this particular part of Snizhne was under rebel control on July 17, 2014.

[Zuhres video](#)



Picture 11: A truck carrying what seems like a Buk vehicle, filmed in Zuhres



Picture 12: The location of where the Zuhres video was made; it is right by the first buildings of the town; the nearby field has roads and could have been used as a point of entry and exit for the truck with the Buk vehicle

[Google map of the truck's location](#)

This video was made in Zuhres, close to Southeastern entrance of the city. If this Bellingcat [article](#) had the [original](#) Zuhres video, it has been deleted from YouTube. If we search YouTube for “зурпес брк” (“zuhres buk” in Russian), the earliest [video](#) seems to have been uploaded on July 22. This doesn't mean that the original video wasn't uploaded on July 17, but most likely, it didn't indicate that it was from Zuhres and/or was kept under low profile for 5 days. If the mentioned Bellingcat [article](#) is correct, this [Twitter post](#) (the account no longer exists) brought attention to the video and provided the exact coordinates. If we [Google search the link of the Twitter post](#), the earliest date that we see this post mentioned is July 22. This date is somewhat interesting: both the real location of Luhansk video and the Zuhres video itself were coincidentally discovered a day after July 21 Russian MoD briefing.

If you haven't done so, I advise you to read the beginning of this chapter as to why this video doesn't implicate rebels.

Snizhne photo



Picture 13: Part of a photo of a Buk vehicle in Snizhne uploaded on July 17

[Google map](#)

This [photo](#) was uploaded somewhere on July 17, 2014 and [geo-located](#) to Snizhne town.

Just like in Snizhne video, the Buk launcher or loader here is driving by itself. Hardly any details (for example, rockets, Buk number, etc.) of the vehicle can be seen in this picture. The quality is low and the highest resolution of this photo that seems to be available is 337 x 600. The military vehicle takes up only 1/50 of the photo. These facts alone suggest that Buk could have been easily added there (see “The white truck” for an example).

Torez photo



Picture 14: Part of a Buk photo in Torez uploaded on July 17

[Google map](#)

According to Bellingcat [article](#), this [photo](#) was uploaded to a [social media site](#) (this link might not be the original source) on July 17, 2014. It was [geo-located](#) to Torez.

It exhibits the same kind of flaw as Snizhne photo: the object of interest in the photo is very small, making it hard to verify the photo's authenticity. In other words, the truck and Buk might have not been in the photo and could have been added using a photo manipulation tool (see "The white truck" for an example).

Buk photo taken at night

«БУК-М1» В НАПРЯМКУ КОРДОНУ УКРАЇНИ З РФ



Picture 15: A picture that Ukrainian SBU (Secret Service) used to have on their page

Shortly after MH17 incident, Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU) published on their page an image of Buk, allegedly belonging to rebels, photographed at night (bottom-right photo). One of the rockets is clearly seen as having a red tip.

In reality, this photo is of Ukrainian Buk that was moved by Kiev side in March 2014, the [video](#) (this is not the original uploader) of which was available online. SBU removed the picture from their page after the public learned of this fact.

Buk from Twitter



Picture 16: A picture of an allegedly captured Buk during rebel attack on air defense base on June 29, 2014

A Twitter account named “dnrpress” allegedly made a post on June 29, 2014 showing Buk vehicle and text, implying that it was captured from air defense base, A-1402 (for more information, read “Captured Ukrainian air defense base” section). Without even verifying the authenticity of this account (anyone can create an account with an “official name,” use DNR flag as an avatar, post what seems like official information/news for months, and at the right time, post disinformation) or question the motives of the poster, thanks to this [page](#), we see that this picture was taken from a [photo album](#), dated 2011.

The white truck

The following photo was discovered on August 6, 2014, which allegedly shows rebels carrying their equipment using the truck shown in previous photo and video material:



Picture 17: Photo of the famous white truck, allegedly carrying rebel's equipment on August 6, 2014

We go to the [source](#) of the photo (according to [Bellingcat](#)) and learn that the maximum resolution of this photo is 500 x 381 and the objects of interest are small, which make signs of photo manipulations less evident. Therefore, not all the details could be real. To demonstrate how easy it is to manipulate such photos even as a novice Photoshop user, look at the cabin in the next photo:



Picture 18: The same photo as before, which has been manipulated for demonstrative purposes: blue line is missing and a new tank is present; a practically new Photoshop user made this manipulation within 30 minutes

It is alleged that the owner of the “unique” white truck said that rebels have stolen it. He could be either lying, someone told him that rebels stole it, or someone who stole it said he was representing rebels.

The Zuhres video with the truck might have been made on July 17, but the only other known video of this truck was allegedly made the next day in Luhansk, in the early morning, giving probably plenty of time for the truck to get from Zuhres to Luhansk without even entering rebel territory. Another important thing to consider is that all three videos might be showing three different military/Buk vehicles. In case of Zuhres and Luhansk videos, Buks could have been loaded into the truck somewhere nearby.

Chapter 4: Other photos, audio tapes, news sites, and social media posts

The original “Buk trail” photo



Picture 19: The original “Buk trail” photo uploaded to Twitter around 3 hours after the MH17 incident

This [photo](#) was uploaded to Twitter on July 17, 2014, with a caption “witness shared the photo of the moment the rocket was launched...” It looks like it is presented as evidence on the [Ukrainian SBU page](#) (May 2015).

The original photo published by Twitter user was of relatively low resolution (1024 x 678). The date and the time of the photo is hard to verify. When MH17 was shot down, it was [cloudy in the region](#) (here is the [weather forecast](#) for Snizhne), but on the photo, we see an almost clear sky.

Another indicator that this photo is not authentic (is not of a trail photographed on July 17, 2014 in this area) is the lack of other photos or videos of this trail, taken by somebody else on July 17 showing the trail at this place. [Buk rockets](#) are loud, and they leave a trail for a relatively long time.

Assuming the photo itself is real, it was probably taken another day, but the rocket artillery system may have left the trail. As an example, here is a [very loud] [video](#) of the use of rocket artillery.

Two high-resolution “Buk trail” photos

The following two high-resolution photos became known about four months after MH17 was shot down:



Picture 20: The allegedly original file of a “Buk trail” photo (but, apparently, without color enhancement), initially shown on Dutch RTL News in December 2014



Picture 21: A “zoomed out” photo of the original “Buk trail,” allegedly taken 7 seconds before the first, initially shown on Dutch RTL News in December 2014.

