

US Detects Heat Around Doomed Russian Jet Just Before Crash

BY DMITRY LOVETSKY
Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — U.S. satellite imagery detected heat around a Russian passenger jet just before it went down in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, two U.S. officials said Tuesday. But the discovery doesn't resolve the mystery of why the plane crashed, killing all 224 aboard.

A missile striking the Metrojet Airbus A321-200 was ruled out because neither a launch nor an engine burn had been detected, one of the officials said.

The infrared activity that was detected could mean many things, including a bomb blast or that an engine on the plane exploded due to a malfunction.

Aviation analyst Paul Beaver said the heat picked up by the satellite "indicates that there was a catastrophic explosion or disintegration of the airplane," but doesn't reveal the cause.

"It doesn't tell us if it was a bomb ... or if somebody had a fight in the airplane with a gun — there is a whole raft of things that could happen in this regard," he said.

It also could indicate a fuel tank or engine exploding, although "engines are designed so that if something malfunctions or breaks off, it is contained within the engine," Beaver added.

Both U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the information publicly.

Some aviation experts had earlier suggested a bomb was the most likely cause of Saturday's crash, while some others pointed at a 2001 incident in which the jet damaged its tail during landing.

The Metrojet was flying from Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh to St. Petersburg when it crashed

Black boxes being analyzed

The Russian Metrojet's Airbus A321-200 black boxes have been found but an Egyptian government spokesman said Monday it would take two to four weeks to study the boxes and provide a full report on what caused the jetliner to crash.

Black boxes

Data from the cockpit voice recorder (known as the black box) and flight data recorder can help investigators reconstruct a crash.

Indestructible

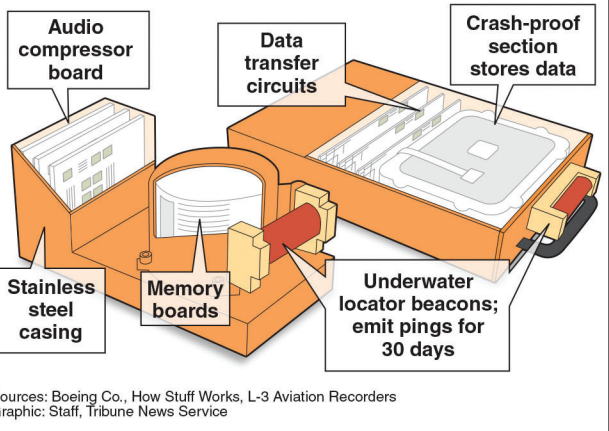
Two types of recorders on plane, designed to survive impact, crushing, heat and immersion in water

Cockpit voice recorder

- Pilot's voice
- Co-pilot's voice
- Third crew member
- Cockpit noises

Digital flight data recorder

- Altitude
- Rate of climb, drop
- Airspeed
- Flight control positions
- Orientation
- Engine power



Sources: Boeing Co., How Stuff Works, L-3 Aviation Recorders
Graphic: Staff, Tribune News Service

in the Sinai Peninsula after breaking up at high altitude, Russian aviation officials said.

Islamic State militants said they had "brought down" the Russian plane because of Moscow's recent military intervention in Syria against the extremist group. But the group did not provide any evidence to support its claim, and militants in northern Sinai have not shot down any commercial airliners or fighter jets.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi called that claim "propaganda" aimed at damaging the country's image, and he insisted the security situation in the Sinai Peninsula is under "full control."

In an interview with the BBC, el-Sissi also reiterated that the cause of the crash may not be known for months and said there should be no speculation about it.

President Vladimir Putin said Russia will keep fighting terrorism in Syria and elsewhere, adding that no one will succeed in scaring it.

His spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, rejected any connection between the crash and the Russian military action in Syria, saying there is no reason to link them.

An international team of experts prepared to analyze the plane's flight data and cockpit voice recorders, the so-called "black boxes."

The joint investigation

committee, which includes Egyptian, Russian, French and German experts as well as representatives from Ireland, where the plane was registered, was wrapping up its last field inspection at the crash site. It will start working on the recorders, said Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Hossam Kamal.

Kamal says it "will take some time" to produce the final report and that the committee "has all the tools and experts to deal with the investigation."

Russian Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said in televised remarks that Russian experts already had conducted a preliminary inspection of the recorders and had seen information from Egypt's flight control radars, but he wouldn't give further details.

As the investigation moved forward, more of the dead were brought to St. Petersburg. Alexei Smirnov of the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry said government planes have brought 140 bodies and other human remains so far, and families have identified 19 victims.

Mourners continued to come to St. Petersburg's Pulkovo airport to lay flowers, toys and other tributes. On the outskirts of town, tearful relatives of the victims left a crematorium where the identification process took place.

Alexander Agafonov, head of the Russian rescue mission in Egypt, said in a televised conference with other officials that searchers found no more bodies Tuesday after combing an area of 28 square kilometers (10.8 square miles). Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov said the site "should be studied centimeter by centimeter."

