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## Polish president plane crash: the plane

Poland's president Lech Kaczynski was flying from Warsaw to Smolensk in Russia when his plane crashed.

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Mr Kaczynski and his colleagues were flying in a Tupolev Tu-154 when it crashed on approaching the airport.

The plane came down a mile away from Smolensk airport, 220 miles south of Moscow, in foggy conditions. The Tupolev Tu-154 is described as the 'workhorse' of the Soviet airlines for decades, and aviation experts say it has a reasonable safety record for the amount of aircraft in use.



The plane came down a mile away from Smolensk airport, 220 miles south of Moscow Photo: REUTERS

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"The 154 is by a wide margin the most successful jet ever built by a communist economic system," said Richard Aboulafia, vice president at Teal Group, a Virginia-based consultant.

"It was created at the height of the old Soviet Union's ability to invent equipment that at least approximated the achievements of the West. The real problem is regulatory oversight in many of the regions where it's used. Corruption and neglect almost guarantee trouble."

The Tu-154 has a fatal accident every 431,200 flights, according to London-based aviation consultant Ascend. The Boeing 737, the world's best-selling passenger plane, crashes every 2.68 million flights.

The planes can hold between 114 and 180 passengers, and are designed for heavy use in demanding conditions. Design criteria included the ability to operate from gravel or packed earth airfields, to be able to fly at high altitudes above most Soviet Union air traffic, and good field performance in Arctic conditions.

The plane was designed in the mid 1960s, and was Aeroflot's standard craft from the early 1970s until this year.

In January 2010 the Russian national carrier announced the retirement of its Tupolev Tu-154 fleet after 40 years of service, but the plane remains the standard airliner for routes across the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe and Iran.

In July last year, a Tu-154 crashed in Iran, killing 168 people. It was the eight fatal incident involving a Tu-154 in ten years.

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