

Israel, US Begin Military Exercises Eyeing Iran

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al-Jazeera: Israeli Defense Forces and anti-aircraft units from the U.S. army started extensive joint air-defense exercises in Israel on Thursday. Israeli security sources said that the operation is aimed at preparing the Jewish State to defend itself against possible Iranian aerial attacks.
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al-Jazeera

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Israeli Defense Forces and anti-aircraft units from the U.S. army started extensive joint air-defense exercises in Israel on Thursday.

Israeli security sources said that the operation is aimed at preparing the Jewish State to defend itself against possible Iranian aerial attacks.

The month-long operation, codenamed Juniper Cobra, will test the extent of coordination between U.S. and Israeli forces in several attack scenarios.

It will also examine air defense systems at different heights, with Israel's Arrow II missile-killer system providing protection at great heights and the U.S.-made Patriot missiles at lower heights.

Israeli and U.S. officials described the exercise as a routine operation.

"There is absolutely no connection with this exercise and any event in the region," U.S. Army spokeswoman Connie Summers told the U.S. military newspaper Stars and Stripes.

But Israeli security sources said that the operation is aimed at tackling Iran's most advanced Shahab-3 missiles, which they say could reach anywhere inside Israel.

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"These war games always take a real enemy into consideration," said a source. "Last time, it was Iraq's Scud missiles. This time around, it's the Iranian Shahabs."

The Arrow is the only system capable of intercepting missiles at high levels, a capability considered crucial to prevent devastating fallout from non-conventional warheads.

In the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq fired 39 Scuds with conventional warheads at Israel, killing one person but causing extensive damage in residential areas mainly on the Mediterranean coast.

Patriot missiles in Israel were not effective in intercepting the Scuds at the time but now they are more developed.

Experts estimate the Arrow's effectiveness at 95 percent but some say that it might not succeed in facing the Shahab-3s, which are four times faster than the Scuds.

Fears of military attacks between Israel and Iran have risen in recent months.

Israel and the United States accuse Iran of covertly developing an atomic weapons program and want to refer its nuclear file to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions.

Both countries didn't rule out using force against Iran, which insists that its nuclear program is strictly for the peaceful generation of electricity.

The Islamic republic also insists that the Shahab would only be used as a deterrent, especially against Israel's atomic arsenal.

Iranian officials vowed to retaliate if the U.S. or Israel attack its nuclear facilities.

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Last week, the chief of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards warned that the 190,000 American forces based in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan will be targeted if his country is attacked.