

Peace paradox and air terror

Peace agreements, stability and regional prosperity, in an interesting paradox, increase the risk of air terror in Israel, according to new research conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Ron Tuegeman under the supervision of Prof. Arnon Sofer of the University of Haifa.

The research, which was published by the Reuven Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy at the University of Haifa, the Fisher Brothers Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies and the Israeli National Defense College, reveals that during the past few years, the civil aviation traffic has increased dramatically in Israel's neighboring countries. This increase includes not only the number of actual flights but also the number of flight paths that pass close to Israel.

According to the researchers, peace agreements and normalization of relations between Israel and her neighbors will require, among other things, opening up Israel's airspace to civilian airliners from these neighboring countries including flights that originate in countries with which Israeli does not have peace agreements. These flights, they warn, could become the preferred target of terror organizations.

"Israel's airspace is very small. The flight time of an airliner – civil or military – from Beirut to Haifa is about seven minutes, and two minutes from the border crossing at Rosh Hanikra. Crossing the width of the entire country by air takes less than five minutes. Therefore, the task of defending this open space is a big challenge," stressed the researchers who point to certain flight routes that were opened in the 1990s over Israel's airspace following peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt, that didn't take into account the terror attacks like 9/11.

According to the researchers, the closeness of the worldwide jihad to Israel warrants a complete change in the way Israel thinks about defending against air terror, "The city of Eilat is an example of the complexity of policy-making following the signing of peace accords. The new flight paths G-183 and "cross-Israel", which opened during a period of positive trends in planning, are now weak points which put the Israeli air defense establishment in a very difficult position. It seems that today, with the hindsight of the air terror attack on the United States, these lanes of air travel would not have been opened," write the researchers, who propose that in any future political settlement, Israel must consider protection of its airspace, knowing that daring air terror with no early intelligence warning is no longer an imaginary scenario.

Take for example, the developments with the Palestinians, whether under agreement or one-sided actions, which must take into account the proximity of the West Bank to Ben Gurion Airport, "It will be enough if the Palestinians acquire an anti-aircraft missile system – shoulder missiles such as SA-7, to shut down Ben Gurion Airport and effectively halt the majority of Israeli air traffic. In any political-security agreement, Israel will not be able to concede sovereignty over its airspace to any neighboring Palestinian entity that will be established," say the researchers.

Source: University of Haifa

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