

Terrorism suspected in crash of Egyptian jet; 66 feared dead

Associated Press

CAIRO — An EgyptAir jetliner en route from Paris to Cairo with 66 people aboard veered wildly in flight and crashed in the Mediterranean Sea early Thursday, authorities said. Egyptian and Russian officials said it may have been brought down by terrorists.

There were no signs of survivors.

EgyptAir Flight 804, an Airbus A320 with 56 passengers and 10 crew members, went down about halfway between the Greek island of Crete and Egypt's coastline, or around 175 miles offshore, after takeoff from Charles de Gaulle Airport, authorities said.

Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos said the plane spun all the way around and suddenly lost altitude just before vanishing from radar screens around 2:45 a.m. Cairo time.

He said it made a 90-degree left turn, then a full 360-degree turn to the right, plummeting from 38,000 feet to 15,000 feet. It disappeared at about 10,000 feet, he said. There were no reports of stormy weather at the time.

Egyptian and Greek authorities in ships and planes searched the suspected crash area throughout the day for traces of the airliner or its victims, with more help on the way from the U.S., Britain and France.

But as night fell, they had yet to find any confirmed debris, at one point dismissing a reported sighting of life vests and other floating material.

Civil Aviation Minister Sherif Fathi cautioned that the disaster was still under investigation but said the possibility it was a terror attack "is higher than the possibility of having a technical failure."

Alexander Bortnikov, chief of Russia's top domestic security agency, went further, saying: "In all likelihood it was a terror attack."

There was no immediate claim from militants that they had downed the plane. If it was terrorism, it would be the second deadly attack involving Egypt's aviation industry in seven months.

Last October, a Russian passenger plane that took off from an Egyptian Red Sea



In this Dec. 10, 2014 image an EgyptAir Airbus A320 with the registration SU-GCC on the tarmac at Cairo airport. Egyptian aviation officials said on Thursday that an EgyptAir flight MS804 with the registration SU-GCC, travelling from Paris to Cairo with 66 passengers and crew on board has crashed.



Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail talks to reporters at Cairo International Airport. He said it was too early to say whether a technical problem or a terror attack caused the plane to crash.

resort crashed in the Sinai, killing all 224 people aboard. Russia said it was brought down by a bomb, and a local branch of the Islamic State claimed responsibility.

Thursday's disaster also raises questions about security at De Gaulle Airport, at a time when Western Europe

has been on high alert over the deadly Islamic extremist attacks in Paris and at the Brussels airport and subway over the past six months.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said that airport security had been tightened considerably before the disaster, in part because of

the coming European soccer championship, which France is hosting.

The Egyptian military said it did not receive a distress call from the doomed plane, and Egypt's state-run daily Al-Ahram quoted an uniden-

tified airport official as saying the pilot did not send one. That could mean that whatever sent the aircraft plummeting into the sea was sudden.

Its erratic course suggested a number of possible explanations, including a catastrophic mechanical or structural failure, a bombing, or a struggle over the controls with a hijacker in the cockpit.

Egyptian security officials said they were running background checks on the passengers to see if any had links to extremists.

In the U.S., the FBI offered its assistance in the investigation. FBI Director James Comey said the bureau has no evidence yet that the plane was brought down intentionally.

California Rep. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said there is much that is unknown.

"We are looking through our intelligence collections to figure out if we have any images. Do we have any signals intelligence that reveals a discussion of a plot like this?" Schiff said.

"We're working with the French to try to figure out if there any information we have that could shed light on any of the passengers, but there's nothing yet to confirm the cause of the plane crash."

He said the plane seemed to have broken apart in flight, but why is unclear.

Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Robert Latiff, an aerospace expert at the University of Notre Dame, said that while it is too early to tell for certain, an accidental structural failure of the highly reliable A320 is "vanishingly improbable."

He also cast doubt on the possibility of a struggle in the cockpit, saying the crew would have triggered an alarm.

Instead, he said, "sabotage is possible, and if there were lax controls at airports and loose hiring and security policies, increasingly likely."

Similarly, John Goglia, a former U.S. National Transportation Safety Board member, said early indications point more to a bomb, since it appears that no mayday call was issued during the abrupt turns. He said the aircraft's black-box voice and data recorders should hold the answers.

