<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/french-probe-of-egyptair-crash-faults-airline-with-lapses/ar-BBYrfZc>

see also: <https://bit.ly/2J1mR8U> (aka: [**http://tinyurl.com/or9bzf2**](http://tinyurl.com/or9bzf2) **) - the MH370 analysis of a cockpit oxygen initiated event**

**French Probe of EgyptAir Flt MS804 Crash Faults Airline With Lapses**

Matthew Dalton

1 hr ago

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PARIS—When EgyptAir flight MS804 crashed on its way from Paris to Cairo on 19 May 2016, international law designated the Egyptian government to lead a probe to find out why the jet plunged suddenly into the Mediterranean Sea, killing all 66 people aboard.

That investigation was never completed. Instead, Egyptian authorities said a bomb had likely brought down the A320 plane (SU-GCC) and withheld key evidence from French investigators, citing the secrecy of their counterterrorism inquiry.

But 3½ years later, a French judicial probe has alleged that maintenance and safety lapses by EgyptAir left the plane unsafe to fly in the days before it crashed, according to confidential documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. A leak of oxygen in the cockpit preceded a fire that likely disabled the plane, according to an expert report circulated this month, contradicting Egypt’s claim that a terrorist act brought down the aircraft.

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The plane registered serious mechanical errors on its final five flights, according to automated messages sent by the plane. EgyptAir pilots and the airline’s technical center in Cairo largely ignored those errors, according to the documents. Investigators are also questioning whether the EgyptAir technician who inspected the plane in Paris was qualified to service aircraft in Europe.

Before leaving Cairo for Paris on its penultimate flight, “the plane should have been checked during its four previous flights, and should not have left Cairo after the appearance of repeated faults that were not reported by successive teams,” according to one of the documents, an earlier expert report from 2018 that was ordered by the judge.

France opens a judicial investigation whenever one of its citizens is killed in a plane crash. The EgyptAir inquiry, which is continuing, hasn’t established whether the crash was caused by the airline’s alleged lapses that investigators identified.

EgyptAir and Egyptian government agencies didn’t respond to repeated requests for comment. Egypt’s civil aviation ministry has previously denied that the plane registered technical faults in the days before it crashed.

The country’s response to the crash exposes weaknesses in the international air-safety treaty that dictates how governments should cooperate on plane-crash investigations. American and European authorities have little recourse if an authoritarian nation like Egypt, led by its strongman President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, refuses to conduct an investigation or to allow other countries involved in an incident to examine key evidence or documentation.

France’s own air-crash investigation agency, the Bureau d’Enquêtes et Analyses, refused for months to give the French judge data from the plane’s “black boxes”—which the agency extracted for Egypt—citing the international aviation treaty. The judge obtained the data after executing a search warrant at the BEA’s headquarters in 2018.

***“We are not allowed as BEA to release to third parties any information on this safety investigation because we are not leading it***. The Egyptian authorities are, and they need to approve that kind of request,” said BEA spokesman Sébastien Barthe.

Air-safety experts and officials have raised concerns that the crash of the Airbus 320, the world’s top-selling passenger jet, will remain a mystery so long as Egypt controls the probe. Airbus declined to comment.

The French judicial investigation also raises questions about the safety culture at EgyptAir, a state-owned company that is one of the Middle East’s biggest airlines. EgyptAir’s maintenance and engineering division provides technical support for airlines across the region.

In November, Boeing Co. picked EgyptAir to provide maintenance and supply services for its Middle Eastern customers. The airline continues its daily flights to cities across the U.S. and Europe. A European Union official said EgyptAir has been subject to more rigorous monitoring since the crash.

On the plane’s last flight, its cockpit voice-recorder registered what French investigators believe was a high-pressure oxygen leak shortly before the captain declared that a fire had broken out, according to the documents. French investigators said that two maintenance operations were performed on oxygen supply systems in the cockpit—one three days before the crash—but that they couldn’t find documents that would provide more details about those operations.

