

U.S. tries to justify warplanes harassing Iranian commercial airliner



Tehran, July 25 (RHC)-- U.S. F-15 warplanes involved in the harassment of an Iranian passenger plane approaching the Beirut airport were not "on a routine air mission," a report says, dismissing a claim otherwise made by a U.S. military official with Central Command, CENTCOM.

The Nournews agency on Friday cited an unnamed source familiar with the matter that contrary to the remarks made by CENTCOM's spokesman, Bill Urban, the U.S. jets "intercepted the Iranian plane after violating Lebanon's airspace" and were not on "a routine air mission" when they flew close to the Mahan Air plane.

The source said the F-15s harassed the Iranian plane in Lebanon's sky when it was dropping its altitude to approach the Beirut airport. On Thursday night, U.S. warplanes operating illegally in Syria conducted some "dangerous" maneuvering close to the Mahan Air flight in an act of air piracy.

The American aircraft ignored several warnings by the Iranian pilot about the urgency to observe the distance but they continued the maneuver, the source said. The U.S. warplanes continued to conduct some "dangerous" maneuvering close to a Beirut-bound Iranian airliner over the Syrian capital Damascus,

injuring some of the passengers.

The Mahan Air Flight 1152 had taken off from Tehran and was en route to the Lebanese capital when the incident happened over Syria's hugely-strategic al-Tanf region.

CENTCOM claimed that a single F-15 had made a "visual inspection" of the Iranian airliner "in accordance with international standards... to ensure the safety of coalition personnel" at the military base in al-Tanf. It added that the F-15 conducted "a standard visual inspection of a Mahan Air passenger airliner at a safe distance of approximately 1,000 meters."

Meanwhile, the adviser to Iran's parliament speaker on international affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, said on Friday that severe consequences await the U.S. military's act of provocation.

"The harassment of an Iranian passenger plane by American fighter jets once again proved that the presence of foreigners in the region is a serious threat to peace and security," he said in a post on his Twitter account. He added that likewise the Zionists cannot carry out a provocative act and "immediately say that we were not involved."

The Thursday episode apparently bares hallmarks of a similar incident pertaining to a Russian aircraft in 2018. In September that year, Russia said Syria had shot down one of its military planes. Moscow, however, blamed Israel for the death of the 15 personnel on board.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Israeli jets had put the Il-20 plane into the path of Syrian air defense systems. According to the ministry's data, the Syrian missile was, in fact, targeting an Israeli F-16 jet before it abruptly altered its course and eventually hit the Russian aircraft.

"There is no end to the criminal acts of the U.S. regime in threatening the lives of ordinary people, ranging from economic terrorism to aviation terrorism." Those are the words by Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations Kazem Gharibabadi that appeared on his Instagram page on Friday.

Highlighting the "dirtiest" type of policy followed by the US, the Iranian diplomat asked, "Is not it time for the international community to stand united in the face of these US acts [which are] in violation of international law which also threatens international peace and security and to force this country to act as a normal state?"

The Iranian official also rejected CENTCOM's claims. "In the presence of the existing radars and advanced supervisory equipment, the dispatch of a fighter jet to identify the economic or military type of the plane is not acceptable at all."

He added that the flight of U.S. jets over Syria without its consent is a violation of Washington's international obligations under the Convention on International Civil Aviation.

Gharibabadi emphasized that the move against the Iranian passenger plane should be seriously pursued through the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Justice Audit and the United Nations. He said the Islamic Republic deserves the right to make any appropriate decision or take action in response.

Earlier on Friday, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denounced the United States for the harassment. The Iranian foreign minister said Washington has displayed "audacity to compound lawlessness upon lawlessness."



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