



Ethiopian Plane Shot Down by Hizbullah Terrorist?

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Hypotheses and speculations mounted about a "sabotage" action in the Ethiopian plane crash which plunged into the Mediterranean sea in stormy weather earlier this week with 90 passengers and crew on board feared dead.

The Ethiopian plane crash which plunged into the Mediterranean sea in stormy weather earlier this week with 90 passengers and crew on board is likely a "deliberate" attack, some media reports said Wednesday.

While the daily al-Liwaa said the crash is likely a "deliberate" attack, pan-Arab Asharq al-Awsat did not rule out "sabotage" after the disaster presumably killed all 90 passengers and crew. OTV, meanwhile, which is close to Hizbullah and is reputed to have strong ties with Hizbullah circles, cited official circles as saying that the Ethiopian plane was likely hit by a rocket.

Al-Liwaa based its hypothesis on Hizbullah's heightened concern about the catastrophe and the fact that a Hizbullah delegation, including Hashem Safieddine and MP Nawar al-Sahili, was supposed to be on the plane.

It said the trip was cancelled at the last minute upon instructions by Speaker Nabih Berri to allow Sahili to attend a parliamentary session scheduled for Monday. Berri, however, called off the meeting after the plane crash disaster.

Al-Liwaa also pointed to Hizbullah's noteworthy presence in the funeral of one of the plane victims identified as Hassan Tajeddine in the southern town of Hanaway. It said Tajeddine had close ties with Hizbullah.

However, a communique issued by Hizbullah strongly denied Al Liwaa's report and said it was "totally unbased." "The newspaper used some atmospheres related to the trip of MP Nawwar al-Sahili to publish a totally unbased scenario," added Hizbullah's communique.

Navigation sources, meanwhile, told Asharq al-Awsat that "all possibilities are open." They said an "explosion" likely took place on the plane, pointing out that lightning by itself cannot bring down an aircraft.

The sources also raised the possibility that the lightning hit the plane in a "sensitive area" that, together with human and technical errors, led to the crash. Witnesses said the aircraft was in flames as it dropped into the sea. Lebanese leaders, including President Michel Suleiman, Defense Minister Elias Murr and Transportation Minister Ghazi Aridi, have ruled out sabotage in the plane crash.