

Saudi Arabia to allow Israel-UAE overflights

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Two days after the first-ever commercial flight between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia has said it would allow overflights on this route on a scheduled basis with no further restrictions, the Saudi Press Agency has reported. A source in Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) said the kingdom would respond positively to requests filed by Emirati authorities to allow overflights to "all countries". While Israel was not explicitly named in the report, presumably because Saudi Arabia does not formally acknowledge its existence, it was the only country facing overflight restrictions. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu welcomed the decision, although he provided no firm timeline as to the next steps regarding the launch of scheduled flights between Tel Aviv Ben Gurion and the UAE. El Al Israel Airlines flight LY971/2 on August 31, while lauded as the first-ever commercial flight between Israel and the UAE, transited Saudi airspace by virtue of an exceptional permit. The flight, operated with a B737-900(ER), carried a group of American and Israeli officials to Abu Dhabi Int'l. Since 2018, Air India (AI, Mumbai Int'l) has been permitted to overfly Saudi Arabia en route from Delhi Int'l to Tel Aviv. However, all other airlines flying to and from Israel, regardless of their destination or origin and nationality, are banned from using Saudi airspace to do so.

