

THE OBAMA SHOE-BANGING MOMENT ON THE UKRAINE FRONT – DUTCH AND AUSTRALIAN TROOPS WERE PLANNING TO START WAR WITH RUSSIA AFTER MH17 WAS SHOT DOWN

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By John Helmer, Moscow

President Barack Obama (lead image, left) and his advisors (right) spent at least a week, and as much as three weeks, planning to send up to 9,000 combat troops into eastern Ukraine, on the border with Russia, following the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 two years ago. The scheme, which was to have involved Dutch and Australian army units, with German ground and US air support, plus NATO direction, has inadvertently leaked from the publication of a report this week by a former Australian Army captain.

The military plan, according to James Brown, now head of research at the US Studies Centre of the University of Sydney, “would have consumed the bulk of the Australian Army.” Captain Brown also claims “planning for these military options consumed Australia’s intelligence agencies. The National Security Committee of [the Australian ministerial] Cabinet met every day for more than three weeks, and staff and agencies produced a frenzied stream of briefings on Ukraine, Russia and the intentions of [President] Vladimir Putin.”

According to Dutch sources, the military plan of attack was aborted when Germany refused to participate directly, or allow its bases and airspace to be used. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced the Dutch were pulling their troops out of the plan on July 27. He said at the time: "Getting the military upper hand for an international mission in this area is, according to our conclusion, not realistic." That was ten days after the MH17 crash. But Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his cabinet continued, Brown and his sources reveal, to plan the operation with the US for another 10 days.

MH17 was shot down on July 17, 2014, killing 298 passengers and crew. Of the lives lost, 193 of them were Dutch; 43 Malaysian; and 27 Australian (plus 11 dual nationals or residents). From the first hours, the Malaysian government suspected elements of the Ukrainian military had been involved. Kuala Lumpur was reluctant to endorse the claims of the Ukrainian and US governments that Russia had been culpable, and that Russian-backed forces were directly to blame. That story can be read [here](#).

The Dutch and Australian governments were, and continue to be, the most supportive of blame for Moscow. This was adopted as the official policy of the European Union (EU) states when they [joined](#) the US in introducing new sanctions against Russian oil companies and banks between July 16 and 31, 2014. For more details of the disagreements between political leaders on what had caused the shoot-down, read [this](#).



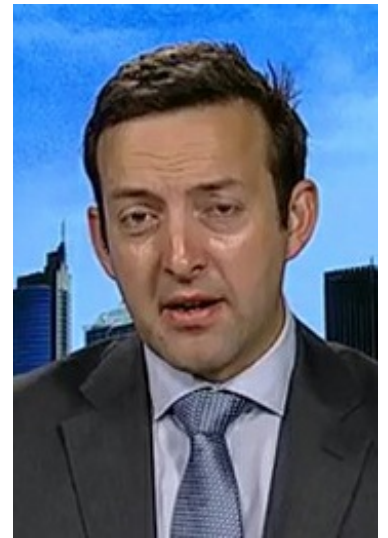
Left: Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak with Rutte, The Hague, July 31, 2014; right: Najib with Putin, Sochi, May 21, 2016

Rutte and Abbott combined to pressure Prime Minister Najib to drop his public scepticism, and join the police and prosecutors group known as the Joint Investigation Team (JIT). Najib is the only one of the three to discuss with Russia its assessment of the causes of the MH17 crash.

The [report](#) by Brown (pictured right) was cited in an Australian newspaper on Monday as an attack on ex-prime minister Abbott for “grand aspirations [which] could have exposed Australian troops to substantial danger in pursuit of lofty objectives misaligned with national interests”. Abbott lost his job when the MPs of his party combined to replace him with the current prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, on September 14, 2015. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko then appointed Abbott one of his “international advisors”.

In 2014, according to Brown, Abbott “calculated that the best way to encourage the United States to retain an active role in world affairs was for Australia to lead by example: as an ally encouraging, reassuring, and perhaps even occasionally shaming the US into taking action.” The full Brown report can be read [here](#).

Brown reveals that “military planners worked up options for Abbott that involved deploying up to a brigade’s worth of troops to Eastern Ukraine, a formation of as many as 3,000 troops”. Another proposal, which he reports as coming from Abbott’s office, was “to commit uniformed Australian military logistics personnel to help the Ukrainians improve their own systems”.



Poroshenko (left) meets in Kiev with his international advisors (centre to right): ex-Polish foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski; Abbott; and Melanne

Verveer, a Ukrainian-American protégée of Hillary Clinton.

Brown, who favours special forces operations himself and the command of the Australian Army by former [spetznaz officers](#), says “nearly 200 [special force troops] were eventually sent to Europe to support the MH17 recovery operations, staging from bases in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to provide close support to investigators and backup for further crisis or contingency.” Less than four weeks later, according to Brown, one hundred of these men were moved to Iraq instead.



Australian troops in Iraq in [August 2014](#). No photograph or press report of Australian troops in Ukraine at the time has appeared.

