

The Civilian Front in Israel: A Framework for Future Preparedness

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The only episode in 2013 that came close to being an acute threat to the Israeli civilian front involved the tension between Washington and Damascus concerning the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Today, even if the fate of the chemical arsenal in Syria remains unclear, the episode highlighted one important lesson about the complexity and volatility of the risks facing the Israeli home front: in the conflict ridden and frequently changing Middle East, the home front can suddenly find itself facing an unanticipated conflagration in unforeseen circumstances from an unexpected direction. While for many years Israel perceived itself as challenged by a military threat from non-state or semi-state entities led by Hizbollah and Hamas, the challenge is now proving to be more diverse and points to possible surprising future directions. The firm lesson that emerges, therefore, though not entirely new, prompts the requisite action items. In other words, as it undertakes preparedness for an emergency, the home front must be ready to provide an immediate and appropriate response to a broad range of threats from different directions. This means that it must attend to the surprise factor that is often associated with disaster and crisis events.

All in all, 2013 was a quiet year for external threats to the home front. Following Operation Pillar of Defense (November 14-21, 2012), relative quiet prevailed in and from the Gaza Strip, thereby highlighting the power of effective deterrence. On the northern front, Hizbollah too has been careful to exercise restraint against Israel since the Second Lebanon War

in the summer of 2006. Furthermore, the turbulent regional environment resulting from the upheaval in leading countries, including those bordering Israel, has weakened Israel's enemies and afflicted Syria, Hamas, and Hizbollah with severe problems. The result is that the possibility of deliberate confrontation with Israel is now more remote, at least for the foreseeable future. This combination of clear Israeli deterrence and severe internal problems among its enemies grants a breathing space for the home front in Israel.

This respite of sorts brings with it both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, Israel has time to prepare in proper, orderly fashion for future threats to the home front. Time is a crucial asset, particularly when the different home front response organs use it well in meticulous planning. On the other hand, given the situation in Israel, prolonged security calm is liable to create the illusion of long term stability and an absence of urgency and necessity to effect readiness on the civilian home front. This article examines the degree to which Israel is dealing correctly with this dilemma.

New Developments in Threats to the Home Front

The past year was not the best for military buildup among Israel's immediate enemies. Syria is mired in a bloody civil war, with its army fully preoccupied by the conflict. Hizbollah is also heavily involved in the Syrian crisis, including militarily, and Hamas for its part is not privy to its regular sources of military supplies. In the absence of adequate available data, it is assumed that the quantitative reinforcement of Israel's enemies with high trajectory weapon systems has been less than impressive in the past year. Still, the stockpiles of weapons accumulated in previous years are extensive, and make a long offensive campaign against the Israeli home front eminently possible. In this context, the head of the IDF Home Front Command stated that if a war breaks out with Hizbollah, the central region "will come under a massive missile barrage. Hizbollah has at its disposal about 5,000 warheads, weighing between 300 and 800 kilograms each. In my estimation, the first days will be extremely difficult. I am preparing for a scenario in which more than a thousand missiles and rockets a day are fired at the civilian rear."¹ The capabilities of Hamas and the very large

arsenal of short range rockets in the hands of the two organizations, and possibly the Syrian potential threat, can be added to this threat assessment.

Against this background, several developments in the enemy's capabilities are liable to have negative consequences for the future defense of the Israeli home front. The first is procurement of precision weapon systems. Until now, the Hamas and Hizbollah military buildups concentrated on statistical weapon systems, as they were more available, less costly, and easier to operate. At the same time, Hizbollah apparently has already obtained a small quantity of precision missiles, and there are increasingly frequent reports of its acquisition of such weapons. It was recently reported, for example, that Iran was planning to supply Hizbollah with advanced GPS-guided missiles – the Fateh 110 missile (to use its Iranian name),² also called M-600. According to unconfirmed reports, these missiles (or a less developed version of them) already reached Lebanon from Syria in 2010. Israel has made it clear more than once that it would take action to thwart the transfer of “game changing” weapons to the Lebanese organization, and in this context has attacked targets in Syria.