The 2018 expert report ordered by the French judge cites “a major lack of rigor by the teams and technical services of EgyptAir in handling the technical documents of the aircraft.”

Families of crash victims fear French government officials have prioritized safeguarding France’s relationship with Egypt over investigating the incident. Egypt is a major purchaser of French military equipment, including Rafale jet fighters and high-tech warships. Mr. Sisi is also considered a key ally in France’s efforts to fight Islamist extremists and to limit African migrants from reaching Europe.

“There are too many diplomatic and economic interests for France to pound its fist on the table,” says Julie Heslouin, whose father and brother died in the crash.

In the day before it crashed, the plane flew round-trip between Cairo and the Eritrean capital of Asmara and between Cairo and Tunis. During those four flights, it registered technical faults with bathroom smoke detectors, a circuit breaker and a system that uses heated engine air to control the main cabin’s climate and air pressure, according to the 2018 expert report. On the penultimate flight, from Cairo to Paris, that system registered two faults.

The pilots on those flights didn’t mention the issues in post-flight reports, even though the faults would have set off warnings and in some cases audio alarms inside the plane, the 2018 report said. The EgyptAir ground technician at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris told investigators that neither the airline’s technical center in Cairo nor the pilots alerted him about the malfunctions.

The plane took off from Paris the evening of May 18, 2016. As it flew over the Greek island of Crete, a bathroom smoke detector went off, followed by a cascade of other faults. Flight data showed that passengers clustered toward the back of the plane, apparently to avoid a fire at the front, according to documents. Soon after, the plane spiraled into the Mediterranean at high velocity.

The international air-safety treaty gave control of the investigation to Egypt, which took custody of debris and the recovered bodies of victims.

Six months after the crash, Egyptian authorities said they found traces of TNT on the bodies and opened a criminal probe. French investigators doubted that claim, saying the bodies were in seawater for several weeks, which would have dissolved traces of such explosives. **When French victims’ bodies were returned to France, investigators found no traces of TNT.**

In May 2018, the French judge and a team of investigators met in Cairo with Egyptian authorities, who allowed them to view but not touch the aircraft debris. The French repeated their longstanding request for a copy of the plane’s cockpit voice-recorder data. The Egyptians refused, citing the secrecy of the criminal investigation, according to the documents.

Soon after, the judge learned the BEA held a backup copy of the data after extracting it for the Egyptians, but the agency refused to hand it over for months. In October 2018, the judge’s investigators arrived at BEA headquarters outside Paris and prepared to search the building. The agency’s director gave them a hard disk containing the data.

“We lost 18 months because of the BEA,” says Sébastien Busy, a lawyer who is representing the families of the victims.

Write to Matthew Dalton at [Matthew.Dalton@wsj.com](mailto:Matthew.Dalton@wsj.com)

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Last updated: 29 December 2019

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Status:** | - (No safety board investigation) |
| **Date:** | **Thursday 19 May 2016** |
| **Time:** | 02:29  <https://aviation-safety.net/database/record.php?id=20160519-0> |
| **Type:** | Silhouette image of generic A320 model; specific model in this crash may look slightly different [Airbus A320-232](https://aviation-safety.net/database/types/Airbus-A320/index) |
| **Operator:** | [EgyptAir](https://aviation-safety.net/database/operator/airline.php?var=6292) |
| **Registration:** | SU-GCC |
| **C/n / msn:** | 2088 |
| **First flight:** | 2003-07-25 (12 years 10 months) |
| **Engines:** | 2 [IAE V2527-A5](https://aviation-safety.net/database/engine/IA-V2500) |
| **Crew:** | Fatalities: 10 / Occupants: 10 |
| **Passengers:** | Fatalities: 56 / Occupants: 56 |
| **Total:** | Fatalities: 66 / Occupants: 66 |
| **Aircraft damage:** | Destroyed |
| **Aircraft fate:** | Written off (damaged beyond repair) |
| **Location:** | ca 200 km N of Egyptian coast (https://cdn.aviation-safety.net/database/country/flags_15/med.gif   [Mediterranean Sea](https://aviation-safety.net/database/country/country.php?id=med)) |
| **Phase:** | En route (ENR) |
| **Nature:** | International Scheduled Passenger |
| **Departure airport:** | [Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG/LFPG)](https://aviation-safety.net/database/airport/airport.php?id=CDG), France |
| **Destination airport:** | [Cairo International Airport (CAI/HECA)](https://aviation-safety.net/database/airport/airport.php?id=CAI), Egypt |
| **Flightnumber:** | MS804 |

