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MH17: The Exploitation of A Tragedy

By Justin Raimondo

July 20, 2014

If there's one thing neocons and Obamaites can agree on, it's the penultimate evil of Vladimir Putin. The downing of MH17 has knitted them so close together that it's hard to tell the difference. No sooner had the airliner hit the ground than, one and all, they echoed the "game-changer" meme first enunciated by *The New Republic's* Julia Ioffe, the go-to person for media Russophobes. Top Democrats in Congress ranted that what was clearly an accident is an "act of war," not to mention an "act of terror," while Sen. John McCain took the opportunity to agree wholeheartedly – while adding that Obama's "weakness" in the face of Russian "aggression" is really to blame.

Washington is basking in its near-unanimity, and the only competition between left and right is to see who can snarl the most menacingly at the Russian bear. In this frenzied atmosphere, pundits left and right – and even "news" accounts – refer to the fields where the wreckage lies as the "crime scene," the scene of a "murder." And they are pointing a finger not only at the rebels but also directly at Putin – with air cover from the Pentagon, as this *New York Times* account makes all too clear:

"Rear Adm. John Kirby, the top Pentagon spokesman, said it would have been difficult for separatists to fire the SA-11 without Russian help. 'It strains credulity to think that it could be used by separatists without at least some measure of Russian support and technical assistance,' he said.

"Admiral Kirby raised the possibility that the Russian military had transported the system into Ukraine and even fired it. 'Whether it was a system that was driven across the border by Russians and then handed off, we don't know,' he said."

What Kirby fails to mention is that Russian expertise is hardly required, since whole Ukrainian army divisions sent in to crush the rebels have chosen to defect rather than fire on their countrymen. There are plenty of rebels with the training to operate an SA-11 or SA-20, but that comment about direct Russian support – "and even fired it" – tells us everything we need to know about this latest chapter in the ongoing US-Russian standoff. They want to pin the blame on Putin, but that is a case that won't stand up in court.

That's because the "evidence" of Russian complicity is flimsy. The SBU, the Ukrainian intelligence agency formerly preoccupied with brutalizing opponents of whatever regime was in power, has come up with a series of "intercepts" that are being played nonstop on American cable television: these purportedly show not only rebel responsibility for the downing but also direct Russian assistance. The playing of the SBU tapes is usually preceded by ass-covering boilerplate that they "could not be independently verified" – with the unspoken addendum that "but, heck, why not broadcast them anyway?" One tape presented as a conversation between a rebel commander and his henchman on the ground was apparently made the day *before* the plane was downed – sloppy work, but good enough for cable news.

But then again everything seems to be half-ass in Ukraine: nothing much in that country has functioned since the fall of the Soviet Union. This was an accident waiting to happen – and in spite of the certitude in which denunciations of the "criminal" rebels are framed, we still don't know for sure who pulled the trigger. While the Russians have pointed out that the Ukrainian army had anti-aircraft weaponry in the vicinity when the plane went down, it could well be that Washington is correct and the rebels did indeed hit the plane, mistaking it for a Ukrainian fighter. Yet the lesson to be drawn from this isn't what Washington and the screaming meemies of the Beltway are telling us it is.

Unable or unwilling to directly confront its main antagonists – Russia and Iran – Washington has turned to cold war era tactics (and rhetoric), using proxies to fight wars they don't dare fight on their own. In Libya, and now Syria, the US used its supposedly tame jihadists to overturn secular Arab leaders who didn't follow Washington's orders willingly. The big problem with their efforts to recruit suitable proxies, however, is that quality control is lacking.

This is especially evident in the Ukraine, where Washington has hooked up with a motley gang of ultra-nationalists, open fascists, and Ukrainian oligarchs. Yet the violent coup that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich was just the beginning as far as the War Party is concerned. The Obama administration has been under attack from fellow Democrats as well as McCainite Republicans to deliver some serious arms to Kiev – as well as the Syrian rebels – and the MH17 incident may well provide the political impetus for him to do so, at least in the case of the former.

This would be precisely the opposite of a rational policy, for if the rebels did indeed down that plane, and if they did get the means to do it from the Russians, then this illustrates the utter

stupidity of arming proxies with sophisticated weaponry. Plenty of American-made equipment is showing up on the Iraqi battlefield in the hands of ISIS, and although we're being told it was looted from captured Iraq military facilities, there is good reason to doubt all of it came from that particular source.

In the midst of all this warmongering, the President is coming off as a relative moderate, especially compared to the Republican McCainiacs bent on pouring arms and even US "advisors" into Ukraine (obviously someone has to train the Ukrainians to use them). Meanwhile, Obama – like Franklin Roosevelt in the run up to US entry into World War II – lets others call for stronger action while his relatively rational public pronouncements belie his provocative actions.

The crucial context of this terrible tragedy is the years-long regime change operation conducted by the US in Ukraine, which finally succeeded this year as a democratically elected pro-Russian regime was overthrown – by force – and a government more amenable to Western diktat was installed.

This was accomplished due to both overt and covert support to the Maidan rebels, whose "government" – not recognized by half the country – is now engaged in a brutal military campaign that has wantonly killed civilians in a series of atrocities studiously ignored by the Western media. *We* started the vicious civil war that is now making Ukraine unlivable: *we* set off the chain of events that led to the annexation of Crimea – whose people welcomed the chance to opt out of a bankrupt corrupt mess of a "country" – and *we alone* are responsible for the ensuing internecine conflict that gripped the eastern provinces.

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) was presciently correct when he warned:

“Some on our side are so stuck in the Cold War era that they want to tweak Russia all the time and I don't think that is a good idea.”

As it turned out, tweaking Putin was and is a terrible idea – one that has had fatal consequences not only for the people of Ukraine but now also for the 298 victims of the downing of MH17 whose body parts litter the fields of the east.

The shameless exploitation of this tragedy by slaving warmongers like McCain and the gaggle of neocons and "progressives" out for Russian blood is one of the most disgusting displays in many years. It underscores the inability and utter unwillingness of our puffed-up political class to view US foreign policy and its consequences with any degree of objectivity. This blindness, when it is translated into policy, is dangerous: it is like giving someone with 20/200 vision a racing car to drive – or like handing an anti-aircraft missile system to some Ukrainian half-wit.

The investigation into who and what caused the crash is focused for the moment on the "crime scene," in areas controlled by rebel forces in the east. Yet the real evidence isn't scattered over those fields of sunflowers but in MH17's last communications with Ukrainian air traffic controllers located in Kiev. Reports that these have been seized by the authorities are not encouraging: nor are the tweets coming from someone of Spanish nationality claiming to be an

air traffic controller working in Kiev which say the Ukrainian military shot down the airliner – perhaps mistaking it for a Russian fighter jet. That is all too possible, given the jittery circumstances prevalent on the Ukrainian battlefield.

Regardless of whether those tweets represent anything real – and, like those SBU intercepts and alleged postings by rebels claiming responsibility for the downing, they couldn't be independently verified – this scenario is perfectly plausible, just as it's entirely within the realm of the probable that the rebels did it. Yet none of this obviates the real lesson of this horrific incident – which is that the superpowers' reckless proxy wars are setting us up for a major conflict, a misstep that could end in starting World War III.