In December 2014, Dutch RTL News [interviewed](#) the “anonymous” photographer of the original “Buk trail” photo. Two new [photos](#) were presented.

These photos are of very high resolution (4928 x 3264) and are in BMP format (at least those that are publicly available). The first one is allegedly that of the original “Buk trail” that was uploaded on July 17, but with no color enhancement. The second picture (with the wires) was allegedly taken seven seconds before the first.

There are a couple of significant issues with these two photos, questioning their authenticity: (a) they were presented four months after the MH17 incident, giving plenty of time for the photo manipulator to work on the details; (b) if you download the photos and look at the photo with the wires at an actual size (not zoomed out), you will notice that it is blurry (compare it with the second photo); the excuse/explanation for that [not mine] is his camera focused on the wires.

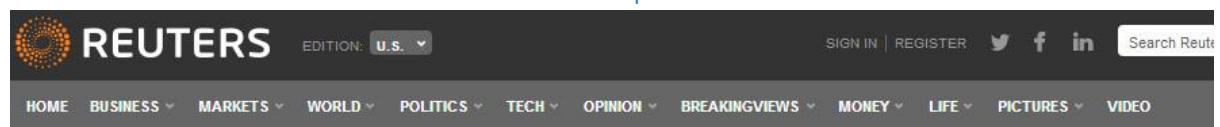
As mentioned before, the original photo of the “Buk trail,” posted on July 17, had a flaw — there were no clouds. So, I think that in order to make the original photo more authentic, another one was produced, but this time with the clouds and which would be as if it’s a zoomed out version of the original.

It is hard to hide evidence that photos were glued up together when working at such high resolutions: many pixels would need to be properly aligned. However, the wires and the blurring effect here coincidentally help make it possible.

Even though the photographer is “anonymous,” this [Dutch blogger](#) knows his name, has more details, and he even decided to come to Ukraine and get to the roof of the photographer’s house.

There is no reason why the author of these two new photos waited 4 months and wouldn’t post them on the internet right after MH17 incident, as he did with the one with the “Buk trail” photo that “has color enhancement...” Other than, of course, if they didn’t exist at that time.

[Reuters’ exclusive interview and the audio tape](#)



World | Wed Jul 23, 2014 6:47pm EDT

Related: V

Exclusive: Ukraine rebel commander acknowledges fighters had BUK missile

DONETSK UKRAINE | BY ANTON ZVEREV

Picture 22: The title of Reuters' July 23, 2014 article

On July 23, 2014, Reuters has released an [article](#) with a title: “Exclusive: Ukraine rebel commander acknowledges fighters had BUK missile.”

In the article, it is unclear why the author wrote: “Before the Malaysian plane was shot down, rebels had boasted of obtaining the BUK missiles.” There are no videos, audio, or even news from mainstream Russian media of any rebel commander saying/confirming at that time, before MH17 was shot down, that they had Buk. There were random posts on social media (for example, “Buk from Twitter”) by anonymous people and Vzglyad article (see “Vzglyad article”), but it wasn’t said by a rebel commander. The “boasting” was also about a captured Ukrainian Buk on June 29, not of it having been provided by Russia. No photos or video materials seems to exist that would prove rebels captured Buk vehicle on June 29 during the alleged attack on the air defense base. Kiev denied on June 30, 2014 and July 18, 2014 that any of their BUKs were captured (see “Captured Ukrainian air defense base” for details).

Reuters cites Khodakovsky, but provides no links to the source: the audio or video of the interview. However, the interview, labeled as “Alexander Khodakovsky’s interview for Reuters agency,” is [hosted](#) on a site called Svoboda, which is part of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Svoboda’s page also writes that Khodakovsky confirmed that rebels had Buk.

If we look at Svoboda/Reuters video, we see that it’s an audio track that is 2:24 minutes long with a few added pictures. If we listen to it, we notice that at 0:57 the audio quality changes dramatically, and Khodakovsky is suddenly talking about another thing. This part was, without question, glued together. The next glued parts are at 1:13. The words suddenly interrupt here, and he’s talking about something else. Therefore, this 2:24 long audio track is combined from at least three different tracks. How can we be sure that his words were not taken out of context? This could be verified by listening to the full Reuters’ interview, which also probably had a video. However, it looks like Reuters did not release the full interview to the public.

Khodakovsky has [denied](#) to the Russian media as having told that rebels had Buk to the Reuters’ interviewer.

Even though the exact words that Khodakovsky said in Reuters/Svoboda soundtrack were probably taken from another interview, you can see in this [video interview](#) how open-minded/talkative he is when it comes to the MH17 incident and the possible theories. Reuters probably ended up with a lot of material when they interviewed him after MH17 incident.

Reuters probably interviewed Khodakovsky after MH17 was shot down, took phrases out of context, glued up the tape together, and presented it as an interview of a rebel commander, allegedly taken before MH17 was shot down (the caption under Khodakovsky’s photo in Reuters’ article says, “Rebel commander Alexander Khodakovsky of the so-called Vostok battalion - or eastern battalion - speaks during an interview in Donetsk, July 8, 2014,” confusing/suggesting to the reader that the interview was made on July 8).

[Ukrainian SBU audio tapes](#)

On July 18, 2014, Ukrainian Secret Service has released [audio tapes](#) of allegedly intercepted calls of rebels.

It is important to verify the authenticity of the tape first. For example, were phrases taken out of context, and it was glued together from many pieces just like the Reuters’ “interview” of a rebel commander?

The difference between the tapes “leaked” by Ukrainian SBU and the ones that, for example, were leaked in early 2014 ([Ashton](#): snipers in Maidan shooting at both sides; [Nuland](#): where she talks about what people should be in Ukraine’s government and who shouldn’t; [Tymoshenko](#)) is that, unlike the SBU ones, the last three were confirmed as being real by the people that were on the tape.

[Social media account named strelkov_info](#)

A popular social media account named [strelkov_info](#) exists with hundreds of thousands of followers. The name “Strelkov” is a nickname for one rebel commander that, until the end of summer 2014, was involved in the conflict in Ukraine. It is unclear who or how many people control this account. They post all sorts of news related to the rebel side. They use Strelkov’s photo as an avatar (he was very popular), but Strelkov did not have an official Twitter, FB, or VK account.

This post by strelkov_info is used as proof by some of rebel’s involvement in shooting down MH17:



Picture 23: A post in social media that allegedly was made and deleted at the time when MH17 was shot down

The top-most text in blue was the general name/description of the account at that time. It says: “summary/reports from Strelkov Igor Ivanovich.” The post itself writes that the following message is from rebels. The text in quotes starts as: “In the region of Torez, just now AN-26 was shot down, it’s lying somewhere over ‘Progress’ mine. We warned – not to fly in ‘our sky’...”

