Militancy/Terrorism



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MENA Analysis: Attempted mega-terror attack on Flydubai aircraft underscores persistent risks of Islamist radicalization, including insider threats

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Executive Summary:

- The FlyDubai pilot on the Tel Aviv-bound September 30 flight is identified as an Omani national who was previously banned from flying over his extremist views. As of the time of writing, despite a few statements from US and Israeli leaders, the assailant appears to have operated as a lone wolf and not as an Iranian or any other actor's proxy.
- Together with statements from Emirati officials, this highlights gaps in the aviation security sector related to screening and intelligence-sharing, which can enable insider threats.
- In Israel, the incident is viewed as a major security failure, with disputes over culpability already emerging between the Transport Ministry and Israeli security agencies.
- Nevertheless, while the current plot targeted Israel, it underscores a credible threat vector emanating from jihadist sympathizers that is broader and may affect other arenas and sectors, underlining the need to conduct due diligence.
- **MAX Security can support establishing related security protocols and background checks. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com for further information.**

Current Situation:

September 30 incident

- According to October 3 reports, the FlyDubai pilot who attacked his colleague on a Tel Aviv-bound FlyDubai aircraft on September 30 has been identified as Omani national Hamam al-Hammami.
- October 5 reports citing Israeli officials state that al-Hammami intended to crash the aircraft into Ben Gurion International Airport in a mass-casualty attack. This factored into al-Hammami's decision to only attempt to seize control of the aircraft some time into the flight while over Jordanian territory, where he would continue toward Israel under the guise of a normal landing before crashing the aircraft.
- The pilot had reportedly been removed in the past from his previous post as a pilot with Oman's national airline, Oman Airways, amid concerns over his "extremist views." He was subsequently placed on a de-radicalization program in Oman. He then traveled to Morocco and Syria before being employed by flydubai, according to an unconfirmed Israeli report.
- Additional reports indicate that accounts affiliated with al-Hammami posted videos hours after the incident occurred on September 30. These included videos of former al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and an al-Qaeda affiliated suicide bomber. Two compilation videos of Israeli national carrier El Al aircraft operating at Dubai International Airport (DBX), filmed from the cockpit of a plane, as well as an AI-generated video of the three holiest cities in Islam, Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, were also posted. It is unclear if the videos were pre-scheduled for upload or posted by another individual.
- According to an unconfirmed Israeli report from October 4, citing an unnamed senior Emirati official, the ongoing investigation remains focused on the planning stages of the attack, including reports that al-Hammami reportedly staffed multiple flights to Israel in the weeks leading up to the incident.

Israeli media reports and narratives

- The Israel Tax Authority reportedly received a list of passengers and crew on the FlyDubai flight under the Israeli National Center for Passenger Information Analysis (NCPIA). However, the Ministry of Transport (MoT) reportedly denied receiving or accessing that list in advance.
- On October 4, Likud Member of Knesset (MK) and Transportation Minister Miri Regev denied allegations that the MoT is privy to passenger and crew list data from foreign airlines. She stated that the MoT is "not an intelligence body," and does not bear responsibility for checking this data, which is only exposed to intelligence agencies. The remarks were directed to Opposition Leader Yair Lapid, who criticized the Likud-led government over the incident.
- On October 4, an Israeli military correspondent for Israel's army radio circulated a then-secret report by Israel's State Comptroller from February 2024, raising concerns that the MoT was not fulfilling its responsibilities outlined in a Cabinet decision from July 2021. The decree transferred responsibility from the Shin Bet to the MoT's Civil Aviation Authority for securing foreign airline flights landing in Israel and ensuring compliance with regulations. Senior MoT officials reportedly pushed back against the move, except the Civil Aviation Authority head, Shmuel Zakai, who advocated for it. PM Netanyahu ultimately approved the measure in 2025.
- The document further revealed that security gaps concerning foreign flights had already been identified in 2025. This included warnings from the Shin Bet over the MoT's limited capacity to take responsibility for vetting foreign flights arriving in Israel, and its failure to enforce Israel's policy that foreign airlines do not send crew members from nations that do not have relations with Israel.

