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3 Russians Killed in South Sudan Were 'Shot Down,' UN Says

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A United Nations helicopter that crashed in South Sudan last month was shot down after a rebel commander alleged that UN aircraft were being used to transport government troops, the mission in South Sudan said Tuesday.

Three Russian crewmen were killed and another was wounded on Aug. 26 when the helicopter crashed near the disputed town of Bentiu in Unity state. Experts who concluded the first stage of the investigation had uncovered evidence indicating that the aircraft was shot down, the UN mission said in a statement.

Despite the threats to shoot down UN aircraft by the rebel commander, Peter Gadet, it was still premature to say who shot down the Mi-8 cargo helicopter, the UN mission said.

Gadet alleged during a phone call with a UN staffer on Aug. 17 that the UN was transporting government forces, allegations the staffer denied, according to the statement. It also said that after Gadet's allegation, the UN mission in South Sudan immediately started sharing information on all its flights into Bentiu with the opposition forces and government troops

in order to ensure the safety of its aircraft.

Akol Ayom Wek, a spokesman for the governor of the northern Bahr el-Ghazal state, said at the time that Gadet had shot down the helicopter after warning the UN not to fly over his territory.

Gadet is one of the South Sudanese military generals who defected after violence broke out in the world's newest country last December. His forces are loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar, who is accused by South Sudanese President Salva Kiir of launching a failed coup bid that the government says sparked violence that has killed thousands of people.

The UN statement on Tuesday said a technical investigation is being conducted to conclusively determine the source of the ground fire which brought down the helicopter.

The UN Security Council condemned the attack, saying those responsible must be held accountable.

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