Apparently semi-state organizations are not satisfied with statistical systems, and are striving to supplement them with more advanced systems. This might pose a serious challenge for Israel, if in addition to statistical systems, which are designed primarily to frighten the population and disrupt its daily life, the enemy possesses systems capable of precise strikes against critical civilian and military infrastructure installations, such as military bases, airports, seaports, the electric grid, and other such sites. This new development might require a different, more comprehensive passive defense approach, and might challenge the newly constructed active defense system, whose order of battle is currently limited. If the active defense system is insufficient for enemy barrages, the IDF would be forced to set difficult priorities for protecting the different targets. The dilemma would necessitate choosing between protection of the civilian population, critical civilian installations, or military bases, quite a sensitive issue in Israel.

The second development concerns the cyber dimension. Until now, cyber warfare was conceived in Israel as a separate challenge from the home front. It now appears that it should be perceived as another increasingly

important element in the array of threats against the home front, requiring an appropriate integrated response, along with the more traditional and familiar threats. Indeed, together with the precision weapon systems mentioned above, it represents a future major threat to the critical military or civilian infrastructure installations, which depend directly or indirectly on IT systems.³ As of now, the offensive cyber warfare capabilities of Israel's immediate adversaries are apparently limited. Still, they are under development, as was indicated by the report that numerous cyber attacks were launched against government internet sites during Operation Pillar of Defense.⁴ The presumably enhanced capabilities of hostile countries like Syria, and especially Iran, whose operational cyber offensive capabilities are developing rapidly, should be considered more seriously.⁵ In any case, Israel is systematically preparing itself for this growing threat, even though the national effort in this field is conducted through separate and parallel channels, external to those engaged with the home front cycle. Possible integration of all defensive cyber activities aimed at countering, foiling, and especially protecting the relevant systems should be considered, through creation of a joint entity responsible for all threats against the home front.⁶

Third is the chemical dimension, which was in the headlines following the Syrian regime's August 21, 2013 chemical attack against the rebels and the ensuing agreement whereby Syria would dismantle its chemical arsenal.⁷ Several points might be in order here. One, the chemical threat has been perceived in Israel as relevant and serious particularly since the Iraqi missile attacks in 1991. In 2010, it was decided to redistribute gas masks and protective kits to the public, but the measure was inadequately budgeted and left 40 percent of the public unprotected.⁸ The defense establishment has recently suggested ending this project altogether, based on the apparent change in the threat picture following Syria's commitment to dismantle its chemical arsenal. Two, beyond the Syrian context, there is disagreement regarding the likelihood of chemical weapons being used against Israel. Some assert that such a weapon, which was used by Egypt in the war in Yemen and by Iraq against the Kurds, has never been used against an enemy capable of an appropriate response, and that its use against Israel is therefore highly unlikely. There are those who are more cautious and suggest that the potential threat must be heeded⁹ and prepared

for. For example, the recent annual national drill (Turning Point 7/Bold Home Front 1) was based on a nonconventional scenario,¹⁰ as are local civilian drills that drill responses to chemical attacks.¹¹ Three, it can be assumed that the chemical threat will continue to pose some kind of threat for the civilian front in Israel and may become even stronger, especially if it finds its way to non-state terrorist organizations. Future developments will require a reassessment of the chemical threat's potential. If the threat is perceived to continue, and if it is decided to preserve the passive defense capabilities, it will be important to close the present gap and supply the entire population with the adequate defense means.¹²

Despite their current weakness, Israel's adversaries still possess sufficient military capabilities to challenge the Israeli civilian home front and create difficult situations. Special attention must be paid to the combination of the huge stockpile of rockets and missiles, with the future expected improvement in their precision and in cyber capabilities. Together, these will enable the enemy to wage a rather long campaign deep within Israel, including against population centers (Tel Aviv and the outskirts of Jerusalem were already targeted in Operation Pillar of Defense), and to severely damage civilian and military critical infrastructures. Such enhanced capabilities require Israel to take advantage of the breathing space provided by the regional developments in order to create an orderly, comprehensive, and flexible deployment that will provide a solid comprehensive response to the range of relevant threats, taking into consideration also less expected scenarios.

