



Twenty Years of Israel-U.S. Air Defense Investment Pays Off

Description

WORLD : On the evening of April 13, Israelis were told that Iran had launched nearly 300 drones and missiles to strike the country within a few hours. It was around eleven in the evening, and for millions of people, there was a long waiting game.

The drones would arrive just before two in the morning on April 14. The unprecedented barrage targeted southern and central Israel, and some projectiles were also shot down heading for northern Israel.

I was awake when the duel over Israel's skies began. Dozens of the drone threats were downed on their way to Israel by the U.S., UK, French, Jordanian, and other militaries.

Israel was left to use its Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 air defense missiles against around a hundred ballistic missile threats, as well as numerous drones. According to the Israeli Defense Forces, 99 percent of the threats were intercepted.

“Out of hundreds of launches, only a few missiles crossed into the territory of the State of Israel, causing only minor damage to infrastructure at the Nevatim Airbase near the runway and to a road in the Hermon area,” the IDF said.

“The functionality of the Nevatim Airbase was not affected, aircraft continued to take off and fulfill their defense and offense missions—even during the night, and throughout the day.”

This unprecedented air defense success was made possible by decades of Israeli and U.S. investment and cooperation in air defense. The Israeli “Arrow” air defense system was jointly developed with the United States.

The Arrow is a product of decades of investment in air defenses that got a boost in Israel and the United States after the first Gulf War and the threat of Iraqi Scud missiles launched by Saddam Hussein.

Missile threats since then have expanded exponentially, as have drone threats. Iran, for instance, has invested heavily in kamikaze drones such as the Shahed 136, which it has exported to Russia to be used against Ukraine.

Israel has seen rocket and missile threats expand greatly among terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Where Hamas rockets only flew a few miles, terrorizing Israeli border communities, in the last decade, Hamas has been able to threaten most of Israel with rockets.

Hamas fired thousands of rockets at Israel in the first hours of the war launched on October 7, 2023. It has now launched 9,200 rockets at Israel, and Iranian-backed Hezbollah has launched more than 3,100 projectiles at Israel since October last year.

Israel invested heavily in various air defenses over the last two decades. For instance, the 2006 war in Lebanon encouraged Israel to develop Iron Dome rapidly. The Iron Dome system was developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.

Rafael also developed a medium-range air defense system with U.S. support called David's Sling. It has seen extensive use in this recent war.

The Arrow 3, the top tier of Israel's air defense systems, "is co-developed and co-produced by the Israel Missile Defense Organization (IMDO) in the Israel Ministry of Defense and the United States Missile Defense Agency (MDA)," the IDF notes. Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) produces the system.

"It is one of the most advanced air and missile defense system of its kind in the world for the interception of exo-atmospheric ballistic missiles," the IDF says. Prior to April 13, it had seen around seven operational successes in this war. Both Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 had been used to stop threats from the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen.

Then came the unprecedented test on the evening of April 13-14. In the wake of the success, IAI noted that it "congratulates the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) for intercepting the many threats launched last night from Iran.

This unequaled degree of performance was achieved thanks to the multilayered defense systems developed by Israel's defense industries." IAI radar and intelligence collecting systems also played a vital role in the evening's successful interdiction of so many missiles and drones.

Arrow utilizes the Green Pine radar, which is made by IAI's subsidiary, Elta. David's Sling and Iron Dome air defense systems use Elta radar as well.

Amir Peretz, a former Israeli Defense Minister and now IAI's Chairman of the Board, said following the attack, "I am proud of and grateful to the men and women of IAI who were today partners in the successful defense of the State of Israel."

The successful interception of so many drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles would appear to be an unprecedented first of its kind in warfare. Russia has launched numerous drones and missiles at Ukraine, but it appears the Iranian barrage was unique and was certainly unique to the Middle East.

The challenge was also more complex than in Ukraine because the drones and missiles flew over

multiple countries. Jordan, for instance, downed drones crossing its airspace.

The projectiles also overflowed Iraq. Iran also said that it targeted Israel from four directions, including over the Red Sea from Yemen and from Syria and Iraq, as well as Lebanon.

In addition, “the destroyers USS Arleigh Burke and USS Carney in the eastern Mediterranean Sea took down between four and six ballistic missiles, officials said. Meanwhile, an Army Patriot missile battery deployed to Irbil, Iraq, shot down a ballistic missile headed from Iran toward Israel,” Stars and Stripes reported.

This illustrates another layer of complexity in a duel over the skies of the Middle East, stretching for thousands of miles from the Eastern Mediterranean to Yemen to Iran and involving a half dozen countries in the region, as well as support the United States, UK, and France.

Iran’s attack on Israel risks further inflaming the region. Iran claims the attack was retaliation for an Israeli airstrike in Damascus on April 1 that hit a building adjoining the Iranian consulate, killing three senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders.

The Iranian attack has illustrated the importance of the investment over the last three decades by Israel and the United States in air defense systems. Israel’s multilayered integrated air defense is some of the most sophisticated in the world, and its airspace is likely the most well-defended in the world, considering the country’s small size and numerous external threats.

The interceptions over the Middle East also illustrated the importance of the United States and Israel working closely with partner countries in the region, such as Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and other states, on more integrated approaches to air defense and general security.

by Seth J. Frantzman

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