

More Reckless Behavior by Israel: Netanyahu Plays by His Own Rules. Christmas Day Air Raids against Syria

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As has become the normal practice, [Christmas Day's air raid](#) by Israel directed against targets near Damascus was largely ignored by the US media. Given the fact that Israel has bombed Syria more than two hundred times, the attack itself, which wounded three soldiers at a warehouse, was not particularly notable. But what was significant was the fact that it was the second time that Israel has used other planes to mask the approach of its own warplanes to the target. On this occasion, the masks consisted of two civilian airliners making their approaches to the airports in Beirut and Damascus. Fortunately, the Syrian Arab Air Defense Forces made the decision to delay the deployment of surface-to-air missiles and electronic jamming "to prevent a tragedy" and air traffic control was able to divert one of the passenger jets landing at Damascus to the reserve military airport in Khmeimim in southern Latakia.

Syrian anti-aircraft crews did manage to intercept and shoot down fourteen of the sixteen incoming missiles that were launched by six Israeli F-16 warplanes using US-made GPS-guided GBU-39 Small Diameter Bombs (SDBs). If the Syrian air defenses had been more reckless and gone after the F-16s themselves, they might have hit an airliner by mistake and hundreds of lives could have been lost.

The Russian Ministry of Defense, which was able to reconstruct the attack from radar imaging, condemned the incident, stating that "*Provocative acts by the Israeli Air Force endangered two passenger jets when six of their F-16s carried out airstrikes on Syria from Lebanese airspace.*" The terse Russian announcement reveals that beyond endangering hundreds of civilians, Israel had committed several war crimes in its action, which the Israeli government claimed was intended to destroy a shipment of Iranian-made Fajir-5 rockets, which was allegedly on its way to Hezbollah.

As Israel is not at war with Iran or Syria or Lebanon and it persists in attacking targets in Syria based on its own perception of threats, it meets the United Nations definition of an aggressor. And its violation of Lebanese air space to stage the attack on Syria was also an act of aggression. Both would normally be condemned in the UN Security Council but for the American veto protecting Israel.

Analysts have confirmed that the Israelis carried out the strikes in Syria by deliberately using scheduled airline departures and arrivals as cover to foil the improved and upgraded Syrian air defenses. Security sources in the region now believe that any civilian flights

entering or leaving Damascus or Beirut are potentially in danger due to the Israeli tactics, which clearly accept endangering civilians to mask the movements of the warplanes.

The Israelis also used a Russian intelligence plane as a mask off the coast of Syria back in September, with fatal results for the crew after Syrian air defenses responded to the attack. Israel, of course, [claimed innocence](#), insisting that it was the Syrians who shot down the Russian aircraft while the Israeli jets were legitimately targeting a Syrian army facility “from which weapons-manufacturing systems were supposed to be transferred to Iran and Hezbollah.”

The Russian aircraft was returning to base after a mission over the Mediterranean off the Syrian coast monitoring the activities of a French warship and at least one British RAF plane. As a large and relatively slow propeller driven aircraft on a routine intelligence gathering mission, the Ilyushin-20 had no reason to conceal its presence. It was apparently preparing to land at its airbase at Khmeimim when the incident took place.

Syrian air defenses were on high alert because Israel had attacked targets near Damascus on the previous day, including a Boeing 747 on the ground that Israel claimed to be transporting weapons.

The Israelis used four F-16 fighter bombers to stage the surprise night attack targeting sites near Latakia, close to the airbase being used by the Russians. They came in from the Mediterranean Sea using the Russian plane to mask their approach as the Ilyushin 20 would have presented a much larger radar profile for the air defenses.

The Israelis might have been expecting that the Syrians would not fire at all at the incoming planes knowing that one of them at least was being flown by their Russian allies. If that was the expectation, it proved wrong and it was indeed a Syrian S-200 ground to air missile directed by its guidance system to the larger target that brought down the plane and killed its fourteen crew members.

There was also a back story. The Israelis and Russian military had established a hotline precisely intended to avoid accidents. Israel reportedly used the line but only one minute before the incident took place, leaving no time for the Russian plane to take evasive action.

The Russian Ministry of Defense was irate. It saw the exploitation of the intelligence plane by the Israelis as a deliberate high-risk initiative. [It warned](#) “*We consider these provocative actions by Israel as hostile. Fifteen Russian military service members have died because of the irresponsible actions of the Israeli military. This is absolutely contrary to the spirit of the Russian-Israeli partnership. We reserve the right for an adequate response.*”

It's the same old story. Israel does risky things like attacking its neighbors because it knows it will pay no price due to Washington's support. The downing of the Russian plane and the current endangering civil aviation has created a situation that could easily escalate. What Israel is really thinking when it seeks to create anarchy all around its borders is anyone's guess, but it is, to be sure, in no one's interest to allow the process to continue.

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