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Russia's Su-27 Fleet Grounded Over Deadly Crash

By The Moscow Times

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Head of the Russian Air Force, Colonel-General Viktor Bondarev has ordered the grounding of the country's entire Su-27 fleet, until the reasons behind the crash that led to a pilot's death on Thursday are clear, the TASS news agency reported.

Meanwhile, investigators working at the crash site recovered the flight-data recorder and sent it to the Defense Ministry's Research Institute. The black box was in good condition, according to TASS.

A Su-27 fighter jet crashed on Thursday morning in the Moscow Region, TASS reported. The body of the pilot was found in the forest at the accident site, located about two kilometers from the village of Muranovo.

The crash was likely caused by a technical error, the Defense Ministry's press service said, adding that the pilot attempted to avoid crashing into the village. "He had no time left for ejection," Ministry representatives added.

The aircraft fell apart into pieces, but the color of surviving parts indicates that it belongs to the elite aerobatics squad Russkiye Vityazi, or Russian Knights, an unidentified source within the emergency services told TASS.

The Defense Ministry confirmed that the jet crashed while returning to the airbase after a planned flight. Six jets from the Russian Knights squad took part in the opening ceremony of a monument dedicated to Russian aviators in the village of Anushkino earlier on Thursday. Only five of them returned to the airbase, TASS reported.

The plane probably exploded upon impact, an unidentified crash witness told the journalists. "There was a loud explosion, and a column of smoke rising from the forest," he added, TASS reported.

The jet was piloted by Major Sergei Yeremenko, according to TASS. The first-class military pilot graduated from the Krasnodar Military Aviation Institute in 2003. During his service, he flew the Yak-52, L-39, MiG-29 and Su-27 aircrafts, and spent more than 800 hours piloting the jets.

The Sukhoi Su-27, a twin-engine fighter aircraft joined the Soviet military forces in 1984. An Su-27 jet weighs about 22.5 tons and can carry up to six guided missiles of medium range and up to four short-range missiles.

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