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Su-27s Grounded After Karelia Crash

By Jonathan Earle

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An Su-27, like the one pictured here, crashed in Karelia Thursday morning.

The Air Force grounded its Su-27 fleet after a fighter jet crashed Thursday in a forest near Karelia's Besovets airport, coincidentally not far from the site of an airliner crash that killed 47 people almost exactly a year ago.

The two pilots of the Su-27 jet ejected from their plane at 9:51 a.m. above the northwestern republic near Finland, and were quickly rescued with minor injuries, the Air Force said.

No deaths or injuries were reported on the ground.

An Air Force official said the plane crashed during landing after a weather-scouting mission.

Amateur video footage from the crash site posted on RIA-Novosti's website showed uniformed men descending on a mass of smoldering, twisted metal in the middle of a pine forest.

The cause of the crash was not immediately apparent, although the plane might have struck a

bird, RIA-Novosti said.

Investigators are also considering the possibility that an onboard flight system failed or pilot error, according to media reports.

The Investigative Committee said in a statement that it was looking into whether the pilots had violated flight safety rules.

Both of the flight recorders have been found and will be sent to the Defense Ministry to be decoded.

Flights of the Su-27 have been suspended pending the results of the investigation.

The Su-27 went down near the site where a Tu-134 airliner crashed during landing on June 20, 2011, killing 47 of 52 passengers on board.

The Interstate Aviation Committee blamed the Tu-134 crash partly on the pilot, who was drunk and ordered a less-experienced pilot to violate landing rules in heavy fog.

Karelia's leader later called for the Besovets airport to be renamed. The name "Besovets" is derived from the word "bes" or "demon."

The Su-27 that crashed on Thursday was the seventh lost in the past five years. The previous crash occurred in April 2011, when a control system failure caused the jet to go down near Vladivostok. The pilot survived after ejecting safely.

The Su-27, a fourth-generation fighter, entered into service in 1990. Built by the Sukhoi company for the Air Force, it is also used by armed forces of China and several countries throughout the former Soviet Union, Southeast Asia and Africa.

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