First, the post doesn’t say “we shot it down,” it says that it was shot down (three days before the incident with MH17, AN-26 was shot down by rebels; there was initial confusion that another AN-26 was shot down when the MH17 debris was falling; see “AN-26 shot down on July 14, 2014” for more info about that incident). Second, the poster could have been anyone, as again, this is not Strelkov’s official account and never was.

[Vzglyad article](#)

Ополченцы сообщили, из чего сбили украинский Ан-26

14 июля 2014, 21:11

[Версия для печати](#)
[Вставить в блог](#)

Ополченцы сообщили, что сбили украинский самолет Ан-26 из зенитно-ракетного комплекса «Бук».

Picture 24: The title of Vzglyad’s July 14, 2014 article, saying, “Rebels told what they used to shoot down Ukrainian AN-26”

On July 14, 2014, Russian news website [Vzglyad](#) published an article labeled: “rebels told what they used to shoot down Ukrainian AN-26.” Vzglyad quoted a post from social network, allegedly belonging to rebels. This is how the website quoted the post: “Today, SAM ‘9K37M1’ (more known as ‘Buk’) was used to destroy AN-26 at the height of 6 thousand meters. Few weeks ago, it was reported that these systems were captured by rebels. Now they were repaired, staffed, and are on active duty. These complexes make it possible to shoot down planes at an altitude higher than 4

thousand meters. Previously, rebel forces were powerless against enemy's planes that flew at these altitudes, because neither MANPADs, nor anti-aircraft gun work at these altitudes."

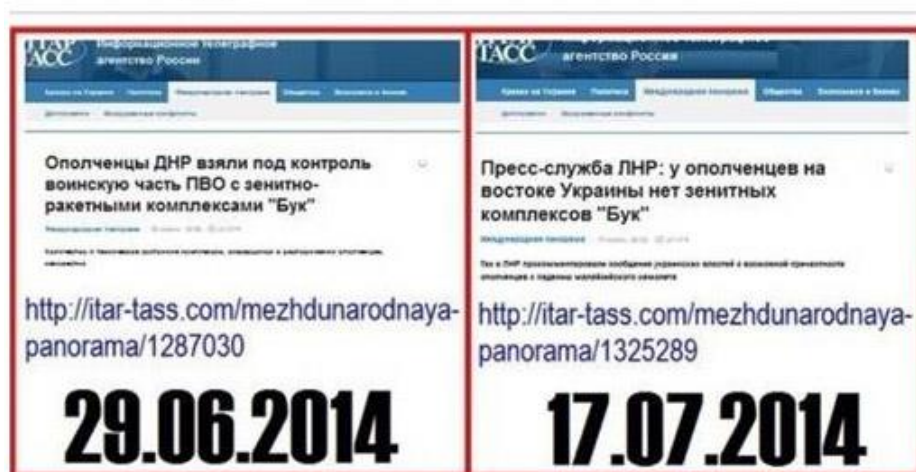
Vzglyad's article included a [link](#) to the post they quoted, but it seems the link is not accessible. Nevertheless, their article includes a comment left by a user named "Кейн Пиллер", posted on July 14. The commenter writes: "Editors, be vigilant! The message about Buks is not from rebels, but 'from experts in air defense.' LNR has published a denial." Then the commenter provides a quote from head of LNR Igor Plotnitsky, where the head said, on top of other things, that the planes were shot down using MANPADs, and that the planes were probably flying not higher than 3 thousand meters, which allowed rebel forces to use Iгла MANPADs. That Plotnitsky's quote, denying the use of SAM (Buk), was also [published](#) on July 14 in social media under a VK account [strelkov_info](#) (this is not someone's official account, but a popular place for news "from the front"), as well as in [RIA Novosti](#).

Even though the post/link that Vzglyad is referring to is inaccessible and was probably deleted, Google saves internet's pages in its cache, providing access to deleted content for a limited time. Someone accessed a cached page of the post after it was deleted and used a website that can save a snapshot of a page. [On it](#), the URL/link matches with the link in Vzglyad article. After reading the post, it becomes clear that Vzglyad omitted key words at the start of the post, which states that the message is from "experts in the field of air defense" and omitted the word "Думаем, что", meaning "We think that." This explains the previously mentioned user's comment in Vzglyad's article who warned the editors. Another copy of the quoted post exists on [this](#) user's "wall" at the same social media website.

For more information about the shot down AN-26, see "AN-26 shot down on July 14, 2014."

[TASS article](#)

«ИТАР-ТАСС» ДО ТА ПІСЛЯ ТЕРАКТУ



Picture 25: A picture taken in May 2015 from Ukrainian SBU (Secret Service) website from a page about MH17

This picture is on Ukrainian SBU (Secret Service) [page](#) about MH17 (checked in May 2015).

The caption in Ukrainian says: "ITAR-TASS, before and after the act of terrorism." Then two screenshots are provided of articles from Russian information agency TASS.

The [article](#), dated 06-29-2014, has a title that says: “DNR rebels captured Ukrainian air defense base with Buk complexes.” In this article, it is written that the number and the condition of the Buk complexes is unknown. This article is about alleged captured Ukrainian Buk complexes, and not of Buk having been provided by Russia. Therefore, it’s unclear why SBU still has it on their page, as the Ukrainian and Western narrative is that the Buk was a gift from Russia.

There were reports on June 29, 2014 that Ukrainian air defense base was captured that had Buk complexes. No video or photo material seems to exist of rebels standing by a captured Buk or of the captured Buk itself. Other than the Reuters’ glued up tape (see “Reuters’ exclusive interview and the audio tape”), no rebel commander ever said they had Buk complexes. Kiev has also denied on June 30, 2014 and July 18, 2014 that any of their Bucs were captured (see “Captured Ukrainian air defense base”).

The [article](#), dated 07-17-2014, has a title, saying: “DNR’s press service: rebels in Eastern Ukraine do not have Buk complexes.”

[Kurginyan’s words about repairing Buk](#)

A political scientist from Russia named Kurginyan has visited the rebel territory in the first half of July 2014. A [video](#) exists of him saying: “... our talented electronics engineers, of course, will repair — I think that they already repaired ... I have such a feeling — the captured Buk from Ukrainian bandits...”

