

Despite missiles on Kuwait

IDF believes threat here remains low

By Amos Harel

Haaretz Correspondent

The missiles Iraq fired against Kuwait yesterday were not long-range Scuds as initially reported in the international media, but much shorter range ground-to-ground missiles. In all likelihood the missiles fired are those code-named "Frog," with a range of not more than 70 kilometers.

The implications are that Iraq has not deviated, for now, from using weapons permitted by the United Nations following the Gulf War in 1991.

Israeli security sources said that the use of short-range missiles by Iraq has no implications for Israel Defense Forces planning or pose a potential danger to Israel. Indeed, the sources stress that the chances that the country will come under direct attack from Iraq remain very limited, especially because the assessment is that Saddam Hussein is not interested in exposing whatever supply of Scuds or non-conventional weapons he

may have.

Maj. Gen. Amos Gilad said yesterday on Channel 10 news that "there is a chance that there may be some isolated incidents [of missile firings]. We have invested a great deal of money in [dealing with this] and we are preparing for this [eventuality]."

Gilad noted that the coming hours, with the intensified American offensive against Iraq, will be critical for Israel. "But we will then have to re-evaluate the situation in order to establish whether the situation may result in more critical periods," he warned.

The Defense Ministry is receiving running updates from the U.S. regarding developments and progress in the offensive in the Gulf. While information on the operation of special forces in the western deserts of Iraq is limited, in Israel it is believed that allied forces were operating in the area most sensitive in terms of Scud missile launches – from an Israeli perspective – even

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Ariel Schalit

EYES IN THE SKY: Policemen standing atop a Tel Aviv roof yesterday, to help spot missiles in case of an Iraqi attack.

Police posted as missile spotters in Tel Aviv

By Roni Singer

Haaretz Correspondent

Tel Aviv's best detectives have been posted on rooftops throughout the city as missile spotters in case of an Iraqi missile attack, chosen for the job because of their intimate knowledge of the city.

Sgt. Tzahi Tal and Eyal Kazaz were on one of the metropolitan area's tallest buildings yesterday. "Their job is to be human eyes in addition to the radar images and other technology that will locate any fallen missile," said the commander in charge, Eli Asayag. In real time, the spot-

ters are supposed to use binoculars and night vision scopes, to identify a missile's location and help guide rescue forces to the scene. They have been posted so they overlap each other's zone, thus blanketing the entire Dan region, said Asayag.

The detectives usually

work at solving serious crimes or finding ways to arrest crime kingpins, but they know the streets of the city better than any other policemen, and for the last several months have been memorizing streets for their temporary jobs as missile spotters. Each rooftop shift lasts 12 hours.

Analysis / Ze'ev Schiff

Saddam's caution

As long as Saddam Hussein still believes that international public opinion will come to his aid against the U.S. offensive, he will avoid using nonconventional weapons or Scud missiles against Israel and Kuwait, weapons banned by the United Nations Security Council. This may change in the case of an extraordinary event, such as a direct American assault against him or his family.

The developments in the ground offensive in the coming 24 hours may significantly affect the situation in terms of Israel, if U.S. ground forces complete the occupation of the Western Desert, which will diminish the threat to Israel.

Another significant step is an offensive push against the southern port city of Basra and

its environs.

Saddam's reaction after the first day of cruise missile attacks against Baghdad, and the targeting of bunkers thought to house part of the Iraqi leadership, suggests that he still believes he may receive international aid against the war. If he does use banned weapons, this will damage international support for him and justify the American offensive.

More massive protests are expected in Europe this week-end against the war, the United States and President George W. Bush. For many of the protesters, the one who is violating the law is President Bush, not President Hussein.

Were the Iraqis to fire Scud missiles against Kuwait, as the

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French find ricin poison in train locker

The Associated Press

PARIS – Traces of ricin, a highly toxic poison that can be used as a biological weapon, were discovered in two bottles stored in a locker at a Paris train station, the Interior Ministry said yesterday.

Police seized the bottles on Monday after being alerted to their presence at Gare de Lyon station by officials from SNCF, the state-run train authority, the report said. An analysis confirmed the presence of

ricin, the ministry said.

Two flasks containing powder and a third containing liquid were also found. The Interior Ministry did not identify those substances.

Ricin, which is derived from the castor bean plant, can kill within days. There is no antidote or treatment.

In Afghanistan, al Qaidawas known to have experimented with the highly toxic poison but French authorities refrained from commenting on who left the poison in the train station.

Israel had 90-minute warning of U.S. attack

By Aluf Benn

Haaretz Correspondent

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell gave Prime Minister Ariel Sharon 90 minutes warning before the American forces in the Gulf launched their "pinpoint" attack Wednesday night on Baghdad buildings believed to house top Iraqi commanders.

Powell made clear that Wednesday night's bombing was not the major operation being planned.

Sharon yesterday wished the Americans success in their mission. "Your war is the war of the free world, protecting freedom and liberty and

democracy against the dark and evil forces that work with terrorism," he said. "Israel is not taking part in this war, but we understand well the dangers in governments such as Saddam Hussein's."

"We believe and hope that we will not be involved in the war," Sharon continued, "but if – heaven forbid – we are dragged into it, Israel is prepared to deal with every threat both defensively and offensively." He reiterated his call to Israelis to maintain their daily routines, including sending their children to school and going to work. Sharon maintained his own regular schedule.

Parents choose to keep kids close to home – and out of school

By Ruth Sinai, David Ratner and Relly Sa'ar

Haaretz Correspondents

Amir Chen is not afraid of Saddam Hussein. He is certain that Iraq will not fire missiles at Israel – and certainly not at the Ben-Zvi Elementary School in Herzliya, where he is in first grade. Therefore, it never occurred to him not to go to school yesterday. But he was in the minority: Only 13 of his 30 classmates showed up, and the numbers were similar in the other first-grade classes. In the higher grades, the ratio was reversed: About two-thirds showed up and one-third stayed home.

