

U.S. officials believe that Iran shot down a Ukraine International Airlines passenger plane on Wednesday, according to CBS News , the Associated Press and multiple other news outlets citing anonymous government sources.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson supported the assessment, saying evidence indicates an Iranian surface-to-air missile downed the plane. He added that striking the plane may have been unintentional, and said it was too early to draw conclusions.

The Kyiv-bound plane crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran's airport, killing all 176 people on board. The disaster took place early Wednesday morning, hours after Iran launched a series of missiles at Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops as a retaliation for the U.S. killing of top Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

Iran's alleged downing of the plane was likely accidental, officials told news outlets.

Iran and Ukraine launched a joint investigation into the crash following the disaster, but Iran has refused to provide the black boxes from the plane to either U.S. investigators or the plane's manufacturer, Boeing.

Ali Abedzadeh, head of Iran's national aviation department, gave a press conference Friday and denied that a missile had hit the plane. He also asked the U.S. and Canada to share any information they had, The Associated Press reported .

"What is obvious for us, and what we can say with certainty, is that no missile hit the plane," he said.

Hassan Rezaeifar, who is leading the Iranian investigation into the disaster, said it could take a month to extract black box data and that the investigation may continue into next year.

Ukraine's investigators announced they would be considering all causes of the attack, including looking into unverified social media reports of fragments in the area from a

Russian-made air defense missile.

The passengers were from several different countries and included 63 Canadians , many of whom were university students and professors returning after winter break. Trudeau demanded that his government play a significant role in investigating the disaster, saying Thursday that both he and the families of victims needed answers.

President Donald Trump distanced the U.S. from the event and suggested it was possible Iran could have mistakenly downed the plane. “Somebody could have made a mistake on the other side … not our system. It has nothing to do with us,” Trump said. “It was flying in a pretty rough neighborhood. They could’ve made a mistake.”

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky had calls with the leaders of several countries affected by the disaster, and he asked for assistance from international partners in the investigation of the crash.

The reports that the plane was potentially hit with a projectile are a shocking turnaround after U.S. intelligence officials initially said that there was no immediate evidence that the flight was shot down. Iranian officials had harshly rejected speculation that the plane may have been shot in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

“The rumors about the plane are completely false and no military or political expert has confirmed it,” Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, spokesman for Iran’s armed forces, told the country’s Fars News Agency on Wednesday.

The plane allegedly climbed to 8,000 feet and then disappeared from radar systems, according to Iranian civil aviation officials. The plane apparently never made a radio call for help and was attempting to turn back toward Tehran airport at the time it went down, an initial Iranian report stated .

Footage of the disaster appears to show a small projectile hitting the plane. The aircraft then attempted to turn around before suffering an explosion and rapidly descending, according to

videos verified by The New York Times .

Some of Ukraine's investigators also worked on the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014. In that incident, investigators found that Russian-backed separatists fired a Russian-made BUK anti-aircraft missile that brought down the plane and killed all 298 passengers on board. The attack led to widespread sanctions against Russia and a yearslong investigation into its causes.

This article has been updated with more details about the disaster the world leaders' reactions to it, and Iran's denial.

Liza Hearon contributed to this article.

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* *https://www.huffpost.com/entry/iran-downed-plane-american-officials_n_5e176033c5b600960c62230d?ncid=newsltushpmgnews&guccounter=1*