There were rumors in the media that a damaged/non-working Buk complex was left at Ukrainian air defense base, which rebels allegedly attacked on June 29, 2014 ([this](#) Ukrainian source probably was the first who mentioned the non-working Buk being left at the base). Kiev, later, on June 30, 2014 and July 18, 2014, denied that any of their Bucs were captured (for more information, read “Captured Ukrainian air defense base,” “TASS article,” “Reuters’ exclusive interview and the audio tape”). Therefore, Kurginyan probably got this rumor about broken and captured Ukrainian Buk from the media and believed it.

Chapter 5: Other information and some online investigations

[A report from Buk manufacturer on June 2, 2015](#)

After MH17 incident, EU has imposed sanctions against Buk manufacturer Almaz-Antey. The purpose of Almaz-Antey's [report/conference](#) was to prove "the company's non-involvement in the MH17 tragedy" and that EU's sanctions against the company are unjust.

"The manufacturer's investigation and comparative analysis of shrapnel revealed the missile to most likely be a Buk-M1 missile, which is used by the Ukrainian military, and fired from an area south of the village of Zaroshenskoye, territory controlled by the Ukrainian military at the time."

Almaz-Antey said that the analysis was based on data of the debris from the Netherlands. They also offered to make a live experiment/demonstration at company's cost.

They did not rule out other theories.

Almaz-Antey uploaded a [video](#) with English subtitles explaining the theory.

[BBC Russian video showing witnesses that saw a military plane at the time of MH17 incident](#)

On July 23, 2014, BBC Russian released a [video](#) of correspondent Olga Ivshina that provided accounts of witnesses who saw a military plane at the time of MH17 incident:

[0:21]: Olga says, "People of the nearby villages assure that they saw military planes in the skies, not long before the disaster. In their opinion, it was the military jets that could have shot down Boeing."

[0:30]: First witnesses: "There were two explosions in the air... and there was another plane, a military... everybody saw it... it was flying lower, because we could see it, it was flying lower than the passenger [jet]."

[0:46]: Second witness: "There were sounds of explosions, but they were in the sky, then the plane made a sudden turn, changed trajectory, and flew that way."

[3:25]: Rebel commander says that Ukrainian jets used passenger jets as cover: "... as was seen in Slavyansk, they used to fly under passenger jets, then came out and bombed..."

BBC deleted this video within a day. On July 24, they [explained](#) the reasons why it was deleted — it didn't meet their editorial values. They said it is being worked on and will be released again.

Their [new video](#) was uploaded on July 25. These are some of the changes (Olga's voice actually changes when the new parts are heard/shown):

[0:20]: Removed: "in their [villagers'] opinion, it was the military jets that could have shot down Boeing." Added: "International experts think that, mostly likely, the rocket was launched from the ground."

[1:00]: Added: "Official Kiev says that no Ukrainian military aircraft was in that region that day..."

[3:57]: Added: Commentary of "aviation expert" who thinks it is highly unlikely that Ukrainian military jets used passenger jets as cover [flew under them.]

[4:58]: Both versions of the videos say that the rebel commander denies they had any means to take out a plane flying at high altitude. What was added here is Olga saying: “however, some separatist leaders earlier told that they had captured a few Buk complexes.” [She was probably referring to Reuters’ interview; see “Reuters’ exclusive interview and the audio tape.”]

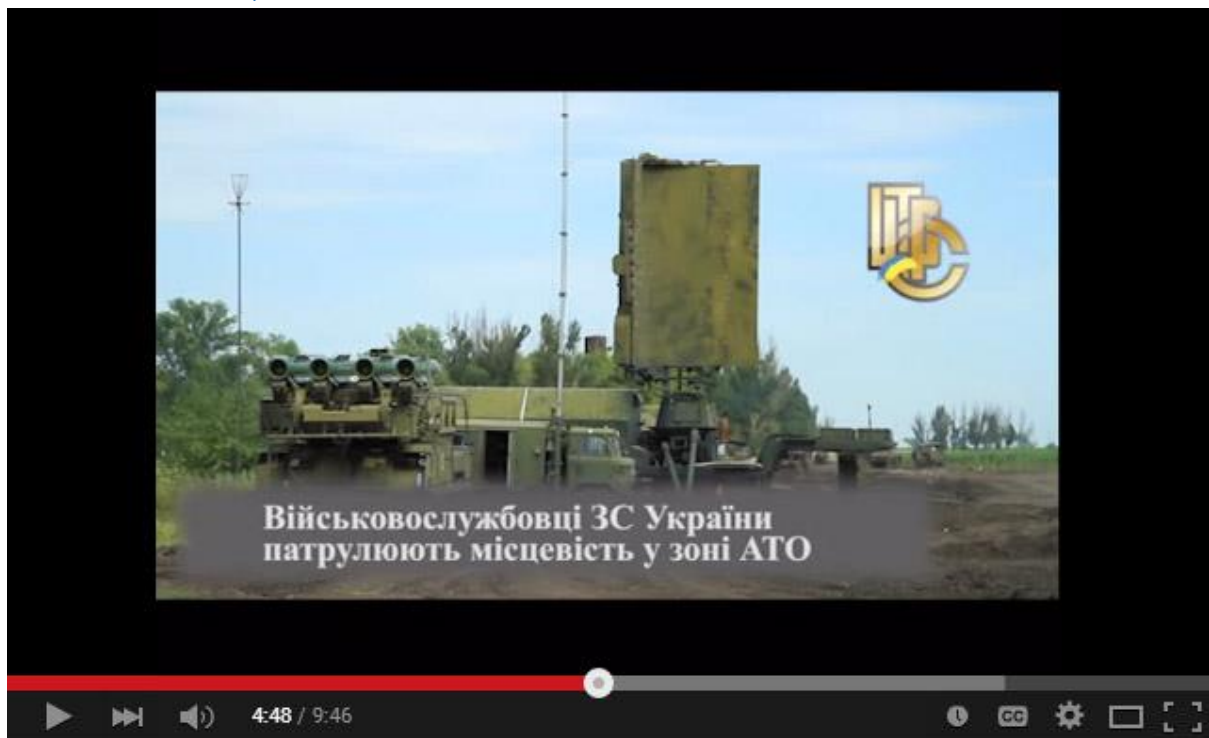
Kiev denies any of their military planes had missions on July 17 in the “ATO” area

A day after MH17 was shot down, official Kiev [says](#), “... at that moment, Ukrainian fighter jets did not fly in the Ukrainian space.” What’s interesting, Kiev said it on July 18, before the Russia’s Ministry of Defense briefing of July 21, before the BBC video showing witnesses who saw the plane, probably before any mainstream media was even talking about a theory involving a fighter jet, and maybe without being asked.