Statements:

- Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu shared a video on social media on October 2, where he alleged that the perpetrator had undergone “Islamic radicalization,” and intended to crash the plane with everyone on board. PM Netanyahu vowed that “whoever sent him will pay a very heavy price.”
- On October 3, senior diplomatic advisor to the UAE President, Anwar Gargash, labeled the incident a “terrorist operation.” Gargash further reiterated the UAE’s “firm stance” of “no tolerance for extremism and no leniency towards its discourse.”
- The Omani government has not issued any formal statements regarding the incident as of the time of writing.
- In its weekly edition published on October 2, al-Bayan, a publication launched by al-Qaeda supporters, reportedly called on followers to stage similar attacks, inspired by the incident, juxtaposing it with the 9/11 attacks against the US. The group did not claim responsibility for the latest incident.
- On October 1, in response to a question from a reporter on whether the pilot was linked to Iran, US President Donald Trump stated that “based on what I am hearing, the answer is yes.” When asked whether it was possible that there is a link between the Omani pilot and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), he stated that “we are still looking into it.”
- When asked by reporters again on October 5 whether Iran was responsible for the attempted attack on the FlyDubai flight, President Trump reiterated that he personally does believe this to be the case.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. The latest developments corroborate preliminary Israeli assessments that **al-Hammami attempted to hijack the aircraft in an attempted terrorist attack**. As underscored by Israeli PM Netanyahu, his dismissal at Oman Airways, measures reportedly taken by Muscat, and the subsequent videos that apparently emerged on his social media after the attack, Islamist radicalization was the basis for the plot. Despite remarks from Israeli PM Netanyahu and US President Trump, warning of reprisals and alluding to Iran’s involvement, respectively, **there are currently no further concrete indications that al-Hammami was connected to a third party and acted as a proxy**.
2. Regardless, **the attempted hijacking highlights significant risks to the aviation sector from insider threats**, namely, radicalized individuals with the access and technical know-how to initiate attacks and weaponize aircraft in transit. This is underscored by al-Hammami’s use of a crash axe in the cockpit to attack his co-pilot, and his subsequent attempts to seize the flight controls and exploit the fact that the cockpit door cannot be opened from outside. Crash axes are available within the cockpit itself, which is inaccessible from the cabin once in flight, based on protocols initiated following al-Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks. The plan to use it reduced the likelihood that he would have been flagged before boarding the flight in possession of a weapon or intercepted by other individuals once he initiated his attack in the cockpit, with passengers only gaining access to thwart the attack once it was opened by his wounded co-pilot, who did not succumb to his wounds and took initiative. This suggests a considerable degree of premeditation on the assailant’s part.
3. The plot highlights major security gaps in the aviation sector, primarily in recruitment screening and due diligence. **The fact that al-Hammami was previously barred from flying for Oman’s national carrier highlights significant personnel vetting and intelligence-sharing failures on multiple fronts**. It is still unclear whether Muscat disclosed its dismissal of al-Hammami to FlyDubai or other Emirati or Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) authorities. However, reports citing his social media channels, which contained consistent indications of radical views in previous years, highlight gaps in the carrier’s internal vetting system that go beyond mere commitment to any specific Israeli regulations. While Israel was the target of al-Hammami’s plot, such apparent jihadist sympathizers are inclined to view many other targets associated with, for example, the West and/or perceived “apostate” Gulf states, as legitimate targets. **The threat such individuals pose if they successfully breach security screening and penetrate**

critical and sensitive sectors is thus much broader than the latest specific, narrow plot focused on Israel.

4. **This threat also extends beyond the aviation sector** and may be applied in additional sectors and methods with which jihadist sympathizers could generate large-magnitude, mass-casualty events, through means available in critical sectors or even more casual day-to-day commercial activities. Particularly, this extends to any economic activity associated with vehicles that can be easily weaponized, including on-ground mass transit.
5. In this context, the latest high-profile incident could become an inspirational catalyst for jihadist sympathizers, especially as it echoes al-Qaeda's 9/11 attack against the US. This is important from both a jihadist and security authorities' perspectives because religious extremism and radicalization, which received considerable attention in previous decades, have since become less prominent amid the relative scarcity of high-profile attacks in the West by al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) operatives. Therefore, this latest incident functions as a watershed event. The fact that it occurred and subsequent attention to it by global jihadist groups underscores that the threat remains both persistent and significant.

