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Airlines to Consider Evacuating Tourists from Egypt

By Anatoly Medetsky

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Army soldiers clashing with supporters of Mohamed Morsi inside the al-Fath mosque in central Cairo last week. **Muhammad Hamed / REUTERS**

The Federal Aviation Agency has ordered airlines to make contingency plans for evacuating Russian tourists from Egypt, as violent clashes between the country's government and Islamists continue.

The plans should include options for airlifting people from alternative locations in the event that the usual airports of Cairo, Hurgada and Sharm-el-Sheik shut down, the agency said Friday.

The Foreign Ministry earlier this week warned against traveling to the riots-torn Egypt. The government on Thursday banned tour companies from selling vacations in Egypt.

Russia's largest airline, Aeroflot, said it was ready to take passengers out of Egypt as soon as it

receives instructions to do so, company spokeswoman Irina Dannenberg said. Anyone who changed his or her mind about flying to the country may fully cash back their tickets, she said.

Transaero, which also has flights to Egypt, said it adopted the same ticket refund policy for Egypt.

Aeroflot and Transaero continue with their service to the country because the authorities have not asked them to suspend the route.

The Association of Tour Operators of Russia is going to petition the Transportation Ministry to restrict flights to Egypt, said Maya Lomidze, the group's executive director.

If airlines have the green light to fly to the country but have no tourists to carry, they could charge tour companies for lost revenue, she said.

The situation in Egypt began heating up Wednesday when the armed forces dispersed a tent camp of supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi.

Tour companies could lose $35 million because of canceling the 50,000 trips to Egypt that had been sold, Lomidze said.

There are at least 53,000 Russian tourists in Egypt at the moment, according to the association.

More than 100 people called a government hotline on Thursday, complaining that tour companies declined refunds on Egyptian tours, the Consumer Protection Agency said Friday.

The embassy of Egypt in Moscow said Friday that Russia had no reason to fear for the safety of tourists in Egypt. The Egyptian government is doing all it takes to ensure that tourists do not feel threatened, said the embassy's information department chief, Shahin Ezzeddin. Not a single accident with foreign tourists has taken place, he said.

Russia is not alone in taking precautions about travel to Egypt. German divisions of tour companies Thomas Cook and TUI have canceled tours to Egypt through Sept. 15 after the country's Foreign Ministry warned against vacations in that country. Belgium on Friday advised its citizens against any trips to Egypt.

Oil prices increased in part thanks to the unrest in Egypt, and Brent futures traded at more than $111 a barrel on Friday, a two-week high. The price changed little on Friday after it climbed about $1 on Thursday, the day after the unrest broke out.

Egypt is not a crucial crude producer, but about 7 percent of the world's oil tankers travelled last year trough the Suez Canal, which it controls.

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