

The Heroes and the Failure of the Flydubai Flight

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[Nadav Eyal](#) Oct 04, 2026

The story of Flydubai Flight 1073 echoed around the world: the co-pilot who tried to crash the aircraft; the wounded captain who managed to open the cockpit door; the Israeli passengers who rushed forward, fought back - and together with the airline's crew saved everyone on board.

As details emerge about the attack, the co-pilot's radicalization, and the bravery of those who stopped him, I think this is a telling story about Israel. We have seen versions of it again and again in recent years. But its meaning is not quite the one being celebrated by some of the country's most enthusiastic advocates.

It is a twofold story. One part is about initiative, civic courage, improvisation, and the determination to take your fate into your own hands. The other is about another government failure: devastating institutional blindness, and a security and intelligence fiasco that brought Israel close to another catastrophe.

Both deserve to be told.

Let's begin with the heroism

Some of the AI-generated videos that circulated after the story broke captured something recognizable about the Israeli archetype. Anyone who knows Israel knows there is some truth to it. Living with grave dangers and terrorist threats can make people quicker to recognize an emergency, and more willing to act.

The passengers who understood what was happening and ran toward the cockpit. The improvisation of [using earphone cords](#) to restrain the attacker. In their instinct to intervene, these passengers represented something of the best of Israel.

I know this sounds like a cliché. But it is rooted in something real.

Israel remains a closely knit society, with a powerful belief in collective responsibility. Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Lazeh: all of Israel are responsible for one another. You might also put it as "all for one and one for all." Elsewhere, these words can sound like a slogan. In a society shaped by military service, repeated wars, and the knowledge that its defenses can fail, they have a very concrete meaning. **After October 7, no Israeli needs an abstract**

explanation of what happens when the people charged with protecting you fail to do so.

There is a famous song performed by Arik Einstein, perhaps Israel's most beloved singer, called Shir HaShayara, "The Caravan Song." Its lyrics, written by Eli Mohar, include the line: "They won't go on without us. This is the adventure of our lives."

For many Israelis, that captures something essential. Their individual lives are part of a larger story, connected to the fate of the Jewish people, to its history, and to the land of Israel. Military service is one expression of that connection. In an emergency, there is also a spontaneous enlistment: you understand that you have a part to play, and you step forward.

The passengers on this flight did precisely that.

Of course, this instinct is not exclusively Israeli. Think of the courage of the passengers of [United Flight 93 on September 11](#); the words forever associated with their resistance: "Let's roll."

We talk a great deal about shared American and Israeli values. There is also a shared disposition: our fate is in our own hands. A form of civic, classic-liberal nationalism that helped define the United States and, to a considerable degree, Israel. A belief that ordinary citizens, as a community, have both the right and the obligation to act.

The Israeli passengers deserve every expression of admiration they have received. So do Captain Smit Machchhar, the Indian pilot who managed to unlock the cockpit after being attacked, and the other Flydubai pilots and crew who helped save the aircraft.

Without the captain opening that door, without the passengers intervening, this could have ended in mass death. We do not know whether the attacker intended to reach a target in Israel - the Knesset, or the Azrieli towers in Tel Aviv, for instance - or simply crash the aircraft.

The Failure

Largely missing from the celebrations by enthusiastic advocates is an astounding Israeli security and intelligence failure. Three years after October 7, Israel came dangerously close to a catastrophic plane crash on the scale of 9/11.

Before the Hamas attack, Israel's senior security leadership catastrophically misjudged Hamas's intentions and capabilities. There were people who warned, and information that should have shattered the prevailing assumptions. Yet the system failed to accept that Hamas could and would carry out an invasion on that scale.



PM Netanyahu meets Yaniv Hayun, the Israeli plumber who helped take control of the Flydubai flight

A hijacked aircraft used as a suicide weapon requires no comparable leap of imagination. Every intelligence service and aviation security authority should have had that possibility firmly in mind since September 11, 2001.

The emerging reporting reveals a series of concrete failures.

1. The pilot had an alarming history that failed to keep him out of the cockpit.

The co-pilot has been identified as Hamam al-Hammami, an Omani national. [According to CNN](#), he had been removed from flight training at Oman Air over concerns about his radical views and reassigned to another role. Yet he subsequently found his way into a Flydubai cockpit, on a route carrying Israelis.

CNN also examined his deleted social media posts, documenting misogynistic and funemetalist views.

2. A basic restriction was repeatedly breached.

Israeli officials, have said the rules should have prevented pilots from countries without diplomatic relations with Israel from operating these flights. Oman has no such relations.

And this was apparently not an isolated exception. [Channel 12 reported](#) that dozens of Omani pilots had flown into Israel on Flydubai aircraft in recent years. That does not establish that those other pilots were extremists. It establishes that the restriction had repeatedly failed.

3. Israel had the crew information. It was not checked (!)

Israeli authorities confirmed that the flight's passenger and crew information reached its government database before departure. Both the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service, and the Mossad, had access to that database.

[Yet according to reporting by my colleagues Itamar Eichner and Sivan Hilaie](#), officials involved in the examination say the Transportation Ministry had not been retrieving foreign flight crews' details for approximately two years.

Transportation Minister Miri Regev says her ministry never received the crew lists and is not an intelligence agency. But the names were already in the Israeli system. The failure was in what the government did with them.

