



The Smolensk Air Disaster

On April 10, 2010, the Polish State delegation, led by President Lech Kaczynski, flew from Warsaw to Smolensk, Russia to attend a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. The Polish military plane, a Tupolev Tu-154M PLF101, carrying them crashed at Smolensk Severny Airport, killing all 96 people on board (eight crew members and 88 passengers). The victims included President Lech Kaczynski and the First Lady, the last Polish President in exile, the Chief of the General Staff, army, navy and air force chiefs of staff, the Chairman of the Polish National Bank, the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, MP's, senators, and prominent figures of the Polish elite. To determine the cause of this tragic event, an investigation commenced immediately. Prime Minister Donald Tusk agreed with Russia that the Russian Interstate Aviation Committee (MAK) would handle the investigation, with the participation of Polish experts. Both States agreed the technical investigation would be conducted under the international standards and recommended practices of Annex 13 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention). Annex 13 is normally applied to civil aviation, while the Tu-154M was a state aircraft serving State purposes. The Russian MAK published a report on January 12, 2011, stating the accident's cause was crew failure to timely decide to proceed to an alternate aerodrome given weather at Smolensk "Severny" Airdrome. On July 29, 2011, the Polish Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents led by J. Miller published their own report, stating the accident's cause was descent below the minimum descent altitude at an excessive speed in weather preventing sight of the ground, as well as a delayed execution of the go-around procedure.

On February 4, 2016, the head of the Polish Ministry of National Defense Antoni Macierewicz established the Subcommittee for Reinvestigation of the Aircraft Accident of the Crash of the Tu-154M PLF101 aircraft of the Polish Air Force on 04.10.2010 in Smolensk. The commission reconstructed, in cooperation with various Polish and American experts, the structure of the Tu-154M aircraft and simulated its flight and ground impact per the parameters of MAK and Miller's Report and the advice of the Military Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw. Additionally, the distribution of

the plane's debris and the distribution of bodies and fragments of bodies were reconstructed. The Subcommittee's research focused on simulations and reconstruction of the explosions in the left wing and center-wing, reconstruction of disintegration of parts of the airplane and pyrotechnical experiments. Analysis and research were also conducted in Poland and in the USA on the traces of explosives in the wreckage of TU-154M No 101. Moreover, additional calculations and analyses were made in the fields of physics and aerodynamics, which could confirm or exclude possible hypotheses of what really happened on April 10, 2010.

The Subcommittee published its research on April 14, 2022, concluding the real cause of the Smolensk crash was two explosions in the final phase of the flight. The first took place in the wing over 100 meters before the location where the plane supposedly collided with a birch tree. The second explosion occurred several meters above the ground about 6 seconds after the explosion in the wing, near the two furrows marking the first contact with the ground of large parts of the aircraft. More information can be found at:

https://podkomisjasmolensk.mon.gov.pl/plik/file/raport_ver_ang.pdf.

On April 11, 2018, the Commission for Reinvestigating the Crash published a preliminary report concluding the aircraft was "destroyed in the air as the result of several explosions". On October 12, 2018, the Council of the European Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution urging Russia to return to Poland the wreckage of the plane. The resolution stated that, under Annex 13 of the Chicago Convention, Russia had had to return the wreckage to Poland once the technical air safety investigation was completed in January 2011.

On April 10, 2023, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to the U.N., Krzysztof Szczerski called on Russia at the United Nations Security Council forum to return the wreckage and the flight recorders. Russia has not complied with these demands and continues to illegally withhold Polish state property and, thus, to frustrate legitimate investigations of the crash, which is particularly troublesome given the conflicting conclusions noted above. Russia has not provided any explanation for its noncompliance and, consequently, it appears Russia may be hiding something regarding the crash, their investigation of the crash, or both.

References:

https://podkomisjasmolensk.mon.gov.pl/plik/file/raport_ver_ang.pdf

<https://www.smolenskcrashnews.com/>

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