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Two Including Russian Pilot Killed in Mali Plane Crash

By AFP

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An L-39C Albatros Russian aircraft during a ceremony to receive a new shipment of Russian equipment for the Malian armed forces in Bamako, Mali, Aug. 9, 2022. **EPA/STR/TASS**

A Russian pilot and a member of ground crew staff died Tuesday when a plane that Russia recently delivered to Mali's armed forces crashed near the northern city of Gao, an official and the military said.

Video provided to AFP by a witness showed an aircraft descending at high speed before crashing in a plume of smoke.

A military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said a Russian pilot had been killed.

The military's general staff said a pilot and a "ground crew member" lost their lives, without giving their nationalities.

Ten more people — two civilians and eight members of the military — were injured, two gravely, it added.

The military earlier confirmed a plane had crashed near Gao airport at around 9:30 am "on its way back from a mission to support the civilian population."

It said it was a Sukhoi Su-25, but the military official previously identified the plane as an Albatros, a Soviet-era Czechoslovakian-built model.

Both were among the equipment Russia delivered to the Malian army in August.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the aircraft was one of the Malian army's "new acquisitions."

Mali's ruling junta, which seized power in August 2020, has turned away from the country's traditional ally France and toward Russia.

The Kremlin's support has included large numbers of ground operatives, who Mali describes as military trainers but who western countries say are paramilitaries with the private organization Wagner, as well as combat aircraft and helicopters.

Mali has faced a jihadist insurgency since 2012. Violence that began in the north of the country has spread to central and southern Mali, as well as to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger.

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