

# Red Outside, Blue Inside: Meet the Enemy Simulating Squadron

*Israeli Air Force*

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One squadron in the IAF has its aerial teams wearing Arabic name tags. It is the "Flying Dragon" Squadron from Ovda Airbase, which functions as a "Red" squadron, simulating the enemy. Meet the squadron that follows the agenda of the IAF's enemy air forces Arabic blares over the radio at the control tower, yet the soldiers sit peacefully in their places. "Muamar, you're free to land", says the air traffic controller in Arabic, and follows the F-16 airplane with his eyes until its wheels touch the runway. This is an ordinary conversation for the "Flying Dragon" Squadron from Ovda Airbase, which simulates the enemy during other IAF squadrons' drills. "We speak Arabic with each other on the two-way radio, and also with the control tower", explains Captain Omer, a pilot in the "Red" squadron.

## **With enemies like these, who needs friends?**

The purpose of the "Flying Dragon" Squadron is to train the IAF's squadrons and improve their fighting capabilities. The "Red" and "Blue" pilots have joint seminars and exercises, consequently creating a more advanced battlefield, which could not have been generated by Blue squadrons alone. After opening, the "Flying Dragon" Squadron was closed after few years of operational activity. The squadron reopened in 2005 as an Advanced Practice Center, to meet the needs of raising the force's training level. The idea of creating a squadron that simulates the enemy was conceived by the U.S Air Force, where that role is performed by the "Grass Horse" Squadron.

The Red Squadron has many ways of simulating the enemy forces. It has both aerial and ground weapons of its own, similar to the ones used by the actual enemy, designed to challenge the IAF's squadrons. In addition, each soldier from the aerial teams gets his own authentic Arabic nickname: Moshe becomes Musa, and Omer becomes Muamar. The ESAD unit (Enemy Simulation & Aerial Defense), part of the Red Squadron, completes the simulation with camouflaged vehicles, flares emitting launchers which simulate missile attacks, trucks, and even inflatable tanks - anything it takes to mimic a modern battlefield. "In my head I know I'm the trainer, not the enemy", says Caption Omer. "Our job is to attack the Blue pilots just when they forget to defend themselves, so that next time, which might be a real combat situation, they'll be better prepared. We're not here to overpower anyone, our goal is to improve".

## **Forever Blue**

When the training is over, the close relationships between the Red and Blue pilots are revealed. "The atmosphere is not competitive. After the joint debriefing we gather for a meal. We are friends who like each other very much", says Captain Omer. But later, when the Red

pilots take off their jumpsuits after the intensive practice, they remember where they belong.  
"For me there's no other option", declares Captain Omer, "I'm Blue. Always".