Abbott himself told Australian state [radio](#) in February 2015: “We did talk to the Dutch about what might have been done in those perilous circumstances, because certainly they were perilous circumstances. There was talk with the Dutch about a joint operation.” Abbott claimed this wasn’t his initiative. “This arose out of the most important and the most necessary discussions between the Dutch military and our own.”

This week’s report by Brown breaks news in identifying how large the Australian force was to have been. He does not report the Dutch, German and NATO planning which was going on at the same time. When asked, Brown declined to say whether he and his sources knew, or didn’t know, that Abbott was acting in concert with the others.

On July 25, 2014, the Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf [reported](#) that the 11th [Airmobile Brigade](#) (unit flash, below right, red) was being [mobilized](#) for action in eastern Ukraine. That’s 4,500 troops, and part of a division-sized German military force called Division Schnelle Kräfte (Rapid Forces Division – unit flash, silver) of about 9,000 men.



Source:

http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/mh17/22895425/___Inzet_commando_s___html

The cover story, according to the Telegraaf, was “to ensure the 23 Dutch crash investigators and 40 unarmed military police officers can do their job.” The real objective, according to one of Telegraaf’s sources, was: “if our commandos are there, they should certainly try to arrest those responsible. [Russian] Colonel Igor the Terrible Girkin [Strelkov] and his associates.” For background on Girkin’s role in Russian plans and operations in eastern Ukraine, read [this](#).

The Dutch newspaper didn’t reveal the Dutch troops would be deployed alongside the 3,000-man Australian force, and that the German command of Division Schnelle Kräfte would also be involved. Telegraaf claimed the operation was “not expected at the NATO headquarters in Brussels”, although it had been presented to “the authorities in Kiev before the green light [was given] and cooperation promised.”

Two days later, on July 27, the BBC [reported](#) Dutch Prime Minister Rutte as calling off the operation. “Getting the military upper-hand for an international mission in this area is, according to our conclusion, not realistic,” he said, conceding it would be “such a provocation to the separatists that it could destabilise the situation”. With almost two years in retrospect, Brown concludes, without mentioning the Dutch, Germans, or other NATO forces, “the potential for harm to Australian troops was all too real. The logic of deploying large numbers of troops into an active war zone alongside the border of a major global military power was entirely shaky.”

Russian analysts in Moscow do not regard the Australian and Dutch governments as capable of planning military action without prior encouragement by the US. The Russians did not realize at the time, they now say, that the US may have been planning a military operation in the wake of the MH17 crash. Yevgeny Krutikov (right), military analyst for Versiya and Vzglyad, recalls there were reports in the press “about the organization of protection for the crash site. Then Abbott offered to send about 1,000 Australian troops to cordon off the crash site. By definition, that was unrealizable stupidity.”



“The number of 9,000 is not real. For the protection of the aircraft wreckage that had fallen, the requirement is less than a militia company. The area was open fields where [the locals] had planted potatoes and sunflowers. There was no talk about the arrival of armed forces from NATO. Air support was even more unreal. By this time, Ukraine has already lost all of its aircraft, and ‘cooperation’ was not technically feasible.”

The omissions in the Dutch and now the Australian report suggest the close coordination of US and EU officials on introducing new sanctions against Russia immediately after the MH17 crash was not matched by coordination of any kind between the Obama Administration, the US command of NATO, the Dutch, Germans and Australians. To Russian observers this is not credible. Preposterous, they believe, is that the Dutch and the Australian governments, at the urging of the White House, went as close as they did to war on the Russian frontier.



Obama and Abbott meet in Beijing, November 10, 2014. Obama said: “Obviously, the men and women of the Australian armed forces have terrific capabilities and on many occasions have made extraordinary sacrifice. So first and foremost, I want to thank [Abbott] for the security partnership that we have.” Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/10/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abbott-australia-after-bilate>

Brown declines to identify or corroborate his sources for the size of the Australian armed force intended for the Ukrainian operation. He was asked to explain “that the prime minister, his advisors, the National Security Committee of Cabinet meeting every day for three weeks, the Australian intelligence agencies, and the Australian military staffs failed to ask for US assessments, US policy guidance, US logistic and other support in the event of engagement between Australian and Russian forces, and US approval of the plans and proposals considered at the time. If the Australians did obtain the US responses, would you say the proposals you attribute to Mr Abbott had US backing, at least at the outset?”

Brown refuses to answer. Was it possible for two prime ministers, the Australian and the Dutch, to start mobilizing for a combined Ukraine operation without US and NATO participation in the planning? Brown won't say.

Instead, he ends his report with an endorsement of Obama's Nobel Peace Prize speech of 2009: “There will be times,” Obama said then, “when nations – acting individually or in concert – will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified... For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world.”

Note: The original and only shoe-banging moment of international significance occurred on October 12, 1960, when Nikita Khrushchev, then First Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee and chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, reacted at the UN General Assembly to criticism by the head of the Philippines delegation. The record of whether [Khrushchev](#) banged or brandished his shoe is ambiguous.

by Editor - Wednesday, June 15th, 2016