"If you need to sift through the sand where the remains or pieces of the fuselage could be, do it," he said.

Scandal At Volkswagen Widens

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's Volkswagen, already reeling from the fallout of cheating on U.S. emissions tests for nitrogen oxide, said Tuesday that an internal investigation has revealed "unexplained inconsistencies" in the carbon dioxide emissions from 800,000 of its vehicles — a development it said could cost the company another 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion).

The investigation was undertaken by the company after the revelations that many of its vehicles had software that allowed them to deceive U.S. nitrogen oxide tests. CEO Matthias Mueller promised Tuesday that Volkswagen "will relentlessly and completely clarify what has happened."

"It is a painful process, but for us there is no alternative," said Mueller, who took over after CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned in September because of the emissions-rigging scandal. "For us, only one thing counts, and that is the truth."

The news is the latest in a string of problems identified with Volkswagen emissions, which have caused share prices to plummet.

In September, the company admitted it had installed software designed to defeat tests for nitrogen oxide emissions for four-cylinder diesel engines on 11 million cars worldwide, including almost 500,000 in the U.S. It has already set aside 6.7 billion euros (\$7.4 billion) to cover the costs of recalling those vehicles — and analysts expect the emissions scandal to cost the company much more than that.

Feds Fine Japanese Company \$70 Million

DETROIT (AP) — U.S. auto safety regulators fined Japan's Takata Corp. \$70 million Tuesday for concealing evidence for years that its air bags are prone to explode with grisly consequences — a defect linked to eight deaths and more than 100 injuries worldwide.

Under an agreement with the government, Takata will phase out manufacture of air bag inflators that use ammonium nitrate, the propellant blamed for the explosions. It also agreed to a schedule over the next two years for replacing many of the devices already in use.

And unless it can prove they are safe, Takata may have to recall all its inflators, even those not yet implicated in the mess.

The company admitted that it knew for years that the inflators were defective but that it fended off recalls by failing to tell the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Delay, misdirection and refusal to acknowledge the truth allowed a serious problem to become a massive crisis," Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said.

Amateur Video Backs Claims Of Force

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Recent videos show Israeli troops shooting a wounded Palestinian at close range, pepper-spraying Palestinian medics, ramming a Palestinian with a jeep and threatening refugee camp residents with tear gas "until you die" unless they stop throwing stones.

Palestinians and Israeli human rights groups contend the images, many captured by amateur smartphone users, buttress long-standing allegations of excessive force — particularly amid a wave of Palestinian stabbing attacks in which top Israeli politicians and security commanders have encouraged forces to shoot to kill suspected assailants.

"There is a very clear message sent by those politicians and military commanders that this is how law enforcement should behave," said Sarit Michaeli of the Israeli group B'Tselem, which documents rights abuses.

Israel's army and police defended the actions shown in the videos, with the exception of an officer who was suspended over the tear gas threat.

"Our activities in all of the cases have been responses to Palestinian aggression," said Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, an Israeli military spokesman. Israel itself has released several videos showing its forces shooting stabbers.

Report Of Humanitarian Funding Shortage

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The combined resources of U.N. agencies, the Red Cross and humanitarian organizations are no longer enough to protect the 60 million people displaced by war and persecution around the world, the U.N. refugee chief said Tuesday.

Governments, private citizens, corporations and foundations have provided the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees with a record \$3.3 billion last year, Antonio Guterres told the General Assembly's human rights committee. Yet humanitarian budgets aren't enough "to cover even the bare minimum, and we are starting to see what happens as a result of that," he said.

Guterres said "the trigger" for the mass arrival of Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and Eritreans in the eastern Mediterranean this year "is the humanitarian funding shortfall."

He also cited two longer-term trends: After years in exile most of the four million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries have depleted their savings and lost hope of a political solution to end the nearly five-year conflict.

Currently, Guterres said, 70 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in "extreme poverty" and 86 percent in urban areas of Jordan are living below the country's poverty line.

Photo Of GMA Anchor Hugging Trump

NEW YORK (AP) — An Instagram photo of ABC News' "Good Morning America" co-anchor Lara Spencer hugging presidential hopeful Donald Trump is drawing a mix of responses on social media and in real life.

In the photo posted Tuesday, Spencer has one arm around Trump's shoulder and the other across his midsection. Trump's hand is on her waist. They are both smiling. Spencer's message that initially accompanied the photo: "Can't beat having the REAL DonaldJTrump on," with a smiley face.

The photo, snapped Tuesday morning on the "GMA" set, triggered comments on Instagram that ranged from support for Spencer and Trump to attacks on her professionalism. After a number of critical comments were posted, Spencer clarified in the Instagram post that she was not seated in his lap, as it appeared to some observers, but "standing next to Donald Trump. Said a quick hello and welcomed him to the GMA studio for first time since he announced his candidacy."