Constructing the Home Front

In many ways, the past year was not much different from the six years before it since the Second Lebanon War, which was a turning point in home front deployment. The main directions have continued without conceptual or practical breakthroughs. The routine was reflected in the many emergency drills that were conducted in the various sectors, most notably the annual drill, in which there were no significant innovations. At the same time, the deployment of Iron Dome batteries in various regions against emerging threats was highlighted repeatedly, to make them a symbol of the active defense and a focus of public relations vis-à-vis both Israeli citizens (you are protected) and the enemy (you can't beat us).

Behind the scenes, however, tempers flared among the partners involved in the civilian front establishment. Most of the contention focused on the issue of authority and responsibility for managing the civilian front, and on the organizational-political question: who will make the decisions in this complex and sensitive theater, and what tools will be at his disposal? Particularly since the failure on the Israeli home front in 2006, several attempts were made to reorganize the home front structure in a way that would best coordinate the action among its various components. None of those produced an integrated and accepted solution, and this lack of resolution continues to ruffle the system and generate bad blood between the different organizations.

Accordingly, to date no comprehensive and effective solution has been found satisfactory. The dispersed and decentralized system has remained mostly without acceptable leadership, direction, or guidance, not to mention the absence of continuous systematic coordination. Every governmental, military, municipal, semi-national, and volunteer agency and party has continued operating mainly according to its own understanding and needs, despite some minor rectifications. Tactical and technical improvements have indeed been introduced over the years into the system, but they have neither changed the overall picture, nor provided a suitable answer to the question of who determines the priorities and the programs for promoting preparedness on the home front before a crisis, and who manages the scene during and after an event.¹³

Minister of Home Front Defense Gilad Erdan, who assumed his position in March 2013 as the third head of the ministry since its establishment in 2011, appears determined to attend to this problematic situation and create a new setting that will meet the challenge of defining responsibility at the ministerial level and addressing ensuing bureaucratic consequences at the lower levels.¹⁴ However, it is not yet clear what the new picture will look like, and whether changes instituted by Erdan will generate a new process, gain momentum, and alter the situation to encourage a greater degree of coordination between the parties, and eventually lead to the effective and proper operation of the entire system.

Several concrete questions are at issue. What is the standing and authority of the Ministry of Home Front Defense vis-à-vis the other ministries,

especially the Ministry of Defense, the Home Front Command, and the Ministry of Public Security, which is in charge of the Israel Police, which in this context also has defined authority under the law? In practical terms: to whom is the Home Front Command, the largest and most important agency in the civil defense system, subordinate, to whom does it report, and what character will it assume in the event of a future change in the system? How will the future organizational structure, which is designed to properly reconcile the military solutions for the home front with the civilian responses, be constructed? This assumes that it is possible, even theoretically, to draw a line separating these two spheres in the Israeli context.

The answers to these questions lie, of course, mostly in the political sphere. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who for some time now has been more closely involved with making decisions concerning the home front, primarily as an arbitrator, and who is trying to push forward a compromise formula in this critical matter, will be the one to make the difference, if he so chooses. Such a compromise may create a formula that grants, at least on paper, more visible authority to the Home Front Ministry, which until now has been no more than a marginal unit in the Ministry of Defense. Such an arrangement should include several essential elements, to ensure: (a) clarity in principle and in practice for the system, instead of the existing obstructive vagueness, in all matters pertaining to authority and responsibility, including budgetary allocations and their ramifications; (b) legislative legitimacy for the future arrangement, to expedite the Home Front Law, which has been stalled for several years; (c) maintenance of the operational capabilities of the Home Front Command, which has made some significant conceptual and practical strides in recent years; (d) clear and binding frameworks for coordination and cooperation between the various entities dealing with home front defense; and (e) clear organizational frameworks for enhancing the local authorities as a basic component, primarily in managing the scene in an emergency.

