

Editor: **Mark A. Heller**

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ISRAELI PREPARATIONS FOR A WAR IN IRAQ

Ephraim Kam
Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies

As the Bush Administration comes closer to a decision about war in Iraq, Israel is preparing for the possibility that it will be attacked by Iraq. The prevailing view in the Israeli defense establishment is that the chances of an Iraqi missile attack with conventional or non-conventional warheads are low. This assessment is based on several considerations. By all accounts, Iraq's capacity to strike Israel is now much lower than it was during the 1991 Gulf War, if it exists at all. And if Iraq launches even one missile at Israel, it will prove that it has the long-range capability it consistently denied having and that it deceived the Security Council over many years, thereby justifying the American attack on it. Moreover, Iraq lacks the same political motivation that prompted it to attack in 1991, because this time there is virtually no Arab coalition ranged against it that an attack on Israel might undermine. Finally, Israel now has an operational anti-missile system in the form of the "Arrow," and Iraq will have to factor in the probability that any missiles it launches will be intercepted. And even if Iraq does decide to attack, its ability to do so will be further degraded by other factors, particularly by American efforts at the outset of the campaign to

isolate western Iraq. Consequently, the chances are that Iraq will not be able to fire more than a few missiles, if any, before its launchers are destroyed.

Notwithstanding this relatively sanguine assessment, however, the Israeli defense establishment has taken wide-ranging measures to prepare for the possibility of a missile attack, while at the same time trying not to panic the public.

First of all, coordination with the United States is much more detailed than in 1991. The U.S. has appointed a senior liaison officer, General Charles Simpson, who is already in Israel. There is an understanding that the U.S. will notify Israel shortly before it commences hostilities. There are also procedures in place for early warning of Iraqi missile launches: American satellites will provide constant coverage of western Iraq, and in the event of a missile launch, Israel will be immediately notified through the American liaison unit. Since missiles need six-seven minutes to fly from western Iraq, Israel will effectively have about four minutes' warning to activate its sirens, broadcast radio and television alerts, and launch Arrow or Patriot interceptor missiles.

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Secondly, Israel has a much stronger defense system than ever before. It includes two batteries of Arrow missiles and four batteries of Israeli Patriot missiles, reinforced by three batteries of American Patriots deployed in Israel during recent joint U.S.-Israeli exercises, as well as two more batteries of Patriots sent from Germany in mid-February. The Patriots will provide both anti-missile and anti-aircraft backup for the Arrow.

Thirdly, the Home Front Command is completing its preparations for possible war in the field of passive defense, including a limited call-up of its reserves. The Home Front Command's operating assumption is that this time, the civilian population will have to stay in shelters and sealed rooms for only a few days, at most, rather than for weeks, as was the case in 1991. It is finishing the process of updating protective kits for Israeli citizens and has begun distributing them to foreign workers. It also plans to distribute kits to Palestinians in Area C of the West Bank, which remains under full Israeli jurisdiction. On the other hand, it has no plans to distribute kits to Palestinians in Areas A and B, which are under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. About 90% of the population in Israel is now equipped with regulation kits; in the coastal areas, where the threat of attack is higher, that figure rises to about 95%. Just before the beginning of an American assault, the Home Front Command intends to issue instructions to the population to seal rooms against the effects of a chemical or biological attack and to open the protective kits and keep them close at hand. In the last stage, a state of emergency will be declared, though probably only if Israel is directly attacked.

Home Front Command is also deployed to deal with chemical/biological strikes. It has trained and exercised teams in quick identification of warhead loads and in rapid evacuation of the

population from contaminated areas if a warhead has been identified as non-conventional. Nevertheless, insufficient coordination with local authorities has raised concern in the defense establishment about the possibility of public disorder if rapid evacuation of the population is necessary. The defense establishment, which wants to convey a general message of reassurance, takes exception to the plans of some municipalities in the Greater Tel Aviv area to evacuate to safer areas those citizens who want to leave; it argues that such plans are superfluous and may well sow panic.

Fourthly, the Prime Minister's Office has set up a National Command Center, to which the National Security Council will be subordinated in the event of an Iraqi attack. In this context, a "National Spokesman" has been appointed. He is Major-General Amos Gilad, Coordinator of Government Operations in the West Bank and Gaza, and his appointment has generated some controversy, not only on grounds of personal background, but also because of concerns that he will, in this capacity, circumvent both the IDF Spokesman and the Home Front Command.

Finally, the security establishment has expressed itself on the question of an appropriate active response in case of an Iraqi attack. Israel has not really clarified how it will act in this eventuality, both because it doesn't wish to impose prior constraints on itself and because it will in any case probably have to coordinate its response with the United States. Nor is it clear that any understanding has already been reached with the U.S. about the character of any Israeli response and the circumstances in which it might take place. In any event, in order to preserve its deterrent *vis-à-vis* Saddam Hussein, Israel stresses that its defensive deployment is designed to foil any attempt on his part to attack Israel, and that it has taken all steps to respond in other ways if that proves necessary.