

Islamic State bomb downed Russian plane over Sinai, US officials claim

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5 November 2015

The destruction of Kogalymavia (Metrojet) Flight 9268, the Russian Airbus A321 that disintegrated over the Sinai peninsula on Saturday, was the result of a terror operation, most likely planned by Islamic State militants operating in Egypt, an unnamed US official said in informal comments to media Wednesday.

While US intelligence has not made a formal accusation against ISIS, leading US intelligence agents indicated their “tentative conclusion” that the plane was destroyed by an explosive smuggled on board by Islamic State members, during a secret briefing attended by the unnamed US officials cited in the reports.

“There is a definite feeling it was an explosive device planted in luggage or somewhere on the plane,” the US official said.

The US official based his assessment partly on previous intelligence data collected by American intelligence agencies, as well as on information that has emerged in the wake of the crash, according to CNN. US intelligence has been conducting intensified analysis of ISIS internal communications as part of its investigation, and intercepted ISIS communications “played a role in the tentative conclusion that the Islamic State group's Sinai affiliate planted an explosive device on the plane,” according to an Associated Press report.

British government statements had already made similar claims attributing responsibility to IS militants several hours prior to the release of the US reports.

“As more information has come to light, we have become concerned that the plane may well have been brought down by an explosive device,” UK Prime Minister David Cameron's office said in a statement released Wednesday.

The British government statements came just one day

after British officials reassured Egypt's military dictator General Abdel el-Sisi that London would “reserve judgement” until official investigations concluded.

Immediately after issuing its claims of a terror plot, London announced the delay of a number of British flights based out of Sharm el-Sheikh airport and the suspension of British flights to and from Sinai, pending security investigations at the Egyptian airport.

Egypt's foreign office has issued muted criticisms of the British statements and flight restrictions, saying that they are “premature.”

Some commentators have continued to insist that the crash was likely caused by a mechanical failure rather than a terror plot. Analysts have cited a previous accident where the Airbus A321's tail end was damaged during a 2001 landing in Cairo.

“A bad repair is like a ticking time bomb, because once it's on the plane, it stays with the plane forever,” former US Department of Transportation (DOT) official Mary Schiavo said Wednesday, while speculating that the 2001 incident and subsequent maintenance failures may have caused the crash.

Predictably enough, the Metrojet air carrier that serviced the flight has rejected the possibility of a mechanical failure from the outset. The company claims that the plane passed regular inspections for years after 2001, having shown no signs of continuing damage.

The immense force of the plane's disintegration, which sprayed debris and human remains across a crash area spanning more than 100 square kilometers, strongly suggests that the Airbus was brought down by a large and sudden explosion. The absence of a distress call and the sudden, violent oscillations in altitude just before the crash add further weight to this theory.

Aside from a bomb being smuggled on board, such an

explosion could also arise from a freak engine malfunction that could have produced an explosion inside the plane, analysts have noted.

Given that the plane was destroyed about territory where IS militants are active, and that the main IS affiliate, IS in Iraq and Syria, is effectively at war with Russia, IS involvement in the attack is not implausible.

Key evidence about the incident remains undisclosed, however. No data from the plane's "black boxes" has yet been formally released. French investigators are still analyzing data from the plane's in-flight recording systems, and have yet to release any assessment of their contents.

Reports issuing from unnamed US intelligence officials, especially ones invited to secret briefings on highly sensitive issues, can hardly be taken at face value. The sources of the reports are members of agencies that are actively preparing covert operations and provocations against Russia, and are directly supporting the same extremist militant networks in Syria and Iraq out of which ISIS emerged.

While no firm conclusions can be drawn over the origins of the Sinai crash, some degree of suspicion over the incident is warranted, coming as it does just weeks after the launch of a new Russian military campaign in Syria that has included hundreds of airstrikes against both ISIS itself and other US-backed Islamist militant groups with close historical ties to ISIS.

The IS and its various affiliates emerged out of terrorist proxy armies that have received close support from Washington over a period of decades, as part of US or US-backed wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Washington has cultivated ties with violently anti-Russian extremist groups for years, including in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Leading members of ISIS were trained by US Special Forces while serving in the militaries of post-Soviet states along Russia's frontier, including Georgia and Tajikistan.

Most recently, Washington responded to the Russian intervention in Syria by accelerating its arms shipments, providing more high-tech forms of weaponry and deploying dozens of US Special Forces commandos to Syria for ground operations in support of anti-government militants.

Regardless of the true cause of the downing of Flight

9268, there should be no doubt that elements of the US government are fully prepared to sponsor bloody provocations against Russia in their drive for the overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Damascus and, ultimately, for the destabilization and dissolution of the Russian federation itself.



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