Syria Journalist Killed Amid Violence In Damascus Suburb

BY ALBERT AJI
Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — A Syrian journalist was killed Tuesday in a suburb of the capital, Damascus, amid intense clashes and shelling between government troops and rebel fighters as diplomatic efforts to end the country's civil war continued to falter.

Batoul Mokhles al-Warar, a broadcaster at Noor al-Sham TV channel and Damascus radio station, was killed by mortar rounds fired by "terrorists," the SANA news agency said. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the journalist was killed in shelling of the government-held Dahiyat al-Assad neighborhood, which has been frequently targeted by rebel attacks.

The Observatory said government troops shelled the rebel-held Damascus suburbs of Douma and Daraya. There were reports of clashes and casualties on the outskirts of both suburbs.

Violence in Damascus suburbs where rebels have been entrenched for years has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians.

Overall violence in Syria has surged since Russia, a top ally of embattled Syrian President Bashar Assad, began airstrikes around the country on Sept. 30. Moscow says it is targeting militant groups, but civilians and Western-backed rebel groups have also come under attack.

Russian news agencies quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov as

saying on Tuesday that Moscow aimed to host talks between Syrian officials and opposition leaders next week. He said the Syrian government had agreed to participate, but it was unclear which opposition groups would attend.

He did not give a specific date for the proposed talks. The proposed talks were expected to be discussed Wednesday at a meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.N. Syrian envoy Staffan de Mistura, Bogdanov said.

Ahmed Ramadan, a senior member of the Syrian National Coalition, told The Associated Press that the opposition group has not received an invitation to Moscow and would not accept such a meeting anyway.

"The coalition believes that Moscow is not an appropriate place to hold any meetings related to reviving the political process in Syria," he said, adding that the process needs an "unbiased mediator" while "Russia is a partner in the aggression on the Syrian people."

Russia earlier this year hosted two meetings with government representatives and members of the political opposition, which did not include the Syrian National Coalition, the main Western-backed political opposition group.

However, Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faysal Mekdad said during a visit to Tehran Tuesday that there was nothing "official" about a meeting between the Syrian opposition and the government and rejected any discussion about a political transition in Syria.

"There is no transitional period in Syr-

ia. It only exists in the mind of those who are far from reality," he said, according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

International talks to pursue a new peace effort involving Syria's Iranian-backed government and opposition groups were held in Vienna last week. The negotiations left open the thorny question of when Assad might leave power, and it was unclear whether he or disparate rebel groups fighting to topple him would sign on to any peace proposal.

A new round of talks is expected to take place within two weeks.

Emboldened by the Russian air campaign, Syrian government troops, backed by an increasing number of Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, have been on the offensive on several fronts in an attempt to secure supply routes and regain control of strategic areas. Iran is another strong ally of Assad.

On Tuesday, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency said an officer with the elite Revolutionary Guard force had been killed in Syria. Col. Mostafa Ezzatollah Soleimani died in fighting in Syria's contested province of Aleppo, the report said.

Seven Revolutionary Guard commanders were killed in Syria in October, Fars said.

Iran has provided Assad's government with military and political backing for years, recently saying it has increased the number of advisers from the Revolutionary Guards on the ground there. However, Tehran denies having combat troops in Syria.

No Joint Declaration At Asia Defense Meet Amid Sea Tensions

BY ROBERT BURNS
AND EILEEN NG
Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Divisions within Asia over China's claims in the disputed South China Sea spilled over Wednesday to a meeting of U.S. and Asian defense ministers, where China insisted the group make no public mention of the waterway in a joint declaration intended as a public display of unity.

A senior American official traveling with Defense Secretary Ash Carter said plans for a joint statement were canceled, reflecting a split with China and perhaps other Asian nations over citing the South China Sea issue. The U.S. official spoke on condition of anonymity because the defense ministers were still in closed-door meetings.

A Malaysian official, whose country hosted the talks, confirmed the joint

declaration was scrapped and will be replaced by a chairman's statement. The official declined to give details.

The U.S. official said that China, which like the United States is not a member of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations but was attending the defense ministers' meeting as an invited partner, was adamant that the meeting's final public statement omit any mention of the South China Sea. The Americans argued that it would be better to make no joint statement at all rather than issue one that omitted mention of the contentious South China Sea issue.

Carter was expected to hold a news conference later Wednesday.

China's claims in the South China Sea are disputed by several countries in the region, including Malaysia, which is hosting the meeting.

It was not clear what

Carter or other attendees wanted the meeting's final public statement to say about the South China Sea, which is a highly trafficked waterway with longstanding territorial disputes.

Carter met with his Chinese counterpart, Chang Wanquan on Tuesday evening, and U.S. officials said afterward that Chang repeated the Chinese government's earlier criticisms of U.S. naval movements in the South China Sea. They said he called the U.S. actions provocative and illegal, but they also said the exchanges between Carter and Chang were cordial.

The U.S. officials who briefed reporters on the dispute about mentioning the South China Sea in the group's final statement said that it reflected divisions in the region created by China's reclamation of coral reefs and other land formations in the waterway.

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