On December 25, 2014, Ukrainian government site also [wrote](#), “... not a single Air Force aircraft was used on July 17th...”

There is a high possibility that NATO was monitoring Ukraine’s skies through AWACS all the time since March 2014. As far as I know, NATO did not provide any official data either confirming or denying that Ukrainian military jets were flying there on July 17.

Video of Buk complex in the “ATO” zone



Програма "Час Ч" №129 (16.07.2014р. Вечірній випуск)

 Військове телебачення України

Picture 26: A screenshot of an official Ukrainian MoD video released on 07-16-2014 showing Buk vehicle that's allegedly in the zone of ATO (“anti-terrorist operation”)

On July 16, 2014, a [video](#) was uploaded to YouTube showing a Buk vehicle with rockets, a radar, and a caption that these are Ukrainian forces in the zone of “ATO” (“anti-terrorist operation”). The

YouTube channel's description says, "Official video hub of TV & radio studio of the Ministry of defense of Ukraine." This is an official channel, because [this](#) verified Facebook account links to it.

Since rebels did not have aviation, this Ukrainian air defense system was probably there to protect against possible air attacks from another country.

[An interview with a whistleblower who was stationed at a base in Dnipropetrovsk](#)

On December 22, 2014, Russian newspaper/news site named Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP) released a [video](#) interview of a whistleblower who was previously stationed at Ukrainian base in Dnipropetrovsk, but who moved to Russia.

He claims to have personally seen Su-25 taking off from a base in Dnipropetrovsk with two R-60 rockets, which are used against aircrafts, and Su-25 returning without them, all on the day when MH17 crashed. This is in contrast to Kiev's statements. The whistleblower also said that he overheard the pilot say later that the plane [supposedly MH17] was at the wrong time, at the wrong place.

To protect his identity, as he feared for his life and the life of his relatives in Ukraine, his voice was changed and face covered at that time. However, on June 3, 2015, Russian Investigative Committee has [released](#) his name — Evgeny Agapov. Russian RT [showed](#) scanned copies of his passport as well as part of a [video](#) of this witness being questioned by Russian investigators (probably in December 2014, after KP interview; the news at that time said that he was questioned by FSB and passed a lie detector).

In this KP video, he released the last name of Ukrainian pilot who flew the plane that allegedly had R-60 missiles and returned without them. It was Voloshin (Волошин).

On December 25, 2014, Ukrainian SBU (Secret Service) [confirmed](#) that this Su-25 pilot exists, that he did take part in the military operations, but said that Air Force wasn't used that day, and that Voloshin's jet was under repairs.

Voloshin is also on Ukrainian President's site in the [list](#) of people who have been promoted on July 19, 2014 for "personal courage and heroism, shown while defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine."

A YouTube user [translated](#) the video of the interview with the whistleblower to English and provided subtitles. His translation seems to be accurate.

On June 3, 2015, the day when the whistleblower's name was announced, Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP) uploaded a [much longer version](#) of the previously recorded interview and without the voice changer.

[Bellingcat investigation](#)

A website named Bellingcat exists, which seems to be a site of "investigative journalists."

They published an array of [articles](#) concerning MH17. They released a [50-page report](#) (which was [translated](#) to Russian by US' RFERL/Svoboda), where they track a Russian Buk moving through Russian territory. Why Bellingcat thinks this Russian Buk is the same as seen in all those well-known pictures and videos? [Because](#) of the first Paris Match photo (July 25, 2014) showing the so-called "Buk's fingerprints" (Buk's side skirt damage visible only on Paris Match photos) and [because](#) of the second Paris Match photo (which was "discovered" somewhere in January 2015), where now a

“netting covering” can be seen. The problem? These Paris Match photos are photoshoped (for more information, read “First Paris Match photo”).

They use all sort of “evidence” with whatever the source, quality, and authenticity, as long as it fits a certain narrative. Bellingcat used [this](#) photo of a truck with blue lines [as evidence](#) in their article that allegedly proves rebels had the truck on August 6, never mind that it’s an incredibly low resolution material, with objects of interest of very small size, making it easy to manipulate (change details, add vehicles) with tools like Photoshop, and make it look realistic, as was demonstrated in “The white truck” section. At the same time, they dismiss BBC Russian witnesses who saw the plane and Kiev’s own videos that show Buk launchers right in the zone of the so-called “ATO.” This is why Bellingcat’s investigations cannot be taken seriously. However, they do have a good collection of accurate data regarding the locations of those known videos and photos that show Buk vehicle, and some other useful info, not only from their own articles, but also from commenters.

Correctiv investigation

The results of [this](#) “investigation” were revealed somewhere in January 2015: “Over several months the Germany-based non-profit investigative newsroom CORRECT!V has gathered facts, investigated in eastern Ukraine and Russia, and found witnesses to the missile launch.”

Pointing out the flaws in everything what was said about the conflict in this what seems like a novel, translated into three other languages, rather than a fact-based investigation, would be out of scope of this paper. Therefore, I will comment just some of the flaws that are related to MH17:

- They wrote that Girkin/Strelkov made a post in social media. — See “Social media account named strelkov_info.”
- They wrote, “Complicating things even more, the BUK’s active radar cannot identify the type of airplane targeted. Fighter jet? Passenger plane? It is difficult.” — A [website](#) exists that shows *live* position of the passenger jets in the sky.
- “Bellingcat was also able to determine the missile launcher’s origin.” — Bellingcat “investigators” don’t look like an impartial group to me (see “Bellingcat investigation”).
- “Later on July 17th the same BUK, now with its identification number 3*2 painted over, was photographed by the Paris Match photographer in eastern Ukraine.” — The Paris Match photos are photoshoped (see “First Paris Match photo”).
- “Just after July 17th he [the rebel commander Khodakovskiy] told a reporter from the news agency Reuters that the separatists possessed a BUK on the day the plane was shot down.” — Reuters’ 2-minute soundtrack/interview was glued up together from at least three parts (see “Reuters’ exclusive interview and the audio tape”).

JIT: Call for witnesses

On March 30, 2015, “[an international joint investigation team](#), in which Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Ukraine take part,” released a [video](#), looking for witnesses that “might have information regarding the transport of the BUK missile system.”

