

## Russian plane: mystery over crash in Egypt, IS claims responsibility

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### All 224 passengers dead in Egypt plane crash



**A Russian passenger jet crashed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 people on board, after losing contact with aviation authorities on Saturday.**

Egyptian officials said the Airbus A321 jetliner, which was operated by Russian carrier Kogalymavia, was flying to St. Petersburg from Sharm El Sheikh, a resort town popular with Russian tourists, when it disappeared from radar screens.

Egypt's state-run newspaper Al Ahram quoted an Egyptian aviation official as saying the plane's pilot had requested to land at the nearest airport after an unspecified mechanical problem shortly after taking off at 5.50am local time (2.50pm AEDT). The newspaper later cited another Egyptian aviation official as saying the pilot hadn't made any distress calls or requests to land.

The Russian Embassy in Cairo said on its official Twitter account that all those on board were killed in the crash.

Sinai Province, the Egyptian branch of Islamic State, claimed responsibility for downing the plane, but officials have cast doubt over whether the group has the capabilities to carry out such an attack. Islamic State and its affiliated groups have frequently made exaggerated claims.

US officials said that based on the information they have thus far, they believe the plane was likely brought down by mechanical issues. But officials said the intelligence was still being reviewed and the assessment could change.

Egypt will lead the probe into the plane crash, under international rules. Local investigators are typically assisted by experts from overseas, in this case plane maker Airbus and the French and German governments' air

crash investigation offices. Because the plane was a Russian airliner, that country also supports the probe. Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to form a state commission to investigate the crash, the Kremlin said Saturday.

Mr. Putin “expressed his deepest sympathies to the families of those who died in the crash.” The Kremlin announced that Sunday would be an official day of mourning.

The wreckage was located south of the city of Al Arish in the sparsely populated, mountainous north Sinai, according to the aviation authority. As many as 50 ambulances were dispatched, it said.



Photo of the Airbus A321 Metrojet which crashed in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula.

A spokesman for Egypt’s prime minister said 15 bodies had been recovered and sent to a morgue in Cairo, while investigators continued to search the crash site for evidence and victims. One of the black boxes, which record flight data and audio, was located and taken into the custody of the prosecutor general’s office, he said.

According to the spokesman, the passengers comprised 214 Russians and three Ukrainians, of which 138 were women, 62 men and 17 children. The count didn’t include the seven crew members.

According to the Kremlin, Vladimir Puchkov, Russia’s minister of civil defence, emergencies and disaster relief, was ordered to send aircraft to Egypt to aid in the recovery of the wreckage of the aircraft. Russia’s Emergencies Ministry said five aircraft were flying to Egypt with first responders and forensic investigators on board. The ministry also set up a hotline to aid families of the victims.



This image released by Egypt’s Prime Minister’s office shows the tail of the Metrojet plane.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration in March warned U.S. airlines to avoid flying over the Sinai Peninsula below 26,000 feet. Airline routes traversing the region “are at risk from potential extremist attacks involving anti-aircraft weapons,” the FAA said, including shorter-range, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles. “Some of these weapons have the capability to target aircraft at high altitudes,” or when approaching or departing airports, the U.S. aviation regulator said, noting that an Egyptian military helicopter flying at lower altitudes had been downed by extremists using a missile.

Dubai-based airline Emirates, the world’s largest by international traffic, said it was currently avoiding Sinai Peninsula overflights until more information becomes available.

Deutsche Lufthansa said it was temporarily halting flights over the area pending more details about the crash. A United Airlines’ spokeswoman said,

A spokeswoman for United Continental Holdings Inc. said the carrier didn’t “see a need to change any of our planned routings at this time.”



Relatives react at Pulkovo international airport outside Saint Petersburg after news of the crash.

British Airways said it also was continuing flights to Sharm El Sheikh. It said it regularly liaised with appropriate authorities and wouldn’t operate a route unless it was safe.

While south Sinai’s resort cities are largely safe for visitors, a number of northern cities including Al Arish have been engulfed by an Islamist insurgency and the rise of Sinai Province.

The militant group has shown increased military sophistication this year, carrying out increasingly audacious attacks on military and police installations with equipment that had been previously unheard of by the group.

Those assaults, including a rocket attack on an Egyptian Navy frigate in the Mediterranean Sea and a sustained attempt to occupy the town of Sheikh Zuwayed, have shown that the insurgency is well equipped, but military experts and the U.S. government have said the group’s weapons would be incapable of reaching a flight at cruising altitude.

The nature of Saturday’s claim was unusual for the group, which typically includes video or photo evidence of the attacks it takes credit for. But Saturday’s claim wasn’t accompanied by any such visual evidence, instead relying on publicly available facts about the crash.

In claiming responsibility for the crash, the group said it was in response to Russia’s recent entry into the Syrian civil war.





All 224 people on board were killed in the crash.

Kogalymavia operates five Airbus A321 passenger aircraft, according to a July news release. Company representatives couldn't immediately be reached.

Airbus said the A321 that crashed was built in 1997 and operated by Metrojet since 2012. The plane, one of the oldest versions of the single-aisle plane model that first entered service in 1994, had logged nearly 21,000 flights and around 56,000 flight hours, the Toulouse, France-based plane maker said, adding that it was ready to assist the accident probe.

Air safety experts agreed it is too early to draw conclusions about what happened. But based on preliminary radar data and other information, a number of experts said the most likely sequence of events appears to be a loss of control by the cockpit crew at cruise altitude, perhaps prompted by the failure of certain mechanical or other systems. According to these experts, the plane's descent trajectory suggests that computerised flight-control features designed to prevent an aerodynamic stall under most circumstances may have become inoperative for some reason.

Airbus has said so-called loss-of-control crashes have accounted for nearly one out of three fatal jetliner losses worldwide since 1995, though the rate for this category of accidents has been cut in half during the past decade.

Airbus narrow bodies have been involved in several recent high-profile crashes, including that of a Germanwings flight in March, apparently at the hands of a suicidal pilot killing all 150 people on board. Late last year, an AirAsia Indonesia plane carrying 162 people crashed into the Java Sea. The crash report is pending.

Still, the Airbus single-aisle jet family, which, along with the Boeing Co. 737 represents the backbone of global commercial airline operations, has a good safety record, with a rate of 0.10 fatal crashes per one million flights — well below many other aeroplane models.

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