

Beat: News

U.S.: SA-11 missile fired from separatist-held region downed Flight MH17

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USPA News - Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was likely downed by an SA-11 surface-to-air missile that was fired from separatist-controlled territory in eastern Ukraine, the U.S. government said in an assessment made public on Sunday, placing further blame on pro-Russian separatists. The assessment said the United States detected a surface-to-air missile (SAM) launch from a separatist-controlled area in southeastern Ukraine on Thursday afternoon, at the same time Flight MH17 disappeared from radar screens.

"We believe this missile was an SA-11," the government's assessment said. The U.S. said the aircraft shutdown came after American officials noticed an increasing amount of heavy weaponry crossing the border from Russia into Ukraine in recent weeks. It is believed a convoy of military equipment with up to 150 vehicles, including tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, and multiple rocket launchers, was sent into Ukraine from Russia in the weekend of July 12-13. "We also have information indicating that Russia is providing training to separatist fighters at a facility in southwest Russia, and this effort included training on air defense systems," the U.S. government said in its assessment. "Pro-Russian separatist fighters have demonstrated proficiency with surface-to-air missile systems and have downed more than a dozen aircraft over the past few months, including two large transport aircraft." Further strengthening the case against separatists, videos were posted on YouTube on Monday that showed the rebels were in possession of an SA-11 system, the assessment said. In those YouTube videos, the separatists also made repeated references to having and repositioning Buk (SA-11) systems. "Social media postings on Thursday show an SA-11 system traveling through the separatist-controlled towns of Torez and Snizhne, near the crash site and assessed location of the SAM launch," the U.S. explained. "From this location, the SA-11 has the range and altitude capability to have shot down flight MH17." Ukraine also operates SA-11 systems, but the United States said it is "confident" that no Ukrainian air defense systems were within range of the area where Flight MH17 was shot down. Ukrainian forces are also believed to have not fired any surface-to-air missiles during the ongoing conflict, despite repeatedly complaining about Russian military aircraft that have violated its airspace. But perhaps most damning was a social media post by Igor Strelkov, the self-proclaimed defense minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, which controls the area. In the post, Strelkov claimed responsibility for shooting down a military transport plane, and it was quickly deleted when it became evident that the aircraft was a civilian airliner. Separatists also deleted references to posts that boasted about their Buk SAM system. The U.S. further analyzed published recordings of phone calls in which separatists allegedly become aware that the downed aircraft was a passenger plane. "Audio data provided to the press by the Ukrainian security service was evaluated by Intelligence Community analysts who confirmed these were authentic conversations between known separatist leaders, based on comparing the Ukraine-released internet audio to recordings of known separatists," the assessment said. Finally, the U.S. government pointed to a video posted online over the weekend that showed an SA-11 on a transporter traveling through the Ukrainian city of Krasnodon back into Russia. "The video indicated the system was missing at least one missile, suggesting it had conducted a launch," the U.S. said. Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 crashed near the city of Torez in Donetsk Oblast on late Thursday afternoon, killing all 298 passengers and crew members in the world's deadliest aviation disaster since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. The airliner - carrying 193 Dutch citizens - was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

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