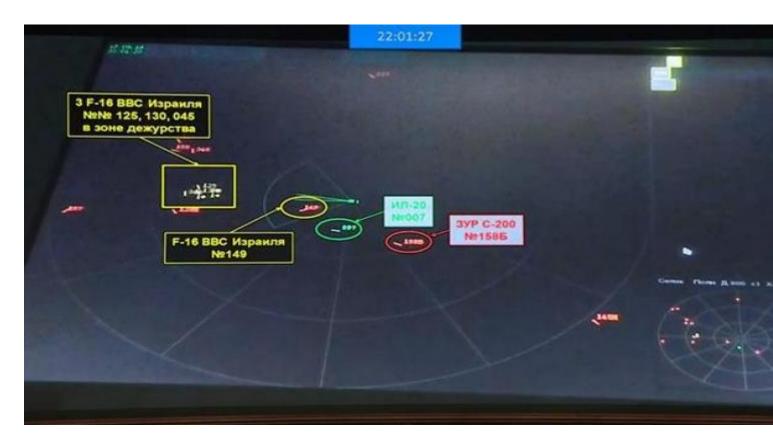# *Moscow says Israeli fighter jets used doomed Russian plane as cover*

Moscow, September 25 (RHC)-- The Russian defense ministry says Israeli jet fighters are to blame for the Syrian air defense's downing of a Russian aircraft as new data shows they had hidden themselves behind the doomed plane in order to avoid the Syrian missiles.

The data has been retrieved from Russia's S-400 air defense system deployed at the Russian Khmeimim air base in Syria's Latakia province. According to the data, the Syrian air defense's missile was, in fact, targeting an Israeli F-16 jet before it abruptly altered its course and eventually hit the Russian aircraft.

"This, and the position of all the aircraft at the moment of the September 17 incident, proves that an Israeli jet was de facto using the larger Il-20 as a cover," Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Major General Igor Konashenkov told journalists in a Monday briefing.

Konashenkov stressed that the radar images "clearly showed the direction of the flight of the S-200 missile launched by the Syrian air defense system, as well as the locations of the Russian and Israeli aircraft." "It is quite clear that the missile was targeting the Israeli jet," he noted.

However, he added, the Syrian missile suddenly changed its course and "locked on a target with a larger radar cross-section and slower speed," which was the Russian reconnaissance plane coming in for landing.

The Israeli jet, which effectively used the Il-20 as a cover from the attack, then also abruptly changed its altitude and the flight direction, Konashenkov said.   The data also proves wrong the claims earlier made by the Israeli military. Tel Aviv had earlier claimed that their planes had already returned to Israeli airspace at the moment of the incident. However, the radar data shows the Israeli jet fighters had continued to patrol the area off the Syrian coast following the incident, Konashenkov said.

"Today's data does not just suggest but prove that the blame for the tragic [downing] of the Russian Il-20 airplane lies entirely with the Israeli Air Force," he noted.

The plane crash which killed 15 Russian servicemen prompted Kremlin to press ahead with its earlier plan to deliver the modern S-300 surface-to-air missile system to Syria within two weeks in a bid to boost the Arab country's air defense capabilities and take "adequate retaliatory measures."

Shortly after the announcement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Russian President Vladimir Putin to warn him about the delivery. In the Monday phone conversation, Netanyahu claimed the delivery of the missile defense system would increase dangers in the region, a statement by his office said.

Tel Aviv has long lobbied Moscow not to provide the S-300 to Syria, fearing this would prevent its jet fighters from launching illegal aggressions against targets in the Syrian territory.

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