



ISRAEL TURNS AWAY TURKISH AIRLINES PILOT WITH IRANIAN PASSPORT

News / Airlines



Israel prevented the pilot of a Turkish Airlines civilian flight from entering the country on Friday because he is an Iranian passport-holder. Instead, the pilot was flown back to Turkey by the Turkish carrier.

The incident involved a routine Turkish Airlines flight to Ben-Gurion Airport, Channel 2 news reported Saturday. When the crew arrived at passport control, the pilot was found to be holding an Iranian passport, and he was not allowed to proceed. It was not clear from the TV report whether the pilot, who was not named, also had a Turkish or other passport.

The Turkish authorities asked Israel to make an exception in his case, and allow him to enter Israel for one night only. But Israel's Shin Bet security agency rejected the request, the TV report said, since it did not want a precedent set.

The airline acknowledged that it had "made a mistake," the TV report said, and the pilot was flown back to Turkey on a subsequent flight.

Channel 2 said that Turkish airlines hired some 200 Iranian pilots last year because of a shortage in its ranks, and assured Israel at the time that none of them would fly the Tel Aviv route.

Iran and Israel do not have diplomatic relations. Iran's leaders relentlessly encourage the demise

of Israel, and Tehran arms, funds and trains terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas that seek to destroy Israel.

Israel's ties with Turkey, once very warm, were deeply harmed in recent years, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan castigating Israeli policy on the Palestinians and backing Hamas. The deaths of 10 Turkish citizens in the May 2010 Mavi Marmara incident — when a flotilla from Turkey tried to breach Israel's security blockade on Hamas-run Gaza, and Israeli soldiers taking charge of the Marmara opened fire when under attack — deepened the crisis.

Israeli and Turkish negotiators have been working to heal relations for the past three years, without concluding terms for a return to normalized ties.

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