

East Ukraine Rebel Leader Denies U.S. Claim of Russia Supplying Weapons

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Pro-Russian separatist fighters from the so-called Battalion Vostok (East) sit in a truck as they set out from a base in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk.

A rebel leader in east Ukraine where a Malaysian airliner was allegedly shot down says his group's military equipment is stolen property from the Ukrainian government and denies accusations by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry that Russia gave weapons to the pro-Moscow separatists.

"We've captured a number of military units and warehouses of the Ukrainian army. Sometimes the Ukrainian soldiers left stuff right on the battlefield, and we picked it up. Some equipment we managed to damage, but then we fixed it up. But we definitely didn't accept any deliveries of military equipment," Andrei Purgin, deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, said Monday.

Purgin said he had not seen any military equipment that the U.S. has accused Russia of supplying to the rebels on his territory.

"If we had such technology, the military situation would be completely different. Right now, on the contrary, we see that the Ukrainian side has got more equipment. We have a catastrophic shortage. It goes without saying that we haven't received anything," Purgin said in comments carried by the Interfax news agency.

Purgin's comments come in response to accusations by the U.S. secretary of state that Russia has supplied the separatists with 150 different kinds of military equipment, including the same type of missile system that is believed to have shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 last week.

In addition to the U.S. claiming to have definitive proof of the rebels involvement in the plane crash, Ukraine's security service has also released audio recordings purporting to be several rebel commanders reacting to the news that they'd accidentally downed a passenger plane.

Although Western leaders have made no secret of their belief that pro-Russian rebels are to blame, a full investigation into the incident has yet to be completed.

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