

“Foreign made bomb” destroyed Russian plane over Sinai, Moscow says

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The Russian commercial jetliner brought down over the Sinai in late October was destroyed by a homemade-style, “foreign made” TNT bomb, according to results of a Russian government investigation announced on Monday.

The plane exploded over the Sinai desert after departing from Sharm el-Sheikh, a vacation destination on the Red Sea that is popular with Russian tourists. At 224 dead, the incident represents the most deadly terror attack against Russia since the seizure of a primary school in Beslan by an Islamist terrorist faction in 2004.

Russia's FSB security agency announced the finding on Tuesday and offered a \$50 million reward for information leading to the capture of the perpetrators.

“According to our experts, a homemade explosive device equivalent to 1 kilogram of TNT went off onboard, which caused the plane to break up in the air, which explains why the fuselage was scattered over such a large territory. I can certainly say that this was a terrorist act,” said FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov.

The Russian government had initially rejected Western claims of a terror attack on Flight 9268 as premature. US and British officials made accusations of terrorism within days of the explosion.

Already last week, however, Russia moved to ban all Egyptian flights to Moscow and arranged for special flights for more than 70,000 Russian tourists stranded in Egypt, on which passengers were forbidden to check any luggage.

Russia is now seeking to harness the incident to justify an escalation of its military intervention in Syria. President Vladimir Putin ordered Russia's military commanders to prepare options for new forms of Russian involvement in response to the announcement.

“We will find them anywhere on the planet and

punish them,” Putin said Tuesday.

Russian long range bombers took off from Russian soil to launch dozens of cruise missiles against suspected ISIS targets following the announcement, Russian military officers told Putin in a hearing Tuesday.

Russian ships stationed in the Mediterranean fired salvos of cruise missiles as part of a bombardment hitting more than 200 targets, according to defense minister Sergei Shoigu. The strikes came just weeks after Russia fired missiles from naval ships in the Caspian Sea.

“We are conducting a mass airstrike campaign against Islamic State targets in Syria. We have now doubled the number of sorties, which is allowing us to conduct operations throughout the length and breadth of the country,” Shoigu said.

Russia will send some 40 additional military planes to Syria, Russian military officers said.

The Russian strikes come amid major escalations of the US and French bombing campaigns against Syria. In a single raid on Monday, US planes destroyed 115 civilian fuel trucks allegedly running supplies for ISIS. French forces launched as many as 30 strikes against the city of Raqqa in northern Syria over the weekend.

On Tuesday, the US and Turkey launched military operations to seal off the Turkish-Syrian border, according to statements from US Secretary of State John Kerry.

The US is “looking to do more” in Iraq, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said on Tuesday. According to recent statements by Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioglu, Turkey may start ground operations against IS within days or weeks.

Russia is attempting to leverage the Paris attacks and the impact of its military escalation to make overtures

to France. Russian officials said Tuesday that the two governments would cooperate in joint operations in Syria.

“This includes closer ties and joint operations between the military command and intelligence services of Russia and France in Syria,” a Russian government statement said.

Moscow ordered a Russian missile cruiser to patrol jointly with French ships in the eastern Mediterranean Tuesday, according to the Associated Press. Putin has invited French President Francois Hollande to Moscow for discussions at the end of November.

US officials have also softened their rhetoric toward Russia, citing the stepped up strikes by Moscow against ISIS.

“At least in recent days there has been more of a focus on ISIL and we welcome that,” US military spokesman Peter Cook said.

While the Russian report bolsters a growing consensus that the Metrojet explosion was indeed the result of a bomb, Egyptian authorities have insisted that the evidence remains inconclusive. Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Hossam Kamal told media that there is not any solid evidence proving a terror attack as yet. The Egyptian government is very concerned over the damage caused by the attack to the credibility of the Egyptian security apparatus and to the country's economically crucial tourism sector.

Egyptian authorities are holding at least 17 individuals in connection with the attack, including two employees of Sharm al-Sheikh airport who the government says may have helped attackers smuggle the bomb on board.



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