Only an arrangement that will establish and ensure this substantive clarity will be able to meet the future needs. Otherwise, the system will remain stalled where it is now, meaning that despite the incremental improvements instituted in recent years, however important, the system

will be limited in its overall capacity to accomplish the strategic leap necessary to provide the comprehensive solution needed for the threats to the home front.

In order to demonstrate that emergency systems can be advanced and improved, even in the tangled Israeli political and bureaucratic situation, consider the following short description of the change over the past two years of the firefighting system, whose severe shortcomings have been known for some time, but which were tragically exposed in the Carmel forest fire in December 2010.

Cabinet Resolution No. 2699, dated January 9, 2011, which followed the December 8, 2010 State Comptroller's Report on the deployment of firefighting and rescue services for emergencies, stipulated, inter alia, that a national firefighting apparatus should be created under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Security. This decision paved the way for enactment of the National Firefighting and Rescue Authority Law 2012, which defined and specified a far reaching structural change in the firefighting apparatus: a decentralized system of municipal services (firefighters union and firefighting departments in the local authorities) became a nation-wide state authority with a centralized management and control mechanism. The new law established a transition period, at the end of which the nation-wide authority would replace the firefighter unions in the local authorities. This indeed occurred on February 8, 2013, as planned. In 2012, an agreement was signed between the firefighters union and the Ministry of Finance settling all issues pertaining to wages and labor relations arising from the transfer of firefighters to the status of civil servants under the Ministry of Public Security.

The changes that took place in the firefighting apparatus were driven by the need to promote a mechanism whose main purpose is to provide a structural connection between responsibility and authority at the local, district, and national levels.¹⁵ In addition to the structural change, the state also invested hundreds of millions of shekels in infrastructure, where the gaps were particularly wide, and in substantial replenishment of the equipment and materials supplied to the firefighters.

The changes in the firefighting domain may constitute a rather good – however atypical – example for both home front preparedness and

implementation of reforms in the public sector in Israel. In this case, putting through the reforms featured several elements critical for success: sustained personal involvement of the senior leadership, headed by the prime minister; a budget supplement that included wage and labor welfare issues; and determined organizational and professional leadership. As such, a reformed apparatus was created with substantially improved operational and organizational effectiveness.

An entirely different issue that must be addressed in the context of advancing the Israeli home front involves development of the new apparatus for active defense. Once the Iron Dome system won public praise and military recognition, substantial acceleration in the construction of the three tier anti-missile system was quite expected. While the operational effort to develop the long range Arrow 3 is continuing,¹⁶ some delay in the development of the Magic Wand medium range system has been evident (some doubt its necessity, given the scope of the further development in Iron Dome's capabilities).¹⁷ It is still unclear how much Israel will invest from its budget in future procurement of the Iron Dome system,¹⁸ now that the sixth battery has already been put into operation, and the seventh and eighth (out of the 13 batteries listed in the long range plan) are scheduled to become operational not before 2014.

Apparently, Israel clearly prefers that most of the budget investment in procurement of Iron Dome come from US sources, as has been the case up until now. Some unconfirmed reports suggest that the system's Tamir missiles will be manufactured in the US, which will accelerate the pace of their production and serve as a platform for marketing the entire system to customers in the United States and elsewhere.¹⁹ In any case, the current Iron Dome order of battle must be doubled; otherwise, under a scenario of a full scale conflict, Israel will be unable to avoid problematic prioritization to defend military bases and critical infrastructure facilities over the protection of the civilian population – contrary to public expectation, based on promises made by the politicians.

