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Azerbaijani Plane Headed for Russia Likely Damaged By 'External Objects' Before Crash – Probe

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Issa Tazhenbayev / AFP

A Russia-bound Azerbaijan Airlines plane was likely damaged by “external objects” before it crashed in late December 2024, according to a preliminary report published Tuesday by Kazakh authorities.

The AZAL Embraer 190 jet was en route from Baku to Grozny on Dec. 25 when it disappeared from radar near Russia's Caspian Sea coast. It later reappeared and crashed near the Kazakh city of Aktau, killing 38 of the 67 people on board.

Kazakhstan's transport ministry published a 53-page report in which it referred to "external objects" and included photographs of the plane riddled with holes.

The damage created by these objects resulted in the loss of hydraulic fluid and pressure, as well as the failure of the stabilizer, the report said.

Experts are examining fragments of "foreign objects" recovered from the fuselage, the report said.

The report did not identify the reason why the plane went off course.

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According to Kazakhstan's probe, the crew had reported to air traffic control in Russia's city of Grozny about losing a GPS signal and shortly later lost control of the plane.

It said that the plane had "various shapes and size of damage in the tail section" and "similar damage was found on the left engine and left wing of the aircraft."

Azerbaijani media, citing anonymous officials in Baku, reported in December that preliminary findings suggest the plane was struck by a missile fired from a Russian Pantsir-S air defense system as it approached Grozny.

Western experts have said the plane was likely shot at from Russia.

After initially saying the plane diverted from its course after it hit a flock of birds, Russia has admitted that its air defense was working the day the plane crashed and that it was repelling a Ukranian drone attack.

But Moscow has stopped short of claiming responsibility for the crash.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has demanded that Russia admit it fired at the plane and accused Moscow of initially trying to cover up the cause of the crash, an unusually forthright accusation of his country's traditional ally.

AFP contributed reporting.

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