Questions regarding the video:

- Why Ukraine, a side, which should have been considered as one of the suspects, is on this investigation team (and probably receiving all the secret information)?
- What was this investigation team doing for about 256 days? They should have been looking for any kind of witnesses within days, a week after the catastrophe.

- Why are they ignoring witnesses who saw the military jet in the sky (in BBC Russian video, villagers told the correspondent that they heard at least two explosions in the sky and saw a military jet at the time when MH17 crashed; see the appropriate section in this chapter for the BBC video)?
- The video is 11:44 minutes long and is in Russian. I heard that most of the people in Donetsk and Luhansk regions are Russian speakers, but why are the subtitles in English and not in Ukrainian?
- Why are they showing Paris Match photo, which was clearly photoshopped, and the low quality, low resolution Torez and Snizhne photos, which could have been very easily photoshopped as well (see the appropriate sections that examine these photos)?
- They said that rebels stole the white Volvo truck. What proof there is that the truck was stolen by rebels (see “The white truck”)?
- They said (on the video at 1:30), “around midnight on July 17, the truck probably was in the area of Sjeverne.” — They show Sjeverne, which is right by the Russian border. Then they say that this Buk has travelled from Sjeverne to Luhansk, from Luhansk to Donetsk (distance from Luhansk to Donetsk alone is about 130 kilometers) and do not show any photos or videos of this journey or of the Buk in Sjeverne. They said, “*probably* in the area of Sjeverne,” but what do they base this on? The audio tapes, some Twitter text posts, or on “he said, she said evidence?”

Bellingcat [mentions](#) that new audio tapes appeared in the video that were previously unknown. However, was their authenticity confirmed (see “Ukrainian SBU audio tapes”) or were they some actors?

So, after 256 days from the day when MH17 was shot down, one of the official investigation teams releases a video. In it, they show all the photos and videos that I have covered in this paper, which are used to point fingers at rebels and Russia. This probably proves that no other videos and pictures are publicly available of this Buk within rebel territory, and that I didn’t miss any.

Chapter 6: Russian Ministry of Defense briefing on July 21, 2014

First, some background. By July 21, 2014, just three days after MH17 incident, the hysteria in the media of certain countries was at a level probably not witnessed ever before. It was as if Mr. Putin [personally](#) shot down the plane. By this time, some of the photos of the Buk that we examined were on the internet; Ukrainian SBU has already released audio tapes and the Luhansk video with one missing rocket, pointing fingers at rebels and accusing Russia of supplying rebels with this Buk launcher. Washington Post [wrote](#), “The U.S. State Department, as well as Secretary of State John Kerry during TV interviews on Sunday, reiterated claims that the passenger airliner was likely to have been brought down by a SA-11 surface-to-air missile.” New York Times [wrote](#), “The United States government has concluded that the passenger jet felled over Ukraine was shot down by a Russian-made surface-to-air missile launched from rebel-held territory and most likely provided by Russia to pro-Moscow separatists, officials said on Friday.” It is only natural that Russia attempted to clear her name.

By July 21, the following evidence was already known: July 17 — Snizhne video, Snizhne photo, Torez photo, original “Buk trail” photo, and photo provided by SBU of their own Buk taken in March, which they removed later; July 18 — Luhansk video, SBU audio tapes. US officials made statements accusing rebels and Russia, but provided no proof. All the mentioned photos and videos were showing Buk allegedly traveling through rebel-controlled territory.

The true location of Luhansk video wasn’t known until July 22 — a day after MoD’s briefing; everybody thought it was in Krasnodon. The Zuhres video itself was either kept under the radar until July 22 or not published, yet; Zuhres video’s exact coordinates were published by a Twitter post on July 22. Reuters’ article with the “interview” of a rebel commander “confirming” that rebels had Buk was published on July 23. The first Paris Match photo was published on July 25. See the appropriate sections for more info about each evidence.

It seems as if Kiev deliberately did not say that the video of a Buk with one missing rocket was made in Luhansk until Russian MoD had a say on July 21. Then suddenly, on July 22, [“the internet users” find](#) the true location of Luhansk video and [learn about a new Zuhres video](#) as well as its exact coordinates (Twitter account, which has been deleted, released the coordinates on July 22; see the section dedicated to Zuhres video).

One thing to note is MoD’s satellite photos show [“satellite data”](#) at the top; they are not just ordinary photos. That data may tell whether the photos are authentic or not. However, there is even one thing for those who think that the information is fake: MoD showed a satellite photo, allegedly made on July 14, of a Buk launcher and two loaders just 8 km North-West of Luhansk city. As was said, the true location of Luhansk video wasn’t known yet, and Russian MoD said that the Luhansk video was made in Krasnoarmeysk. Therefore, Russian MoD didn’t show this satellite photo of Buk near Luhansk to “make excuses” for any evidence that was known at that time to them or to public.

The briefing

Here is the [video](#) of the briefing. However, there is also a page on [Russian MFA](#) site with all of the photos and text (for some reason, the numbers on the photos that are on that page and on the video are mixed up). There are some mistranslations in the video involving numbers. Therefore, I recommend you to read the page on MFA site as well.

Some key moments:

- Until Donetsk, MH17 was flying in the designated corridor, then it deviated to the North...
- July 14 satellite photo of Buk launcher and two loaders just 8 km North-West from Luhansk city; MoD showed this at the time (July 21) when Luhansk video's location wasn't known to public (except to certain people in Ukraine).
- July 14 photo with 60 military vehicles 5 km North of Donetsk city; among them, Buk launcher and radars.
- July 17 photo of the same area of 5 km North of Donetsk that now has Buk launcher missing.
- July 17 photo with Buk launchers near Zaroshchens'ke. It is just 20 kilometers to the West, 4 kilometers to the South from Snizhne. This looks like to be [the exact place on Google map](#).
- July 18 photo of the same area near Zaroshchens'ke, which is now missing previously shown Buk launchers.
- Video from Rostov ATC showing a detected military plane after MH17 was shot down.
- Peak activity of Kupol radars was registered on July 17.
- MoD confirmed that US "experimental" satellite that can determine location of a fired missile was over the area at the moment MH17 was hit with the rocket and asked US to share the data with the world's community for analysis.

Their satellite pictures include time and other satellite's data, which can probably be used to verify their authenticity. If these pictures were fake, US and other nations that track satellites and have their own would have probably officially confronted Russia with it and presented evidence that they are fake long ago.

[Possible reasons why Russian MoD said the Luhansk video was made in Krasnoarmeysk](#)

At the end of the video, Russian MoD said that the video with one missing rocket was made in Krasnoarmeysk. They were wrong, and no, they didn't "read the address on the billboard."

