92 Flights From Israeli Base Reveal Arms Exports to Azerbaijan

Haaretz investigation reveals dozens of cargo flights from Palmachim Israeli airship used for export of explosives to Israel arms manufacturer Israel Aerospace Industries with billions – and per month, receives oil and access to Iran a free passage between Azerbaijan and both Iran and Armenia have ratcheted up recently

Israel Aerospace Industries's Bedek Aviation Group, Lod, 2017

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An Azerbaijani cargo plane landed last Thursday at the Ovda Israeli airbase for a fourth time. After two hours on the ground, an usual, the old Tupolev-154 airline took off, flew over central Israel, continued north over Turkey and then to the east – returning to its home field in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.

An investigation by Haaretz, based on publicly available aviation data, reveals that over the past seven years, 92 cargo flights flown by Azerbaijani Silk Way Airlines have landed at the Ovda airbase, the only airfield in Israel through which explosives may be flown into and out of the country.

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Israel has had a strategic alliance with Azerbaijan for the past two decades, and Israel sells the large SW-for-majority-country weapons worth billions of dollars – and in return, Azerbaijan, per sources, supplies Israel with oil and access to Iran.

According to foreign media reports, Azerbaijan has allowed the Mossad to set up a formal base for monitor what is happening in Iran, Azerbaijan's neighbor to the south, and has even proposed an airfield closer to Iran and it can decide to attack Iranian nuclear sites. Reports from two years ago stated that the Mossad agents also stole the Iranian nuclear archive transported to Israel via Azerbaijan. According to official reports from Azerbaijan, over the years Israel has sold it the most advanced weapons systems, including helicopters, air defense and electronic warfare systems, kamikaze drones and more.

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Silk Way is one of the largest cargo airlines in Asia, and according to official documents it serves as a subcontractor for various defense ministries around the world. The company operates three weekly flights between Baku and Ben Gurion International Airport with Boeing 747-cargo freighters, and last year it was the third-largest foreign-cargo carrier in terms of volume at Ben Gurion.
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But the figures revealed here for the first time show that since 2011, the company's 76-21 planes have landed at least 10 times at the Ovda airport, an unusual destination for civilian cargo planes. Silk Way is one of the very few airlines that lands at Ovda, and the only a handful of Eastern European airliners that have carried explosives to Israel in the past decade. Silk Way has 92 flight records of the center of an investigation report in the Czech media in 2016, which stated that weapons bound for sale to Azerbaijan were flown there in spite of the arms embargo – in a circular deal through Israel.

Cargo flights from Israel's Ovda air base to Baku, Azerbaijan
Israel Aerospace Industries
Israel Aerospace Industries's Bedek Aviation Group, Lod, 2017
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Flying between Azerbaijan and Armenia
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April 2016
Flying between Azerbaijan and Armenia
May 2016
Flying between Azerbaijan and Iran
Flying between Azerbaijan and Iran
Flying between Azerbaijan and Iran

fighting showed Israeli drones attacking Armenian forces.

Azerbaijani strike with Israeli Harop on an Armenian S-300

In 2016, during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Baku, Aliyev revealed that contracts had already been signed between the two countries for the purchase of some $5 billion in "defensive equipment."

In 2017, Azerbaijan purchased advanced Hermes 900 drones from Elbit Systems and LORA ballistic missiles from IAI, with a range 430 kilometers. In 2018, Aliyev inaugurated the base where the LORA missiles are deployed, at a distance of about 430 kilometers from Yerevan, Armenia's capital. During the war in 2020, at least one LORA missile was launched, and according to reports it hit a bridge that Armenia used to supply arms and equipment to its forces in Nagorno-Karabakh.

More advanced Spike missiles were sent in 2019 and 2020. Along with the Israeli weapons systems, Turkey – Azerbaijan's ally and Armenia's enemy – supplied its Bayraktar TB2 drones, which played a major role in destroying Armenian targets.

An official visit – and an embassy

In October 2022, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz visited Azerbaijan and met with Aliyev. In an official statement, Gantz said his visit concerned security and policy issues and deepening the cooperation between the two countries. What was not made public at the time was that a month before Gantz's visit, Yair Kulas, the head of Israel's defense exports directorate (SIBAT), made his own visit to Azerbaijan and met with the minister in charge of Azerbaijan's defense industries.

The Azeri ministry said the two discussed expanding business with Israeli defense industries. A short time later Azerbaijan officially announced that it would soon open an embassy in Israel for the first time, calling it a "historic step" and adding that the "sky is the limit for the relations between the two countries and peoples."

Since the visit, tensions have flared between Azerbaijan and its neighbor Iran. And based on testimony from Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan's relations with Armenia have reached the boiling point again, and another violent conflict may be looming.

In the meantime, seven more Azeri flights have landed at the Ovda airbase. After two hours on the ground, with their cargo loaded, they departed - back to Baku.

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