

**EgyptAir jet with 66 on board crashes in Mediterranean**  
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An EgyptAir passenger plane travelling from Paris to Cairo with 66 people on board crashed in the Mediterranean Sea, officials in the Egyptian Ministry of Civil Aviation said today.

EgyptAir Flight MS804 disappeared from radar at 2.30am local time (0030 GMT), some 45 minutes before it was expected at Cairo airport, the airline said.

Egyptian military search teams received a distress call from the emergency mechanisms of Airbus A320 almost two hours later, it said.

The plane has not landed at any nearby airports, the Egyptian aviation officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Efforts were underway to find any debris, with Greece saying it had dispatched two aircraft and a ship.

EgyptAir denied media reports that a technical failure was behind the accident.

"The causes of the plane disappearance have not been determined yet," the carrier said in a statement.

The plane carrying 56 passengers, seven crew members and three security officers took off from Charles de Gaulle Airport in the French capital late Wednesday, the Egyptian national carrier said.

The passengers included 30 Egyptians, 15 French nationals, two Iraqis and one each from Britain, Belgium, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Chad, Portugal, Algeria and Canada, according to the airline.

The airline named the pilot of the plane as Mohammed Said Ali Shaqir and said he had over 6,000 hours of flights logged, more than 2000 of them on Airbus A320s. The co-pilot had 2,766 flight hours logged, the company said.

French President Francois Holland agreed in a phone call with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi on "coordination and cooperation" between their countries to unravel circumstances surrounding the accident, Egyptian state television reported.

"We are mobilised and at the disposal of the Egyptian authorities, with our military resources - our planes, our boats - to help with the search for the plane," French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said after a meeting with Hollande in Paris.

### **Emergency line set up at French embassy**

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls told RTL radio that "no hypothesis" on what happened to flight MS804 can be dismissed at this point.

Families of the people on board are being received at a hotel near Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, Ayrault said. An emergency line was also set up at the French embassy in Cairo.

At Cairo airport, families who had been waiting to meet passengers of the plane were brought to a private room and were being attended to by medical staff, officials said.

Egypt's Minister of Civil Aviation Sharif Fathy cut short a visit to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and was returning to Cairo, according to *Al Arabiya News Channel*.

The minister was to give a press conference at the headquarters of the Civil Aviation Ministry in Cairo at 1.30pm (11.30am GMT).

Thursday's apparent crash comes in the wake of other incidents involving Egyptian aviation.

In March, a man used a fake explosive belt made of mobile phone covers and cables to force an Egyptair flight to land in Cyprus.

In October, a Russian passenger jet broke up in mid-air shortly after take-off from the resort of Sharm al-Sheikh in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 people on board.

Russian authorities said that the incident was caused by a bomb. The Islamic State extremist group, which operates in Sinai, claimed responsibility and published a

photograph of a soft drink can which it said had been filled with explosives and smuggled onto the flight.

To Moscow's annoyance, Egyptian authorities refused to categorise the incident as an act of terrorism for several months, until al-Sissi conceded the issue in February.

Russia banned all direct flights from Egypt as a result of the attack, a critical blow to the country's beleaguered tourism sector, which has been largely reliant on Russian customers in recent years.

### **Terrorism not ruled out**

Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Sherif Fathy said terrorist act or a technical failure cannot be ruled out in the crash of Egyptair Flight MS804.

"I'll use the term a 'missing plane' until the wreckage of the aircraft is found," he added a press conference.

"We do not know yet causes of its disappearance," he said. Meanwhile reports that suspected debris from the missing Egyptair plane has been found near the Greek island of Karpathos are not true, the air carrier said.

"Egyptair contacted the bodies concerned in Greece, which did not confirm the validity of this information," the airliner added in a statement.