EGYPTAIR FLIGHT FROM PARIS TO CAIRO CRASHES WITH 66 ON BOARD, OFFICIALS SAY

News / Airlines



An EgyptAir flight traveling to Cairo from Paris crashed early Thursday with 66 passengers and crew members on board, Egyptian aviation officials said.

Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail said it was too early to say whether a technical issue or a terror attack had cause the plane to crash. He told reporters at Cairo airport, “We cannot rule anything out.”

Flight 804, an Airbus A320, was lost from radar at 2:45 a.m. Cairo time (8:45 p.m. EDT) when it was flying at 37,000 feet 175 miles north of the Egyptian coast, the airline said.

Officials from Egypt's Civil Aviation ministry said the "possibility that the plane crashed has been confirmed," as the plane failed to land in any nearby airports.

EgyptAir later confirmed that a signal had been picked up from the plane two hours after it

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disappeared from radar, thought to have been an emergency beacon.

Hours later, Egyptian military said in a statement they didn't receive any distress calls from the plane. However, they didn't specify whether they were confirming the initial report that no stress call was received when the plane vanished or when an emergency signal was supposedly received two hours later.

Egyptian military aircraft and navy ships were searching for debris from the plane, which was carrying 56 passengers, including one child and two babies, and 10 crew members. EgyptAir later confirmed the nationalities of those on board as including 15 French passengers, 30 Egyptians, one Briton, two Iraqis, one Kuwaiti, one Saudi, one Sudanese, one Chadian, one Portuguese, one Algerian and one Canadian.



Greece sent two aircraft to join the search and rescue operation: one C-130 and one early warning aircraft, officials at the Hellenic National Defense General Staff said. They said one frigate was also heading to the area, and helicopters are on standby on the southern island of Karpathos for potential rescue or recovery operations.

"We are not ruling out any hypothesis," French Prime Minister Manuel Valls told reporters Thursday. "We are trying to gather all the information available." Valls later told RTL radio France was "ready" to join the search operation if Egyptian authorities requested his country's assistance.

French president Francois Hollande spoke with Egyptian president Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi on the phone and agreed to "closely cooperate to establish as soon as possible the circumstances" in which the EgyptAir flight disappeared, according to a statement issued in Paris.

Airbus is aware of the disappearance, but "we have no official information at this stage of the certitude of an accident," the company's spokesman Jacques Rocca said.

The Airbus A320 is a widely used twin-engine, single-aisle plane that operates on short and medium-haul routes. Nearly 4,000 A320s are currently in use around the world. The versions

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EgyptAir operates are equipped to carry 145 passengers.

Britain's Daily Telegraph quoted a French security source as saying "We cannot rule out the possibility of a terrorist attack." Another French official told the paper, "We would be extremely surprised and concerned if there had been a security breach at [Paris'] Charles de Gaulle [airport] ... We believe that is highly unlikely."

France remains under a state of emergency after terror attacks by ISIS killed 130 people in November.

There was no immediate comment from the U.S. government about the crash.

The Associated Press reported that around 15 family members of passengers on board the missing flight had arrived at Cairo airport Thursday morning. Airport authorities brought doctors to the scene after several distressed family members collapsed.

The incident renewed security concerns months after a Russian passenger plane was blown out of the sky over the Sinai Peninsula. The Russian plane crashed in Sinai on Oct. 31, killing all 224 people on board. Moscow said it was brought down by an explosive device, and a local branch of the extremist Islamic State group (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for planting it.

In 1999, EgyptAir Flight 1990 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean near the Massachusetts island of Nantucket, killing all 217 people aboard, U.S. investigators filed a final report that concluded its co-pilot switched off the autopilot and pointed the Boeing 767 downward. But Egyptian officials rejected the notion of suicide altogether, insisting some mechanical reason caused the crash.

In March, an EgyptAir plane was hijacked and diverted to Cyprus. A man who admitted to the hijacking and was described by Cypriot authorities as "psychologically unstable" is in custody.

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