

A Rising and Falling Alarm: A Strategy for a Joint Exercise in the Home Front Command

Liron Donnell | No. 1567 | March 10, 2022

The national home front exercise in November 2021 saw Israel's national systems that manage the response by the home front to emergencies successfully address the challenge of working together in a multi-arena crisis environment. Its achievements are particularly noteworthy in the joint management, the definition of understandings between the Home Front Command and the National Emergency Authority after many years of disagreements, the promotion of a common digital system, and the exercise of operational plans and promotion of citizen awareness on the importance of personal defense. Meir Elran's article "[National Home Front Exercise 2021: More of the Same?](#)" implies that the exercise realized only part of its potential and apparently did not advance readiness for a future emergency. However, and without disputing the important lacunae highlighted by Elran – which not only were not part of the goals of the exercise, but also cannot be addressed in a single exercise – this article discusses the importance of the exercise and its achievements.

The national home front exercise, which took place in November 2021, envisioned a scenario in which the State of Israel is under fire on a larger scale than it has been with in the past. Described was a multi-arena event of rockets and missiles launched by Hamas from the southern theater and by Hezbollah and even Iran in the northern theater. In this scenario, thousands of rockets, missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles are launched at population centers, vital infrastructure, government institutions, and IDF bases in Israeli territory. Scenarios of infiltration into residential areas, disturbances in authorities with mixed populations, roadblocks, extensive destruction, injuries, and deaths were also practiced.

The first achievement of the exercise was the creation of a common language between the participating bodies: the Home Front Command, the National Emergency Authority, and all the government ministries and emergency organizations. For the first time the exercise was conducted under the leadership of one national administration representing all

bodies, combining the IDF General Staff exercise with the civilian one into one exercise, without the classification barriers that were a detriment to the previous national home front exercise – "Standing Strong" – held in 2018. The administration posed challenges to each of the bodies in relation to the particular goals it had set for itself, including dealing with lessons learned from Operation Guardian of the Walls. Joint and coordinated action of all bodies will enable the home front to continue functioning while saving lives, utilizing resources optimally, and no less important, strengthening the resilience of the population. All of these are necessary conditions for meeting the expected challenges.

The second and central achievement of the exercise was the practice and implementation of Mizrahi Committee decisions. After years of disagreement, last October the commander of the Home Front Command and the head of the National Emergency Authority signed a memorandum of understanding, which regulated the work processes and interfaces between the various bodies during times of routine and emergency, as well as the emergency response time that was synchronized with all government ministries. As part of the exercise, these bodies operated from a common war room, and established and practiced a joint complex responsible for continued functioning – from the national level to the local level. In this complex, the staff of the National Emergency Authority and the Home Front Command worked to formulate and address the gaps in the continuity of functioning at the local level.

Another achievement was the implementation of an advanced version of a digital system for control, monitoring, and use of information, developed by the Home Front Command. This system allows a connection between all the actors in the civilian arena: the Home Front Command, the local authorities, the National Emergency Authority, and in the future, all government ministries. The system will make it possible to formulate a synchronized understanding of the national situation and will assist in emergency decision making processes. The system is built in an open architecture that allows quick access of information by different users in various bodies and roles. It will assimilate the operational, organizational,

and technological concept of the different bodies, and will enable the realization of the vision for the creation of a national and military civilian functioning network, which will help harness the full range of capabilities of the civilian arena in order to provide a response to the home front in an emergency.

The exercise improved overall readiness for a situation in which the State of Israel is required to evacuate populations from communities that are under threat. The national plan Guest Hotel and the IDF's Safe Distance plan for evacuating and absorbing civilians was updated and approved by the Chief of Staff, the head of the National Emergency Authority, and the Minister of Defense, after coordinating with relevant government ministries, the National Emergency Authority, and Home Front Command and Spatial Commands, both North and South.