The teachers helped the pupils practice putting on their gas masks and drilled them in going down to the shelters in an orderly fashion. They also talked about the war and

the preparations for it. Maly Almog, a fourth-grade teacher, explained to her students exactly how the Arrow and Patriot anti-missile batteries work.

At David Yellin Elementary School in Haifa, the 45 percent of the pupils who showed up appeared similarly calm. Some read the fine print on the boxes of the gas masks and noted wryly that there seemed to be logical contradiction: The instructions state clearly that the kits should be kept out of reach of children.

Most of the kids brought their masks, but some, embarrassed, hid them in their knapsacks. Many admitted that they were less afraid of Saddam than of looking like a coward and therefore had not wanted to bring the masks.

"I fought with my parents and

didn't want to bring my mask," said 10-year-old Yuval, who like many kids his age wants to be "cool." "I was afraid I would be the only one to bring a mask and everyone would laugh at me. So I hid it in my knapsack."

Many of the children said the morning began with an argument at home. "Mom said I don't need a mask, Dad said for once we should do as we are told," related Noga. "I told my parents I felt safer at home, but they convinced me to come to school," added Yaniv.

In general, the parents appeared far more nervous than the children. "It didn't seem right to me to send the children to school with gas masks and [atropine] injections at such an age," said Yafit Tabari, a teacher at Ben-Zvi in Herzliya and the mother of a six-year-old girl.

"Children are curious. They could open their kits and start showing things to each other – 'I have a syringe like this, you have one like that' – and a disaster could happen."

She also said that in an emergency, teachers would never be able to help all 30 of their students put on their masks. "Imagine if a teacher forgot to turn on one of the blowers – the child would suffocate," she said. "Classes should have been canceled, at least for the younger grades."

Many other parents evidently agreed and decided to extend the Purim vacation until Sunday, by which time the situation will presumably be clearer. Some teachers agreed as well. In Holon, for instance, one kindergarten teacher initially refused to let her pupils into the classroom unless one parent remained with her for every five chil-

dren. She gave in only after the parents complained to the municipality, which ordered her to open the classroom – but as she continued to insist that she would not be able to help the children in an emergency, most of the parents preferred not to take the risk and left their children at home.

Other elementary school and kindergarten teachers, while acknowledging that they would never be able to help all their students in an emergency, said that since the chance of a missile strike was so low there was no reason not to hold classes. Some of the parents assented. Haifa resident Ilya Kosner, who immigrated to Israel in 1990 and has a daughter in first grade, noted that he had been terrified during the first Gulf War, in 1991, and even took his older children to Be'er Sheva for a

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Conflicting U.S. statements on road map worry Jerusalem

By Aluf Benn

Haaretz Correspondent

Jerusalem is worried by what it considers to be vague and conflicting interpretations by administration officials of President George W. Bush's statements last Friday about his commitment to the so-called road map for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the heart of the concern is the question whether Israel will be able to present its comments and corrections to the draft, or if the existing draft will be presented as is to the sides as a final, indisputable document. The administration plans to submit the road map right after Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian prime minister-designate, presents his cabinet sometime in the next few weeks.

Bush said in his statement that the U.S. expects "contributions" from Israel and the Palestinians to the document. He said the U.S. will "encourage" the two sides to discuss the road map. Senior government sources in Jerusalem said later that Israel could present its comments on the plan. That was also made clear in a meeting of Sharon's top advisors, Dov Weisglass and Ephraim Halevy, with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

The Bush statement worried Arab governments and America's partners in the Quartet – the UN, EU and Russia – who pressured the administration to publish the existing draft as the basis for an imposed inter-

national political agreement. According to the Washington Post, European and Arab diplomats expressed grave concerns about the road map being reopened for negotiation.

Secretary of State Colin Powell calmed them by saying that the existing version of the road map, from December 20, is the one that would be presented to the sides. The State Department spokesman said on Wednesday that the document will be presented to the sides is the road map and will remain so. He said the U.S. plans to discuss the implementation, but not the language of the document, with the parties. And Rice, a few hours after meeting Weisglass and Halevy, told Al Jazeera television that there would be no new negotiations over the road map.

The statements from the State Department worry Jerusalem. Israel sent a response through the American embassy in Tel Aviv in which it noted there was a change in the American position. Israeli officials said they had understood that Israel would be able to present its comments before its publication, and now it turns out the document will be presented in its current form. American officials responded by saying that it is more important to deal with the implementation than the language, and that security issues would be a condition for any progress.

The Prime Minister's Bureau is convinced that the document to be presented will not be the final version and the admin-

istration will accept Israel's comments after the publication. Israel has written in dozens of corrections and comments meant to toughen the demands on the Palestinians and soften the demands on Israel. A team headed by Weisglass finished a final draft of Israel's version of the road map on February 24, but it has not been presented to the government.

The U.S. is now waiting for the Abbas government. Washington believes he will replace the current PA interior and justice ministers but will leave a substantial number of old guard members such as Nabil Sha'ath, Yasser Abed Rabbo and Saeb Erakat. The Americans regard the interior and finance ministries as the two most important portfolios. They expect the former heads of the Preventive Security forces in the West Bank and Gaza, Jibril Rajoub and Mohammed Dahlan respectively, appointed to the new government.

Meanwhile, Robert Danin has been moved from the State Department to the White House, where he will serve as deputy to Elliot Abrams, who holds the Middle East portfolio in the National Security Council. Danin, a Jew, replaces Flint Levert who returned to the CIA.

Netanyahu: U.S. success in Iraq will help our economy – Page 4

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