Kiev's head of MIA Mr. Avakov released the Luhansk video on July 18 via a Facebook post. The post's wording was as such that this Buk was moving through Krasnodon towards Russian border. He did not say anything about Luhansk at all. In fact, certain Western news sites still write that the video's location is Krasnodon (see the section dedicated to Luhansk video for the FB post and other links).

On July 19 – 20, many posts existed on the internet, including in Russian blogs, that said this is a city of Krasnoarmeysk because of the billboard. For example, [this page](#) wrote it on July 19, and there are many others if you [Google search for particular sentence](#). [I remember reading that there were two auto companies with similar names in Ukraine; one was indeed in Krasnoarmeysk.]

Therefore, Russian MoD couldn't find the location in Krasnodon, but wanted to know where it was filmed, and just repeated what the Russian blogosphere was saying so that Kiev would provide the video's exact location (as coincidentally has happened the next day).

Chapter 7: Examination of theories

Ukrainian SBU theory

On August 8, 2014, Ukraine's head of [SBU Valentyn Nalyvaichenko wrote](#): "Ukraine's law enforcement and intelligence agencies have established during the investigation into a terrorist attack on [MH17] ... that on that day, July 17, and at that time military mercenaries and terrorists from the Russian Federation planned to carry out a terrorist attack against a passenger aircraft of Aeroflot en route from Moscow to Larnaca... as a pretext for the further invasion by Russia," the official said. "This cynical terrorist attack was planned for the day when the [Malaysian] plane happened to fly by, planned by war criminals as a pretext for the further military invasion by the Russian Federation, that is, there would be a casus belli."

So, according to the head of SBU, Moscow sent the Buk to rebels, who decided to shoot down a Russian passenger jet so that Moscow would use it as a pretext to help rebels by further invading Ukraine, but rebels accidentally shot down MH17 instead of Russian one.

Some of the problems in this theory: (a) rebels would need to be sure that Moscow would invade Ukraine and help them after shooting down this Russian passenger jet; (b) rebels would need to somehow mix up Russian passenger jet with another one, which is probably hard thing to do even if you don't have the necessary radar equipment, as there are [websites](#) that show live passenger jet traffic.

West's theory

According to one of the West's theories, which is in this [video](#) released by [an international joint investigation team](#), in which Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Ukraine take part, Russia gave a Buk launcher to rebels on the midnight of July 17 by the Russian border. This Buk on a truck then traveled from Eastern border with Russia to Donetsk city, then to Snizhne, then it probably shot down MH17 by accident, thinking it was Ukraine's AN-26, then on July 18 this Buk was in Luhansk and then back to Russia.

This theory is not very likely: Russia would need to provide rebels with Buk by midnight of July 17 (what Ukrainian military aircraft did rebels have problems with? What would be the reason for this gift?), then this Buk would need to get to Donetsk undetected, then it would need to shoot down MH17 by accident (and how would this happen when there are even [websites](#) showing live traffic of the passenger jets?), then this Buk would need to get from there to Luhansk through rebel territory undetected, then Kiev's SBU would need to film it showing clearly a missing rocket in Luhansk 12 hours after MH17 was shot down...

This theory is especially problematic if all they have as proof that Buk belongs to rebels are: stitched up Reuters' audio tape; photoshoped Donetsk/Paris match photos; low resolution, low quality, photos taken in Torez and Snizhne, where Buk/truck are of very small size; the three known videos, which were filmed by certain cities' edges (in cities like Luhansk, where Ukraine's own military map is showing that they are by that city); and some other material examined in this paper.

The other theory

Out of all the evidence that we examined, only the three known videos pass the basic checks for forgery. However, these videos barely show any details of Buk and were made by the cities' entrances, in cities where Kiev's own military map is showing that Kiev's forces are nearby (Luhansk city, Snizhne). The Luhansk video itself, allegedly taken 12 hours after MH17 incident by "Ukrainian covert agents," by the edge of Luhansk, at a place with a nearby field with roads that can be used as

a point of entry and exit, with the back of the Buk covered, but clearly showing the missing missile, tells me that all of this is a false flag operation.

By July 2014, rebels lost significant chunks of territory, and [continued](#) losing it until around mid-August or September 2014. Rebels were severely outnumbered at the time of MH17 incident.

According to the [FT article](#), Kiev has 60 Buk launchers, as well as military planes, which at that time in summer made [frequent sorties](#). In addition to that, when you see that there is no proof that rebels had Buk, that there is no motivation for them to intentionally shoot down MH17, that its accidental shot down by rebels would be problematic even if they didn't have the necessary radars due to [websites](#) that show live passenger air traffic, that none of the planes that rebels ever shot down involved Buk, you get to a theory, in which Kiev or a group within Kiev's forces either accidentally or deliberately shoots down MH17.

But why would someone destroy a civilian jet, frame the rebels, and point fingers at Russia, saying that it gave this weapon to rebels? What would be to gain from all of this? The answer to that is geopolitics that involve US (NATO), EU (NATO, Eastern partnership program), and Russia.

Just about 11 days after MH17 incident, we get the [news](#): "all [EU] 28 member states agreed on the broader economic sanctions, which will limit access to EU capital markets for Russian State-owned financial institutions..."

The trade between EU and Russia is much more significant than it is between US and Russia. US sanctions alone would not be effective. The sanctions that EU imposed on Russia before July 29 were not as severe; they mostly targeted individual people in Russia. The new sanctions made Russian companies/banks unable to get new credits from EU. Russian companies needed to return over a hundred billion euros by the year's end, and they couldn't get new, relatively cheap credits.

In June 2014, the price of oil has began steadily falling. This drop in price was probably artificially created (thanks to certain US allies) due to oil's overproduction. The price of oil plays a big role in Russia's budget.

The plan of EU's severe sanctions and the artificial drop of oil price was probably to either force Russia into submission regarding geopolitical issues or to shatter the Russian economy, which could make a lot of citizens unhappy with their government, creating a platform for a "colorful revolution." December 2014 was the peak of problems that Russian currency has experienced, but it managed to stabilize.

So, what role does MH17 play in all of this? The EU could not have imposed these sanctions without a consensus: all EU member states needed to agree. Before MH17 incident, there was a group of countries within EU who did not want to impose these tough measures. Coincidentally, shortly after the catastrophe, as we see, their opinion has changed.