**Narrative:**  
**EgyptAir flight MS804**, an Airbus A320 impacted the Mediterranean Sea some 200 km north of the Egyptian coast line, killing all 66 on board.  
The aircraft departed Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport, France, at 23:21 hours local time on May 18. Scheduled departure time was 22:45 hours. Destination of the flight was Cairo, Egypt.  
Last contact with the flight was at FL370, about 02:29 hours. According to Greek military authorities their primary radar showed the aircraft suddenly taking a 90 degree turn left, followed by a 360 degrees turn in the opposite direction as it descended from FL370 to FL150 before disappearing off radars.  
The Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder were both recovered from the sea bed on June 16, 2016.  
  
The Egyptian authorities found that:  
- The flight recorders stopped operating while the aircraft was in cruise at an altitude of 37,000 feet;  
- The aircraft systems sent ACARS messages indicating the presence of smoke in toilets and the avionics bay;  
- The data from the data recorder confirms these messages;  
- The playback of the cockpit voice recorder reveals, in particular, that the crew mentioned the existence of a fire on board;  
- Several pieces of debris were retrieved from the accident site. Some of these had signs of having been subject to high temperatures, and traces of soot.  
  
On December 15, 2016, Egyptian investigators reported that traces of explosives were found on several victims. Egyptian authorities determined that there had been a malicious act. The formal investigation per ICAO Annex 13 was stopped and further investigation fell within the sole jurisdiction of the judicial authorities.  
  
Contradicting the Egyptian finding, the French BEA considered that the most likely hypothesis was that a fire broke out in the cockpit while the aircraft was flying at its cruise altitude and that the fire spread rapidly, incapacitating the flight crew and resulting in the loss of control of the aircraft.

**Classification:**

[Loss of control](https://aviation-safety.net/database/events/dblist.php?Event=REL)

**Sources:**

» [EgyptAir](https://twitter.com/EGYPTAIR)  
» [Flightradar24](https://www.flightradar24.com/data/flights/ms804#9c0b766)

**Photos**

[](https://aviation-safety.net/photo/8029/Airbus-A320-232-SU-GCC)

[](https://aviation-safety.net/photo/8030/Airbus-A320-232-SU-GCC)  
accident date: **19-05-2016**  
type: Airbus A320-232  
registration: SU-GCC

[](https://aviation-safety.net/photo/8031/Airbus-A320-232-SU-GCC)  
accident date: **19-05-2016**  
type: Airbus A320-232  
registration: SU-GCC

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PARIS—When an EgyptAir flight crashed on its way from Paris to Cairo in May 2016, the Egyptian government was charged with leading an international probe to find out why the jet suddenly plunged into the Mediterranean Sea, killing all 66 people aboard.   
That investigation was never completed. Instead, Egyptian authorities said a bomb had likely brought down the plane and withheld key evidence from French investigators, citing the secrecy of their counterterrorism inquiry.

But 3½ years later, a French judicial probe has alleged that maintenance and safety lapses by EgyptAir left the plane unsafe to fly in the days before it crashed, according to confidential documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. **A leak of flammable oxygen in the cockpit preceded a fire that likely disabled the plane, the documents say**, contradicting Egypt’s claim that a terrorist act brought down the aircraft.

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