4. The responsible ministry believed it lacked the means to do the job — and did not sought intelligence assistance.

[According to the Army Radio \(Galatz\)](#), roughly eighteen months had passed since the Transportation Ministry was assigned responsibility for security screening of foreign flights. Its own security officials believed they lacked the tools, authority, and funding to carry out that responsibility without help.

Yet during that period, the ministry reportedly did not asked the Shin Bet or Mossad to help assess a crew member or passenger. Other eporting suggests it relied largely on the foreign airlines' assurances.

5. The intelligence agencies allowed the gap to remain

[According to reporting in Israel](#), neither the Shin Bet nor the Mossad (under the PM office) stepped in to fill the gap. A source familiar with the matter told the Israeli Radio that both agencies knew the ministry lacked the staff and capabilities it needed.

The ministry's responsibility does not settle the intelligence agencies' accountability. The reporting describes a system in which one institution could not adequately perform its assigned task, while others reportedly knew of its limitations and allowed that situation to persist; the deeper failure was not simply bureaucratic. It was what Israelis call *rosh katan*:

an institutional willingness to ignore a mission because it was not formally assigned to you or your institution.

6. The government had been explicitly warned

In May 2024, the State Comptroller, Israel's independent government watchdog, published limited, unclassified findings from an examination of international aviation security. His recommendations covered foreign aircraft entering Israel. [He called on the National Security Council \(under the PM office\)](#) to coordinate a review of responsibilities and resources, and on the prime minister and relevant ministers to formulate a comprehensive policy.

Then, in March 2025, the National Security Council explicitly warned that the Transportation Ministry was failing to fulfill its responsibility and acting contrary to a security cabinet decision, according to the Army Radio.

The danger had been identified; responsibility had been assigned. The failure to exercise it had been documented. Yet the gap remained.

A Crisis of Management

Taken together, these revelations describe a government failing to perform a basic duty during wartime. Israel sustains a lavishly funded intelligence and security apparatus. It devotes one of the highest shares of national income in the world to military spending. Yet with all these agencies, all these budgets, this expertise, checking who was flying an aircraft toward Israel fell through the cracks.

I am not talking about some extraordinary technological breakthrough. Just checking the pilot's employment history, examining information available about him, and enforcing the restrictions already in place. Elementary precautions.

The National Security Council, the Shin Bet, and the Mossad all answer to Netanyahu. The Transportation Ministry is run by Miri Regev.

The picture that emerges of a pattern. Negligence at the top, deep institutional decay beneath it. And ordinary people forced to save themselves from the consequences.

October 7 was the most devastating expression of that pattern. It did not begin there.

Anyone trying to understand what this means should read [the findings of the state commission that investigated the Mount Meron disaster. Forty-five people were killed in the crowd crush at the religious celebration in 2021.](#) It's Israel's worse civic disaster. The dangers had been repeatedly documented. The issue involved several ministries, powerful religious and political interests, and the prime minister himself.

[In its March 2024 final report, the commission found Netanyahu personally responsible.](#)

The commission noted that serious State Comptroller reports had addressed the problem and that it had repeatedly reached the government's table over the years.

Consider the state commission investigating Israel's purchases of submarines and naval vessels, a story long shrouded in allegations of corruption and secrecy. In June 2024, it issued Netanyahu [a formal warning concerning potential adverse findings about his conduct](#). Reuters quoted its assessment that he had "endangered the security of the state and harmed the state of Israel's foreign relations and economic interests."

This was a warning at an intermediate stage of the inquiry. Netanyahu rejected the criticism, arguing that the purchases strengthened Israel's security.

The connection is the way the state is run. At Meron, documented dangers were left unaddressed. In the submarine inquiry, the commission warned about damage to the processes through which national security decisions are made. Now, after the Flydubai attack, we learn that an explicitly identified gap in aviation security remained open.

Again and again in the last two decades, the institutions of the state fail to perform their most basic duties. The public is left to live with the danger, and sometimes to die from it.

Consider, too, the priorities of the Transportation Ministry. Miri Regev's tenure has become associated with controversies over political favoritism [and extensive official travel](#).

This near-disaster should be treated as though it happened and thoroughly investigated as a though the plane has crashed. Instead, the prime minister embraces the heroes, and the cameras capture the moment.

Of course he should honor them. Yet politically, the celebration serves him well: as long as the focus is on the passengers' courage, there is less scrutiny of his government, his ministers, and the handling of warnings by institutions under his authority.

We have seen this before.

In the months preceding October 7, [Netanyahu received repeated warnings](#) about the deterioration of Israel's security position and the growing danger of war. The question of what he did with those warnings remains central to any honest accounting of that catastrophe.

There is a saying in the Israeli military: 'where you find medals, you will also find failures'. The point is that soldiers and officers sometimes have to display exceptional bravery

because someone else failed to plan, prepare, or perform their duty. People are then required to compensate for institutional mistakes with extraordinary courage.

The Israeli Miracle

This story captures part of what I sometimes call the Israeli miracle, with an echo of the Italian one: the extraordinary capacity of a society to prosper despite the dysfunction of its government. Israel has survived, grown wealthier, and built a remarkable technology sector even as the quality of governance and essential public services has deteriorated - in education, security and more.

There is much to admire in the Israeli resilience. There is also a limit to how much a country can ask of it.