The last major question is the issue of enhancement of social resilience. Much has been said on this subject, both in Israel and around the world, but not many are indeed looking in depth into its practical implications. Discussion has begun in Israel over the past year (to a large extent in

the wake of the example of the IDF, which devotes serious theoretical and practical efforts to the defense of the military rear) about system-wide “operational continuity.” This is a necessary concept in the field of emergency management, worded differently but close to the paradigm of resilience. Both aim in the same direction – improving the capabilities of any system – local, community, civilian, economic, military, social, and national – to cope successfully with a severe crisis with preplanned and structured incorporation of the following elements: containment of the consequences of the crisis; a flexible and adjustable response to an unexpected challenge according to its scope and magnitude; recognition that a temporary functional decline is unavoidable as a result of the disturbance; coping and adaptation; and an expeditious bouncing back, to facilitate a rapid return to the original designated functioning, and possibly even an advance to an improved systemic performance.²⁰

Engagement in the area of resilience began in Israel in the 1980s in the northern communities facing Palestinian terrorism from Lebanon.²¹ Rather slow progress has been made since then in studying the subject and in the commitment to address it. It appears that recognition that social resilience is not a static and given situation but must be enhanced early on through systemic and focused efforts has not yet taken root among decision makers in Israel. The limited activity in this key social strategy has been irregular and unsustainable – in effect, too little, too late. The past year represented a low point in this essential area. While leaders continue talking about promotion of national and community resilience as a lever for successful handling of the challenges of the various types of terrorism against the home front, they should be expected to get to the root of the challenge, and translate this understanding into appropriate plans and practical measures for ensuring resilience and operational continuity on the home front during and after a crisis.

Conclusion

Two phenomena characterize the current situation on the home front. On the one hand, Israel is experiencing a period of relative calm on both of its main confrontation fronts: the Gaza Strip under Hamas, and southern Lebanon under Hizbollah. This relative stability is an appropriate time

to make the necessary amendments and advance preparations for future crises, which are bound to occur in unexpected circumstances, places, and times. At the same time, prolonged calm naturally produces complacency. From this perspective, the US-Syrian episode beginning in late August 2013 could have acted as a catalyst for further progress in preparedness – but it did not.

On the other hand, a serious controversy is taking place, partially behind the scenes, on the future setup of the governmental control over the home front. This could be an important opportunity for a constructive shake-up of the home front machinery. This prospect appears to be necessary, as it seems that the positive effects of the Second Lebanon War, namely, the important improvements mainly at the technical-tactical and operational level, were not sufficient to generate the necessary qualitative strategic leap forward. The organizational frameworks devised so far – the founding of the National Emergency Authority (NEA) in 2007 and the establishment of the Ministry of Home Front Defense in 2011 – have not produced the necessary transformation. Some even argue that they have added to the confusion within the system, and have therefore caused more damage than good. They have mainly created yet another mechanism on top of the already existing ones, without helping to clarify the question of authority and responsibility, which is the most critical issue in the labyrinthine structure of the home front.

Notes

- 1 Amos Harel, “Israel’s Enemies have Put the Entire Civilian Population on the Frontline,” *Haaretz*, March 29, 2013.
- 2 Amir Rapaport, “Attack on the Way to a War,” *Israel Defense*, August 15, 2013.
- 3 The conceptual outline in this question was extensively reviewed in articles published in recent years in periodicals published by the Institute for National Security Studies. For example, see Lior Tabansky, “Critical Infrastructure Protection against Cyber Threats,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2011); and Daniel Cohen and Aviv Rotbart, “The Proliferation of Weapons in Cyberspace,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2013).
- 4 Moti Basuk, “A Cyber War: 44 Million Attempts to Disrupt the Governmental Websites were Hold Back,” *The Marker*, November 22, 2013.
- 5 Gabi Siboni and Sami Kronenfeld, “Iran and Cyberspace Warfare,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 4, no. 3 (2013), pp. 68-69.

