

RUSSIA WATCH

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- Results of the investigation of the Boeing MH-17 crash
- Russia's military operation in Syria

Results of the investigation of the Boeing MH-17 crash: The [publication](#) of the results of the investigation by the Dutch Safety Board into the downing of the MH-17 plane enhanced the perception of Russia's involvement in the crash. Russian leadership tried to neutralize the effect of the Dutch report by publishing its own [report](#) elaborated by the Almaz-Antey company, a producer of rocketry, exactly on the same day when the Dutch report was published. The Dutch experts concluded that the Boeing was shot down by a Russian-made BUK missile. This conclusion discredited some previous versions produced by Russian officials (including the Almaz-Antey). Commentator of radio station Ekho Moskvyy **Sergey Parkhomenko** [pointed out](#) in that regard: *There is no [Ukrainian] fighter jet any longer, which was flying somewhere and shooting missiles. There are no traces of machine gun shells anymore that were supposedly clearly seen by everyone on the fuselage of the Boeing MH-17. There are no frozen corpses, no dummy planes, no Spanish dispatchers – they all dropped like autumn leaves from trees. Nothing remained. Only one, in fact, the main real version remained – version about a BUK, which hit the plane.*

Russia's military operation in Syria: After Russia launched its military operation in Syria, the Russian propaganda machine unleashed another 'rally 'round the flag' campaign. Russian officials [present](#) Moscow's intervention in Syria as a [contribution](#) to fight against [global terrorism](#) and as an effort to stabilize the situation in the Middle East. Kremlin and Kremlin-friendly media have rushed to celebrate Vladimir Putin as a leader who [returned Russia](#) into the world politics, who showed to the West who is currently the strong player. Massive "patriotic" propaganda did not remain without consequences – while at the beginning of military operation in Syria only a small part of the population supported this campaign, three weeks later the Russian president's [rating](#) of approval has risen to almost 90%. Other motivations, however, might include maintaining the Assad regime at power, permanent access of Russian armed forces to the Middle East region through military bases in Tartus and Latakia, and the breach – under the disguise of an "anti-terrorist operation" – of international isolation in which Russia found itself following the conflict in Ukraine.

Security expert **Alexandr Golts** in his [article](#) for "Yezhednevnyj zhurnal" warns of the risk of a new Cold War, into which the Russian President draws the world with his military activities in Syria: *While Russian television shows the never-ending series, consisting of bombings and shootings, broadcasting triumphant reports of the Syrian military, the Western press publishes quite different pictures. Pictures of the burned tanks that Russia ... delivered to Assad. Commanders of the "moderate opposition" ... do not hesitate to say that the [Russian] armored vehicles were destroyed by the most advanced American anti-tank systems... The "New York Times" writes about the beginning of the proxy-war between Russia and the*

United States... Today the new Russian-American conflict inevitably acquires the characteristics of the first "cold war". Everything looks similar, even the details... Pentagon chief Ashton Carter said that Putin "encapsulated Russia by the shroud of isolation" – from Kamchatka to Central Asia, from the Caucasus to the Baltic region. The US Secretary of Defense actually repeated the famous rhetorical formula of the Fulton speech by Winston Churchill. In 1946, it was this speech that marked the beginning of the first "cold war". It seems that we are witnessing the birth of the second one. Carter's words leave no doubt about it: "We will take all necessary steps to curb the harmful and destabilizing impact of Russia, its aggression and coercion."

The leading Russian economist and political analyst **Andrey Illarionov** in his [interview](#) to the Voice of America highlights the peculiarities of Russia's participation in Syrian war, revealing the estimated costs of military activities and delineating the perspectives for survival of Putin's regime. According to Illarionov, "it is the first dislocation of regular Russian troops abroad after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the first ever in history – in the Middle East. By its participation in the fight in Syria Russia is involved in a religious war in the Middle East on the side of the Shia camp against the Sunni camp. Also, for the first time since 1962, Russian military are located on the same theater of war with the US troops. After the Berlin crisis of 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 Washington and Moscow came to the conclusion that it is necessary to avoid the dislocation of the regular troops of both countries on the same theater of military operations. For the first time in more than half a century this rule has been violated." The analyst also presented his calculations of the price, which Russia pays for its military actions: "Since beginning of 2012 until the end of 2015, on the preparation and conducting of current Great War [with the West], in which Ukrainian conflict turned out to be one of its fronts, Russia would spend about 144 billion dollars. Given another component – the outflow of private capital from the country, the total price of war increases to 377 billion, or an average of 94 billion dollars a year. According to Illarionov, "the regimes similar to current Russian regime successfully survive sanctions and effectively neutralize internal opposition ... They can pass away and go to history only as a result of external military defeat. Such models are almost indestructible from the inside, while they remain invincible outside. After defeat outside the chances of replacement of such regime sharply increase."

Political scientist **Liliya Shevtsova** [refers](#) to the operation in Syria and elaborates on how the West failed to identify in time the intentions of the incumbent Russian regime, which returned to the traditional imperial policy: "The Kremlin does not want to isolate Russia; it wants to return to the formula described by English philosopher Isaiah Berlin in 1946: "Russia is ready to participate in international relations, but it wants other countries not to care about its internal affairs." So, we went back to the USSR, which once lived according to this formula."

Visegrad and Russia: In mid-October Slovakia found itself in the focus of attention of Russian media in connection with Russia's involvement in the war in Syria, when state agency RIAN [published](#) (other media followed) a report informing about an article in German *Deutsche Wirtschafts Nachrichten*. The Agency's report creates an impression that there is an internal division in NATO. The illustration of this division is the statement by Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico that "without Assad in Syria the situation cannot be solved". Russian media reacted in a way suggesting that internal divisions in NATO are serious, as can be seen from their headlines ("Slovakia supported the operation in Syria"; "NATO is scared: NATO member state supported Russia in Syria and demanded talks with Assad"; "Prime Minister of Slovakia announced the refusal of the "ideological blinders" and [support for Russia's actions in Syria](#)"; "NATO divided: Slovakia supported Russian operation in Syria").

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