Israel/Israel-UAE-specific impacts

1. **In Israel, the incident is viewed as a major security failure, with disputes over culpability already emerging between the MoT and Israeli security agencies**. The responsibility for vetting foreign airline crews and ensuring the airline's compliance with regulations banning crew from hostile states appears to lie with the MoT's Civil Aviation Authority. Despite Minister Regev's denial, this will significantly increase pressure and scrutiny on the ministry and her position specifically.
2. **FORECAST**: More broadly, PM Netanyahu's reported authorization to transfer responsibility for this screening and compliance process to the MoT in 2021, despite concerns raised by multiple parties about its capacity to undertake it, will further increase pressure on the Likud-led government ahead of the October 27 elections. The incident will be used by the opposition, as underscored by criticism from figures such as Yair Lapid, as evidence of another critical security failure by the government, following the major shortcomings prior to Hamas's October 7 attacks. In this context, the development will inflame political tensions further ahead of the polls.
3. **FORECAST**: PM Netanyahu and President Trump's remarks, warning of reprisals and alluding to Iran's involvement, will also fuel tensions between the countries. This is underscored by Iran's accusation on October 2 that Israel is using the incident as a "false flag" operation to draw the US into another war against Iran. However, **there are currently no concrete indications of a connection between al-Hammami and Iran, so the development is unlikely to catalyze military action in this context**.
4. **FORECAST:** Regardless of the political implications, the event will carry immediate ramifications in the Israeli aviation sector, including more robust overviews of security measures. For instance, a report citing the parliamentary Intelligence (Knesset) subcommittee meeting on October 6, indicated that since the beginning of 2026, more than 1200 aircrew members from countries with which Israel has no diplomatic relations, including Syrian, Lebanese, and Omani nationals, landed in the country. **This will prompt increased Israeli screening procedures and security-related demands and regulations that foreign airliners will be requested to comply with to operate in and out of TLV**. In turn, this may lead to travel delays for flights facilitated by non-Israeli airliners.
5. Specific regulatory changes to customs and protocols in Israeli security regulations pertaining to foreign airlines were also introduced in the context of the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel under the Abraham Accords. **This further undergirds how, in certain cases, geopolitical developments, especially those pertaining to bilateral agreements between states, may influence security regulations and arrangements in a top-down process. Namely, these developments may amount to cases in which government decisions may influence actions taken by different institutions, including one's security establishment**. Particularly, regulatory changes placing security screening under the auspices of the MoT, which is limited in its capacity in contrast to Israel's robust preventive security bodies,

namely the Israel Security Agency (Shabak) and Mossad, may have created structural deficits in the ability to intercept and flag the latest occurrence.
6. The relative tension and operational constraints between the UAE and Israel following the incident also underscore how even terror attacks that have been thwarted, to the benefit of both states, may still translate into diplomatic tensions, rendering them strategic developments within the context of bilateral relations. **FORECAST**: Despite this, both parties will likely work together and prioritize strengthening joint security measures, driven by significant concern for both Israeli and Emirati aviation-related reputation.

Outlook

1. **FORECAST: As investigations into the incident continue, travel-related impacts are likely to persist in the short term**. These will include intensified security screening procedures for foreign flight crews entering Israel, which may result in delays. Flydubai operations will also continue to be affected as investigations into the failure to identify al-Hammami continue. On a broader scale, other airlines will likely engage in reviewing their security protocols and due diligence of active crew members. This is partly based on the understanding that, despite remaining a fringe phenomenon, the incident may inspire other lone wolves to attempt similar attacks in a copycat dynamic.
2. **FORECAST**: While al-Qaeda refrained from claiming responsibility or affiliation with al-Hammami, the praise by its supporters highlights that the incident constitutes a symbolic success for the jihadist group and its supporters, which will be used to encourage additional attacks. It also connects to the risk arising from a broader phenomenon wherein jihadist groups are increasingly relying on sympathizers to launch high-profile attacks, in light of their degradation in recent years that has reduced their capacity to undertake such acts directly themselves. This has increased the proliferation of online materials that radicalize and disseminate knowledge on how to launch attacks as lone wolves. This was highlighted by al-Qaeda's revival of its "Inspire Magazine" in recent years, which has included sections on how to target the civil aviation sector.

Recommendations:

1. Aviation companies and other firms whose business activities may be weaponized are advised to establish and review their Insider Threat Programs.
2. Ensure that managers and employees receive adequate training to recognize potential signs of radicalization. Employees should also receive clear guidance on reporting unusual or concerning behavior among colleagues.
3. Conduct periodic background checks, particularly for personnel in high-risk or sensitive roles.
4. **MAX Security can support establishing related security protocols and background checks. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com for further information.**
5. Remain cognizant of the high potential for Israeli and Emirati authorities and carriers to raise their level of alertness and security protocols globally, potentially leading to delays and more prolonged processes.
6. Expect other international air carriers to also potentially alter security procedures in response to the high-profile incident and its psychological impact on the aviation sector.
7. Comply with all official security guidance and report any suspicious activity to the relevant aviation authorities.