Those on board, according to EgyptAir and various governments, included 15 French passengers, 30 Egyptians, two Iraqis, one Briton, one Kuwaiti, one Saudi, one Sudanese, one Chadian, one Portuguese, one Belgian, one Algerian and two Canadians. Two babies were aboard, officials said.

Whatever caused the crash, the disaster is likely to deepen Egypt's woes as the country struggles to revive its ailing economy, particularly its lucrative tourism industry. It has been battered by the bloodshed and political turmoil that have engulfed Egypt since the 2011 overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak.

French President Francois Hollande held an emergency meeting at the Elysee Palace. He also spoke with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi by telephone and agreed to "closely cooperate to establish as soon as possible the circumstances" surrounding the disaster, according to a statement.

SCAMS: 84 percent of lottery fraud victims were over 55

Continued from 1A

pretending to be a family member in trouble. He remembered one case where the victim sent \$40,000 and because the money was wired, it couldn't be recovered.

"These people prey on opportunity," Roberts said.

Roberts said the department has seen a 21 percent increase in fraud cases like these over the last five years. Phone scams aren't the only way victims can be bilked out of money; sometimes it's an email baiting for personal information, or even someone going through the trash to dig up old junk mail.

Roberts urged people not to throw out mail or personal documents without shredding it first, and to never give out personal information online or over the phone.

"It's that simple. You just don't do it," he said.

Ellen Klem, director of consumer outreach for the DOJ, said it's important for people to know how to identify whether they're the target of a scam. She presented six signs that should raise immediate red flags: First, the scammer contacts someone out of the blue; they might claim there is some kind of emergency, and they need help; they'll ask for personal information, like credit card or Social Security numbers; they'll want the victim to wire them money, or send prepaid debit cards; they will tell the victim to keep their deal a secret; and, finally, the offer usually sounds too good to be true.

"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," Klem said.

Tools to identify potential scams

Both the state of Oregon and AARP have several tools available to alert residents of new scams and file complaints if they feel they have been victimized.

The Oregon Department of Justice has consumer tips and information available online at www.oregonconsumer.gov. The website includes a link to file complaints online, or people can call the Attorney General's Consumer Hotline at 1-877-877-9392.

Anyone selling investments in Oregon must also have a securities license and register with the Oregon Division of Finance and Corporate Securities. To check a license, visit www.brokercheck.org or call 1-800-289-9999. Consumers can also call 1-866-814-9710 to see if an investment or security is registered in state.

Finally, AARP has an online Fraud Watch Network where consumers can sign up for alerts in all 50 states. The network is available at www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork.

"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

— Ellen Klem, director of consumer outreach for the Department of Justice

A 2011 survey found 81 percent of investment fraud victims and 84 percent of lottery fraud victims were over 55, according to the DOJ. Scam Jams are exclusively targeted to seniors to increase awareness. Klem said the best thing they can do if they think they're dealing with a scammer is to simply hang up, or not engage.

Diane Childs, outreach coordinator with the state Division of Finance and Corporate Securities, said seniors should take steps to make themselves financially secure, which in turn makes them less vulnerable to scam or fraudulent investment. She emphasized the importance of having a spending and retirement plan to help manage both short- and

long-term finances.

Bill Hamilton, with AARP Oregon, provided additional tools to recognize scammers, which the organization has compiled into a booklet titled "The Con Artist's Playbook." He said scams are successful because the scammers have learned a number of tricks, including how to play on their victim's emotions and pressure them into making what would otherwise seem like an irrational decision.

Con artists also make up fake credentials and try to build a personal rapport with victims in order to lure them into their schemes. Awareness is the best way to beat scammers at their own game, Hamilton said.

"It is all of our responsibility to make sure we are prepared as best we can to shut the scammers down," he said.

The next two Scam Jams will be held June 2 and 3 in Beaverton and Gresham.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Carriers Needed in Pendleton

We have available routes for North Hill, South Hill, as well as the East and West Sides.

Sign on bonus offered after 90 days contracted.

Call or stop in person for more information.

\$200 Sign On Bonus*

*Paid after 90 days contracted

EAST OREGONIAN

211 SE Byers Ave., Pendleton
541-276-2211 or 1-800-522-0255