- 6 See the position paper by Gabi Siboni, head of the Military and Strategic Affairs Program and Cyber Warfare Program at INSS, on a national organizational solution for cyber, <http://inss.org.il.w99.moonsite.co.il/index.aspx?id=4351&eventid=94>.
- 7 Yiftah Shapir, "Chemical Assad? On the Chemical Warfare Attack in Syria," *INSS Insight* No. 458, August 25, 2013.
- 8 As of May 2013, 4.6 million kits were distributed, of which three million were in threatened areas and to institutions and critical enterprises. It was reported that in a crisis, the Even Pina (Cornerstone) system for distributing the remaining inventory within eight days could be activated, but the shortage of 2.5 million kits could not be made up. See Yoav Zitun, "Home Front Report: High Likelihood of Chemical Terror," *Ynet*, May 16, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4380579,00.html>.
- 9 An internal report by the Ministry of Home Front Defense defined the chemical threat as very likely, the risk from it as medium, and the level of preparedness with respect to distribution of kits as low. See Zitun, "Home Front Report."
- 10 Press release by IDF spokesman, May 25, 2013, <http://www.idf.il/1153-19038-HE/Dover.aspx>.
- 11 See the graph that presents drills at hospitals by charting the scenarios according to years, from Gaby Neuman (Head of Hospital Preparedness for Emergency Scenarios Branch, Home Front Command), hospital preparation cycle for emergency situations, www.old.health.gov.il/emergency/mamarim/22.
- 12 Evidence that the subject is troubling those engaging in this work can be found in the idea, attributed to the Ministry of Home Front Defense and the National Security Council, of levying a NIS 1.3 billion tax to finance the supply of civil defense kits to all citizens. See Moti Basuk, "The Government Considers: Funding the Gas Masks through Increase of National Insurance Contributions," *The Marker*, August 7, 2013.
- 13 Knesset Research and Information Center, Authority of the Ministry of Home Front Defense, report: Oriana Almasi, October 2012, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m03117.pdf>.
- 14 Amir Oren, "What Scares the Home Front Command," *Haaretz*, April 20, 2013; Amos Harel, "Police Responsibility for the Home Front – A Recipe for a Failure," *Haaretz*, June 21, 2013.
- 15 For example, seven district reporting centers were set up within the National Firefighting Authority. These centers assemble data from the various stations, and transfer them to a national control center. See *HaBitachon*, July-August 2013. On the other hand, the IDF decided to concentrate firefighting capabilities on its bases independently of the civilian firefighting agencies; see *BaMahane*, June 2013. This is another reflection of the importance attributed by the IDF to what is called

“operational continuity” during an emergency and an attack on the military rear. Such separation also expands the firefighting capabilities of the civilian apparatus in an emergency.

- 16 The pace of progress in the Arrow 3 program is more rapid than previous estimates. If there is no further delay, the system could be operational during 2015. Gili Cohen, “The Senior IDF Official: Israel Accelerates the Development of ‘Arrow 3’ – Prepares for a Nuclear Threat,” *Haaretz*, June 3, 2013, in an article on a lecture by a senior officer in the Ministry of Defense Homa administration (responsible for development of the missile interception system) at a conference sponsored by the Institute for National Security Studies.
- 17 Operational deployment of the system is now projected only in 2015. See Gili Cohen, “The First Pictures of ‘Magic Wand’ in Action,” *Haaretz*, November 27, 2012.
- 18 Yiftah Shapir, “Lessons from the Iron Dome,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2013). For the dispute about the system’s effectiveness, see Yiftah Shapir, “How Many Rockets Did Iron Dome Shoot Down?” *INSS Insight* No. 444, March 21, 2013.
- 19 Arie Egozi, “Will the Tamir Missiles be Produced in USA?” *Israel Defense*, October 14, 2012.
- 20 There is rich scientific literature about the metaphor of resilience. See especially F. H. Norris, S. P. Stevens, B. Pfefferbaum, K. F. Wyche, and R. L. Pfefferbaum, “Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008): 127-50; and Committee on Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters; Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, “Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative,” National Academies, 2012.
- 21 The Mashabim (resources) center in Kiryat Shmona, headed by Prof. Mooli Lahad, was a pioneer on this subject. See <http://www.icspc.org>.