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Long-Range Rocket Fire on Israel's Depth:
Lessons for Homefront Defense
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The civilian front can expect to be challenged significantly in any future conflict with Hamas, and even more so, Hezbollah. The recent events deep within Israeli territory highlight the broad inherent risk of a systemic disruption due to rocket attacks on the civilian domain during a broad and protracted conflict, with a danger of multiple, simultaneous events that stretch the capacity of response systems. Israel was wise to come up with its overall concept for a national response to this complex challenge, interweaving military and offensive and defensive options with civilian response mechanisms. That said, the problem evident in past rounds of fighting was that this doctrine has been only partially implemented. Still lacking – mainly in the civilian sphere – is an investment of resources in building up the collaborative response systems and bolstering preparedness at the local level. In principle, this is a matter not just of saving lives, but also of ensuring a rapid response capacity for a swift rebound and recovery from disruptions of national security in the civilian sphere. This in turn allows the government to make considered decisions even under difficult stress conditions – both external and internal.

Recent months have witnessed three instances of long-range rocket fire from the Gaza Strip against population centers deep within Israeli territory. On October 17, 2018, a rocket launched at Beersheba scored a direct hit on a residential building; the family managed to survive by taking cover in the fortified room. On March 14, 2019, two rockets were launched at the greater Tel Aviv area, causing no damage, and on March 25, a rocket struck a home in Moshav Mishmeret, in the Sharon region, injuring seven people. This article surveys the principal lessons from these events regarding the civilian front, in order to encourage a systemic learning process that will help provide responses to the threat of high trajectory attacks on civilian targets.

- a. The Challenge: Sporadic launches against civilian localities in Israel with ranges beyond the immediate Gaza Strip periphery can be interpreted as a message by Hamas that it is ready to level a severe blow deep within Israel's territory, even outside the context of a broad conflict, so as to pressure the Israeli government into meeting its demands. This scenario could clearly recur in the future, with grave outcomes that might force a strong Israeli response, if the Hamas rocketry,

- despite its generally low precision capacity, yields a direct hit and causes fatalities.
- b. **The Importance of Passive Defense:** The recent incidents prove once again the importance of passive defense, particularly the literally lifesaving fortified rooms in private apartments. The Home Front Command (HFC) recently developed and implemented a sophisticated alert system that divides the country into 250 zones (slated in the future for further breakdown, into 1,800 zones), which allows for different, pinpointed alerts to individual communities. The new system enables continuation of the routine in areas not under direct threat and enhances citizen compliance with HFC emergency instructions. The State of Israel has so far invested significant sums in passive defense and complementary technologies, with the lion's share going to the "Gaza envelope." The main lesson is that existing plans for improving public and private shelters should be implemented in other parts of Israel, as a fatal strike on the civilian space would generate pressure on any Israeli government and reduce its leeway in the face of Hamas and Hezbollah fire.
 - c. **The Limits of Active Defense:** Iron Dome has proven to be an effective means of saving lives, which also improves the flexibility of decision makers in Israel. That said, it is clear that the number of available batteries (some operated by reservists) cannot suffice as a response to the threat, even one characterized by sporadic fire against the Israeli depth. In a full-scale conflict the system would be required to cover primarily military installations and vital national infrastructures, which implies shortfalls in protecting the targeted civilian population that expects coverage from the system. The lesson is clear: The order of battle must be increased so that it will provide a response to the threat, together with the necessary complementary measures.
 - d. **Responsibility and Authority over the Civilian Population:** The strikes have highlighted, once again, the absence of a legally stipulated framework assigning responsibility and authority over the civilian sphere in emergency situations. Such a framework is required on the national level, regarding the division of labor between the Home Front Command and the National Emergency Authority (which, though formally reorganized by the Mizrahi Commission in May 2018 and endorsed by the defense minister, has yet to be fully implemented), and also regarding the authority that each wields when dealing with government offices and the civilian population. In the experienced "Gaza envelope" the civil response conduct is generally adequate. However, when such strikes occur in localities that have not been challenged in a long time – if at all – there is grave potential for confusion and disruption in emergencies. Security threats in the civilian domain demand close coordinated and smooth cooperation among the agencies charged with emergency management. During the recent events, questions arose as to who

- is authorized to decide on the closure of schools or the opening of public shelters, issues that continue to be disputed between HFC and municipal leaders. The latter tend to take a more conservative approach to such issues, without being fully aware of the overall situation and the attendant risks, especially as they apply to sustaining functionality in the civilian realm. HFC authority over these matters was ratified by the cabinet in 2012, but the question remains open. The lesson is that whatever is required to ensure proper response for the civilian sphere before, during, and after emergencies should be anchored in law, so as to ensure the optimal performance of all parties involved in managing crises.
- e. A Test for Societal Resilience: The citizenry and first responders functioned at a high level in the immediate aftermaths of the recent events. In Mishmeret, the local council decided within an hour of the attack to keep schools open, and the turnout of students that day was very high. This conduct attested to a swift restoration of routine – a clear benchmark of societal resilience in the face of a surprising and troubling disruption. The lesson is that it is important that local authorities in Israel's depth prepare for similar - and certainly more serious - scenarios in the context of broad conflicts, including rocket and missiles salvos, repeated over time, against civilian localities. Such attacks, especially those that incur substantial loss of life, are liable to pose a severe challenge to societal resilience in a protracted conflict (Operation Protective Edge in 2014 lasted more than seven weeks). Such scenarios necessitate painstaking and ongoing preparation, both of the first responders and the civilians themselves, who for the most part shy away from taking part in emergency drills. An important part of proper preparation entails briefing citizens about the components of the threat and how these might impact on them, something that currently is not done sufficiently.

In conclusion, the civilian front can expect to be significantly challenged in any future conflict with Hamas, and even more so, Hezbollah. The recent events deep within Israeli territory highlight the broad inherent risk of a systemic disruption due to rocket attacks on the civilian domain during a broad and protracted conflict, with a danger of multiple, simultaneous events that stretch the capacity of response systems. Israel was wise to come up with its overall concept for a national response to this complex challenge, interweaving military and offensive and defensive options with civilian response mechanisms. That said, the problem evident in past rounds of fighting was that this doctrine has been only partially implemented. Still lacking – mainly in the civilian sphere – is an investment of resources in building up the collaborative response systems and bolstering preparedness at the local level. A reminder of this was provided by the section in the last report by the State Comptroller on flaws in emergency rescue forces. In principle, this is a matter not just of saving lives, but also of ensuring a rapid response

capacity for a swift rebound and recovery from disruptions of national security in the civilian sphere. This in turn allows the government to make considered decisions even under difficult stress conditions – both external and internal.