

The West to Blame for Russian Plane Crash Chaos, says Security Official

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Karen Danielyan/ AP

A regional branch of Russia's security services has pointed fingers at the West, after a plane crash revealed a lack of emergency preparedness at a regional airport.

On Jan. 4, an Airbus aircraft operated by Russia's flagship Aeroflot Airline [overran the runway](#) at Kaliningrad's Khrabrovo Airport, reportedly after the plane's nose landing gear gave way. Six passengers were treated for minor injuries.

However, in the wake of the crash, workers could not remove the damaged plane from the runway since the airport lacked the necessary equipment. Over 20 flights were cancelled and the airport was forced to shut down for a day as a result. Angry passengers also criticized the airport's handling of the crash, and the subsequent technical chaos has proven an embarrassment for airport and local authorities.

But don't blame the pilots, a source close to the security services' Kaliningrad branch [told](#) the Regnum news agency. The real cause is Russia's foes.

The problems at Khrabrovo airport were “the main thing that the West has achieved since [the annexation of] Crimea,” the security source said. The source did not clarify exactly how the West caused the problems at the airport. However, the statement’s logic seems centered on the region’s geography.

Kaliningrad is an exclave of the Russian Federation sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea. As a result, the only way for Russian citizens to visit the region is by plane, unless they have an international passport and the requisite transit documents.

For this reason, problems at Khrabrovo have an outsized effect on the Kaliningrad region’s accessibility. Increased tensions between Russia and the European Union presumably accentuate these concerns.

Technical issues are, however, far from a new phenomenon at Khrabrovo.

The airport has been under construction for over 10 years. Many expected that the 2018 World Cup – to be held in cities across Russia, including Kaliningrad – would force the local authorities to finish the job. However, construction work has not sped up, despite direct orders from President Vladimir Putin.

Yesterday, Kaliningrad’s acting governor, Anton Alikhanov stated that he was taking personal responsibility for problems at the airport after the crash.

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