Thus, the motivation for those that could have intentionally destroyed the plane would be to affect the opinion of a group of EU countries that were, until then, against severe sanctions. This in turn could have crashed Russian economy, creating severe problems for the Russian government and their geopolitical stance involving Ukraine.

Those who shot down the plane would need to have some sort of degree of certainty that this tragedy would be used to punish Russia (and that they wouldn't be tried in Hague). Did the attackers take a risk or they knew the answer? If the public found out that it was Kiev's side that shot it down, EU and US citizens would probably be in dismay if their governments would provide financial

support to Kiev from that point, which Kiev's government would need just to stay afloat. However, EU's and US' elite want something from Ukraine (covering it here would be out of scope of this paper). US and certain EU countries were not interested in "not blaming any side until investigation would conclude," they wanted those sanctions on Russia for geopolitical reasons.

Conclusion

We have found out that rebels did not capture any Ukrainian Buk vehicles on June 29. There was a rumor from Ukrainian source about a damaged Buk vehicle having been left at a base that was allegedly attacked by rebels. The rumor of a captured Buk was not confirmed, as on June 30 and July 18 Ukrainian sources denied that any Buk complexes were captured. No photos or videos seems to exist that would prove that rebels had Buk either prior July 17 or after July 18. No rebel commander ever said that rebels had Buk.

There's no evidence that any Ukrainian planes were shot down with anything other than MANPADs at any point in this conflict as of May 2015. On July 14, 2014, Ukrainian President's site made a statement that AN-26 was shot down near Ukraine-Russia border at an altitude of 6500 meters and that it can be only possible if a more potent missile was used, which was probably fired from Russia. Videos exist of allegedly the same AN-26 at the time when it was hit in the air. The videos do not show any signs, such as the trail of a Buk, that a more potent missile was used than a MANPAD. Ukraine implemented new restrictions in its air space after the incident with AN-26.

We have examined all photos and videos that allegedly show the rebel's Buk. A [video](#) from the [official investigation team](#), released on March 30, 2015, serves as proof that we've covered all important, publicly known photos and videos. The Paris Match photo itself shows very clear signs of it being fake. The Torez and Snizhne photos are of low quality and low resolution, with objects of interest (Buk, truck) of very small size. The Buk could have been easily added there using Photoshop. The three known videos do not prove that it were the rebels driving it, as no other rebels forces are seen, and Kiev's own military map, displayed in a press conference on July 18, 2014, clearly shows that Kiev's forces are right by Luhansk city, where the video with one missing rocket was made. The map also shows Kiev's forces being near the area where Snizhne is located. The third video was made in Zuhres, which is just 30 kilometers to the West from Snizhne.

We have found an interesting pattern. The mentioned photos showing Buk vehicle (two Paris Match/Donetsk, Snizhne, Torez), where the Buk was most likely added to the photo with the help of Photoshop, were made deep inside the cities. While the three videos were made by the cities' edges, where there is a field nearby with some basic roads. The location of Snizhne and Zuhres videos is also in the Southern parts of towns — the part where Kiev's map shows Kiev's forces to be advancing from.

When Kiev's new government received more legitimacy in early summer, they have significantly stepped up their military operations against the rebel republics and tried to overwhelm them with force rather than solve the conflict through talks. Rebel forces were [rapidly](#) losing territories in June and July. Kiev's own map, indicates that rebels might not have been under control of those particular roads/areas of towns on July 17 where the videos were made.

We have found serious flaws in the "Buk trail photos," we also found that Reuters' interview with one of the rebel commander's (2:24-minute tape) was made using at least 3 pieces, that Ukrainian SBU audio tapes cannot be considered authentic, that a particular account in social media does not belong to a rebel commander.

We have found other useful material, which might be less known to some people: witnesses shown by BBC Russian, who saw a military plane on July 17 when MH17 was shot down; Kiev's own video showing Buk launcher in the zone of "ATO;" a soldier who was stationed in Dnipropetrovsk, who saw three military jets take off on July 17, one of them having "air-air" rockets and it returning without

them; Buk manufacturer presented their analysis in which they concluded that if MH17 was hit by Buk, it would be only possible with specific rocket model and launched from specific area.

We've looked at data from Russian Ministry of Defense, presented just three days after MH17 incident. They showed Buk launchers right by Luhansk city, Donetsk city, and Buk launchers in the area about 20 kilometers West from Snizhne and 4 kilometers to the South. They also detected Ukrainian military planes in the area when MH17 was shot down. Their satellite photos show data that probably can be used to verify their photo's authenticity. If these photos were fake, Western governments would have officially confronted Russia shortly after they were published.

Ukrainian SBU theory as to what has happened is absurd. [One of the Western theories](#) is not too far from absurd (considering the evidence that we examined, and which the investigation team showed in their official video): Russia gives rebels Buk on the night of July 17, then someone accidentally shoots down MH17 using it, thinking it's AN-26 due to lack of some radar equipment (all while [websites](#) exist that show live air traffic), then Buk moves back to Russia on July 18. However, there are other theories. As we found out in the chapter that examines theories, around July 29, EU introduced significant sanctions against Russia. Before that, EU probably didn't have a consensus among its member states. Therefore, MH17 incident might have played a role in changing the opinion of those particular EU countries regarding tough sanctions on Russia. Some people in Ukraine were certainly interested in this turn of events, as well as some key Western countries (for geopolitical reasons).

It is not clear what took down MH17: Buk, military jet, or Buk and the military jet. What is clear is that none of the evidence available on the internet, which we explored connects the Buk vehicle with rebels and Russia. The lack of any videos of this Buk travelling within rebel territory, from Eastern border with Russia to Donetsk city, from Snizhne to Luhansk city, and the lack of any video and photo materials where rebels could be seen near any Buk vehicle also indirectly proves that rebel forces had nothing to do with it. The places where the three videos were made, especially circumstances concerning Luhansk video, tell a thinking person that it was a red flag operation — to put the blame on rebels and Russia in order for EU to impose severe sanctions on Russia.

The official investigation is being artificially stalled. For example, NATO did not either confirm or deny that Ukraine military planes were there on July 17, 2014. NATO was certainly monitoring Ukraine's sky with AWACS, awaiting Russian invasion of Ukraine. The reason for stalling the investigation is geopolitics. If it turns out — and everything is pointing that it is the case — that it weren't rebels who destroyed MH17, EU's and US' financial and other support to Kiev will probably be significantly reduced, and that might be an end to Ukraine's current government. Moreover, what would these Western governments say to their citizens? After all, they imposed sanctions on Russia shortly after the catastrophe, not on Ukraine.

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