

Russian Jet Changes Course After Syria Missile Scare

By [The Moscow Times](#)

April 30, 2013



A Nordwind Airlines Boeing 757 landing at Sheremetyevo Airport.

A Russian charter flight with 159 passengers changed course over Syria after a missile scare that has prompted the Transportation and Foreign ministries to open an inquiry.

The scare occurred Monday while the Airbus A320 jet operated by Nordwind Airlines was flying to Kazan from the Egyptian resort of Sharm-el-Sheikh.

Interfax, citing unidentified Russian officials, reported Tuesday that two ground-to-air missiles were fired at the plane, missing it by only several hundred meters. The plane was at the altitude of 9,800 meters when it was fired on, it said, adding that one missile exploded at 9,200 meters and the other at 8,900 meters.

The crew took emergency measures to ascend another 1,000 meters, thus preventing the plane from being damaged by missile fragments.

But Maya Lomnidze, head of the Russian Association of Tour Operators, suggested that the pilots had seen fighting below and worried that it might threaten their aircraft.

"According to our information, there was no firing whatsoever" at the plane, she said on Ekho Moskvyy radio.

The plane landed safely and on time at the Kazan airport, and a subsequent check found no damage to the aircraft, airport director Alexei Starostin told Interfax.

The Foreign Ministry said it would check whether the plane had faced any danger flying over Syria, where a months-long civil war has claimed hundreds of lives.

"The Foreign Ministry will take the necessary emergency measures to clear up the details of the story and work in cooperation with the Syrian authorities," ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a statement.

The Federal Air Transport Agency has recommended that Russian airlines be banned from flying over areas where fighting is taking place, Interfax reported.

Moreover, the agency, which was also looking into Monday's incident, has recommended that airline pilots review a checklist on how to keep their planes from being hit by missiles.

Other Russian airlines offered assurances on Tuesday that none of their flights went over Syrian airspace.

The Tatarstan airline said had followed a recommendation from the Federal Air Transport Agency and redirected flights from Egypt on a route bypassing Syria a month ago. "The Federal Air Transport Agency advised not to fly into regions with war activity a year ago but not many people listened," airline official Gulnaz Minnihanova told Interfax. "It gave another recommendation on that a month ago, and we followed it. But as far as I know, some airlines have continued to fly as before."

UTair also said it stopped flying over Syria last month.

"Despite the slightly increased travel time, we made this decision following the recommendations that we received and in order to ensure passenger safety," it said in a [statement](#).

Nordwind Airlines, which had no immediate comment on the Syria incident, experienced a separate scare earlier this month when the chassis of one of its Boeing 767 jets caught fire during landing at the Krasnoyarsk airport. A towing crew was the first to spot that the left side of the Boeing 767 had caught fire after it landed April 11 on a flight from Bangkok. The flames were quickly put out by the towing crew, and all 285 passengers were unharmed.

Nordwind Airlines is a charter airline based at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport. Founded in 2008 by the Russian and Turkish divisions of the tour operator Pegasus, it operates a fleet of about 20, mainly Boeing aircraft.

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