There is no question about the importance of preparing the population for emergencies, but this exercise was designed to practice cooperation and synchronization between those responsible for emergency management at the national level, and not the citizens. However, prior to the exercise, the Home Front Command and the National Emergency Authority led a joint information campaign, whose first purpose was to inform the public about the exercise in order to strengthen the sense of security and ongoing improvement of home defense professionals. Its second goal was to create citizen involvement and cooperation in emergency preparedness measures, with an emphasis on the field of defense. Indeed, fourteen communities participated in the exercise with all those responsible for implementing the program at the national level. The process was exercised in full for the first time, from the evacuation of the residents to their absorption in the receiving localities. In addition, the evacuation of a special institution located in a threatened area was practiced. The lessons of the exercise will help improve operational plans and national preparedness for evacuation and population absorption.

2021 saw a leap forward in training citizens and local authorities. Within the framework of the command objectives for the years 2020-2022, the Home

Front Command General has defined a key goal in relation to promoting readiness and capabilities for emergency response at the community level. In this framework, preparation weeks and other emergency preparations are held ("urban emergency week" – a project to improve the local authority's readiness for an emergency called 360°), in which a variety of actions are taken in the city/locality to promote emergency awareness and improve the population-level capabilities for dealing with emergencies. In this context, there are, for example, activities through the local authorities with youth, in senior centers, and guidance regarding the defensive guidelines by Home Front Command instructors. In addition, open lectures are given to the population about coping with and preparing for emergencies; round tables are held between community members; and formal organizations for joint thinking about coordinated coping and assistance during emergencies, entry into protected areas is practiced; and the warning signal is activated. In addition, every year the Home Front Command trains the local authorities in cooperation with government ministries or conducts an audit of their readiness, in cooperation with the National Emergency Authority. Each authority has its own plan formulated after an in-depth analysis by the authority and the residents regarding the emergency response and the threats that are expected in the area. Accordingly, the action plan for citizens and the authority is formulated. The Home Front Command and the National Emergency Authority prepare officials in local authorities and government ministries for their emergency role at the Israel National Resilience Institute – a national institute for managing emergency situations in the home front.

These and many other activities to prepare the population and local authorities for emergencies would not have been possible within the framework and exercise of the National Home Front exercise. In the view of the Home Front Command, it is important to divide the work plan into focused actions `on the ground with defined goals, integrate the population, and engage in direct dialogue with it. These actions will be of greater benefit to the institutional and civic readiness of the State of Israel for emergencies.

Clearly it is not possible in a few days' exercise to address all the defense and protection gaps that exist today, but rather, a national plan and routine activities are required. Nonetheless, the exercise referenced possible responses to said gaps and the challenges they pose if a war breaks out before these plans are set.

Routinely, the Home Front Command works hard to reduce gaps: the Northern Shield project will be budgeted so that it will provide a solution for up to one kilometer from the northern border. Work in the field has already begun to reduce existing protection gaps. The protection of national infrastructures to ensure functional continuity and the supply of electricity and fuel in emergencies will be completed by the end of 2022. The Home Front Command is working to both reduce the regulatory burden on any citizen who wants to establish a shelter and to enforce the security regulations in any new building such that it will contain a protective solution. It has also researched and developed protection solutions against rocket and missile fire and their accessibility to the citizens of the State of Israel.

In conclusion, the National Home Front Exercise is a major and important exercise, but is just one of a series of joint, coordinated and regular exercises, operations, and training sessions that the Home Front Command conducts with all partners throughout the year. The task of defending the home front is complex and challenging. The joint action of all the bodies responsible for its response on the civilian front will reduce the expected damage to the home front and strengthen the resilience of the population. This requires a combination of forces, mutual recognition of the other's abilities, realizing the relative advantage of each body operating in the civil front as well as a common language, agreements, and mechanisms for joint management in emergencies, building physical and digital infrastructures, setting common training and exercise goals, and strengthening operational coordination. All of these will help create an effective functioning civic network, improve readiness, strengthen trust among all partners and between them and the citizens, and prepare the home front for the critical day.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Judith Rosen