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'Heat Flash' Coincided With Russian Airliner Crash: Reports

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The mystery surrounding the crash of a Russian airliner over northern Egypt deepened late Monday, when reports surfaced of a “heat flash” at the time of the incident.

Infrared satellite imaging of the Sinai showed a sudden flash of heat at the time a Russian airliner crashed Saturday under unclear circumstances.

The revelations were made public in a report by CBS, which noted, “The data is still being analyzed in an effort to determine what caused the flash.”

“One possibility is a bomb, but an explosion in a fuel tank or engine as the result of a mechanical failure is also possible,” the broadcaster reported.

Aviation analyst Miles O'Brian told CNN, “The number of heat signatures is crucial.”

“If, in fact, only one was detected, that in some respects might steer one away from a missile launch and onto some idea of an explosion onboard the aircraft,” he stated.

While the aircraft's owner Kogalymavia has blamed an “external influence” for the crash, both Russian and Egyptian authorities have maintained claims the aircraft was downed by militants remain unlikely.

Earlier Monday Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi described claims that Sinai militants shot down the aircraft as “propaganda.”

Speaking to the BBC, Sisi claimed speculation militants were responsible are “one way to damage the stability and security of Egypt.”

“Believe me, the situation in Sinai – especially in this limited area – is under our full control,” he said.

Egypt has struggled to quell a persistent insurgency in the Sinai since Sisi seized power in a 2013 coup.

According to Egyptian Prime Minister Sharif Ismail, Sinai militants are not believed to possess weapons capable of hitting a commercial airliner at over 9,000 meters.

Shortly after the crash Saturday, militants claiming to be affiliated with the Islamic State group said they were responsible for the disaster.

“The soldiers of the caliphate succeeded in bringing down a Russian plane in Sinai,” the militants said in a statement circulated online. Both Russian and Egyptian authorities have said the statement lacks credibility, though a number of international airlines have said they won't fly over the Sinai until further information is made available.

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