

Israeli general readies to lead the charge against Hezbollah
Josef Federman - Associated Press (AP)

RAMLE, Israel (AP) — In his just-completed role as head of the Israeli military's Home Front command, Maj. Gen. Ori Gordin was in charge of bolstering a network of early-warning systems and shelters in case of rocket attacks. It may have been the ideal preparation for his new assignment.



Israel Bracing for Hezbollah© Provided by Associated Press



FILE - Lebanese wave Hezbollah and Palestinian flags, as they stand in front of the Israeli town of Metula, background, on the Lebanese side of the Lebanese-Israeli border in the southern village of Kfar Kila, Lebanon, Saturday, May 15, 2021. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla, File)© Provided by Associated Press

Gordin is set to soon take over the Northern Command -- putting him at the forefront of Israel's efforts to contain Hezbollah. At a time of heightened tensions, the Lebanese militant group is believed to possess tens of thousands of rockets and missiles capable of striking anywhere in Israel, dwarfing any threat posed by the Palestinian militant groups in Gaza that have battled Israel in recent years.



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To Gordin, the connection is clear: His new role will be to keep Hezbollah far away from his old one and ensure that any future fighting “not reach the civilian front.” In an interview with The Associated Press, Gordin said there is “no doubt” that Israel remains the more powerful side. But he said the Hezbollah is nonetheless a potent enemy.

“It can do some significant damage. I have to say that,” he said.

The Northern Command is considered one of the most prestigious -- and challenging -- assignments in the Israeli military. It includes not only the tense border with Lebanon, but also an array of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces in neighboring Syria. The Iran-backed Hezbollah, which recently [marked the 40th year of its establishment](#), is at the heart of those threats.



FILE - Israel's offshore Leviathan gas field is seen from on board the Israeli Navy Ship Lahav during a rare tour in the Mediterranean Sea, Israel, Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2020. (AP Photo/Ariel Schalit, File)© Provided by Associated Press

Gordin, an ex-commando and Harvard graduate with the build of a football linebacker, takes the post at a challenging time.

*For months, Hezbollah has been **threatening to strike** Israeli natural gas platforms in the Mediterranean Sea as Israel and the Lebanese government conduct U.S.-brokered negotiations over their disputed maritime border.*

*In July, Israel shot down **three reconnaissance drones** launched by Hezbollah toward the gas field.*

In the 2006 war, Hezbollah battled Israel to a stalemate in a month of fighting that ended with a U.N. cease-fire.



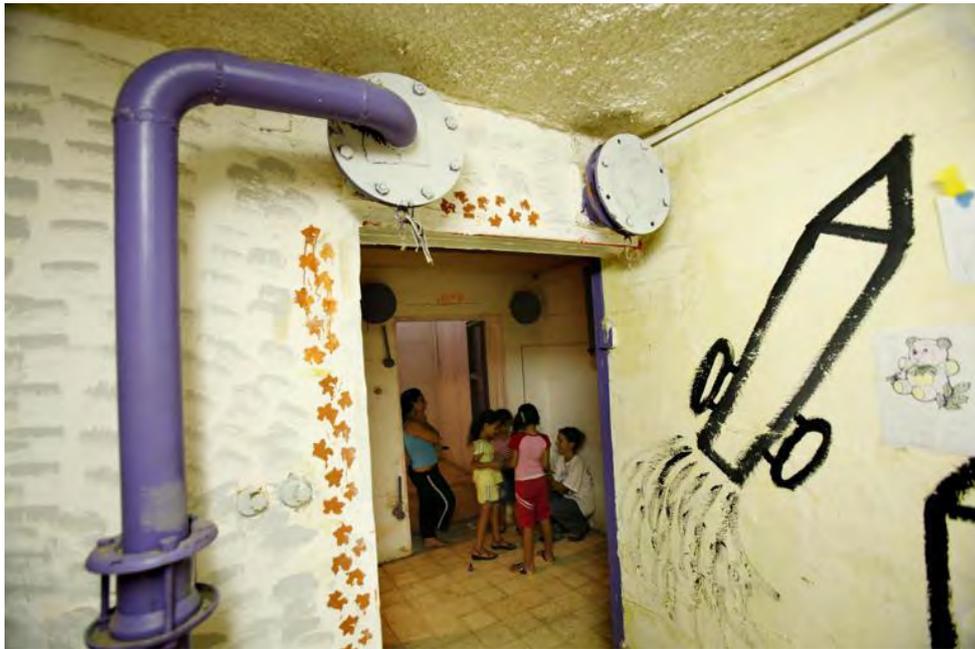
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Bitter memories of that fighting have made both sides wary of starting a new war. Lebanon's political and [economic crisis](#) could also deter Hezbollah.

Still, the recent tensions have raised concerns in Israel about renewed fighting. The Israeli military has invested great sums in [preparing for this scenario](#).

Gordin described the Hezbollah arsenal, which is now believed to include sophisticated precision-guided missiles, as hard to fathom.

Where Gaza militants can now launch some 400 rockets a day at Israel during heavy fighting, he said Hezbollah is believed to be capable of firing 10 times that amount.



FILE - Israelis gather in a shelter during a rocket attack by Hezbollah guerillas in the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, Thursday, Aug. 3, 2006. (AP Photo/Oded Balilty, File)© Provided by Associated Press

Even with Israel's air defenses intercepting over 90% of incoming fire, the Israeli military estimates that as many as 7,000 rockets would strike built-up areas in a future war stretching several weeks. The army does not make public its casualty estimates, but those projections indicate hundreds or even thousands of people could potentially be harmed.

That is where the Home Front Command comes into play.

Founded in the wake of Iraqi Scud missile attacks on Israel during the 1991 Gulf War, the Home Front Command serves as Israel's civil defense force. It helps maintain the country's network of bomb shelters and air raid sirens and is trained to assist civilians during wars and natural disasters.

Under Gordin's command, it also played a key role during the coronavirus pandemic through [a large-scale contact tracing program](#).

During a [three-day flareup](#) in early August, Gaza's Islamic Jihad militant group fired over 1,000 rockets at Israel. But there were no deaths or serious injuries on the Israeli side. Some 49 Palestinians, including at least 12 militants, were killed.

Gordin said the Iron Dome rocket defense system played a key role in minimizing Israeli casualties. He also noted that the more powerful Hamas militant group stayed on the sidelines. But he said advances in the Home Front Command were key to keeping people safe.

In recent years, Israel has greatly improved its ability to detect rocket launches and predict where they will land with great precision, such as a specific neighborhood of a big city.

It also has developed a popular mobile phone application that alerts users of incoming rocket fire based on their location. Gordin said the app works everywhere, including outlying areas that don't have sirens.

He also said the coronavirus crisis ironically bolstered his command by increasing the military's cooperation with local authorities.

Its command center is now a clearinghouse of information gleaned from both the military and local authorities. A bank of large screens tracks rocket launches, interceptions and landings in real time.

A click of a button can show the locations of every police car, ambulance or fire engine in the country, along with Waze maps showing traffic patterns nationwide.

Gordin said this integrated system provides a powerful tool for authorities to coordinate their work and communicate with the public.

“You can't fight a war without the cooperation of the residents who live in the same area,” he said.

“All of these things depend on our ability to cooperate with the civilian population.”