

Israel, US to hold largest ever missile defense exercise. Thousands of US soldiers will be deployed in Israel.

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Israel is moving forward with plans to hold the largest-ever missile defense exercise in its history this spring amid Iranian efforts to obtain nuclear weapons.

Last week [11-18 December], Lt.-Gen. Frank Gorenc, commander of the US's Third Air Force based in Germany, visited Israel to finalize plans for the upcoming drill, expected to see the deployment of several thousand American soldiers in Israel.

The drill, which is unprecedented in its size, will include the establishment of US command posts in Israel and IDF command posts at EUCOM headquarters in Germany - with the ultimate goal of establishing joint task forces in the event of a large-scale conflict in the Middle East.

The US will also bring its THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) and shipbased Aegis ballistic missile defense systems to Israel to simulate the interception of missile salvos against Israel.

The American systems will work in conjunction with Israel's missile defense systems - the Arrow, Patriot and Iron Dome.

Gorenc came to Israel for talks with Brig.-Gen. Doron Gavish, commander of the Air Force's Air Defense Division.

He toured one of the Iron Dome batteries in the South and the Israel Test Bed lab in Holon where the IAF holds its interception simulation exercises.

The IAF is planning to deploy a fourth battery of the Iron Dome counter-rocket system in the coming months and is mulling the possibility of stationing it in Haifa to protect oil refineries located there.

The Defense Ministry has allocated a budget to manufacture an additional three Iron Dome batteries by the end of 2012. IAF operational requirements call for the deployment of about a dozen batteries along Israel's northern and southern borders.

The IAF is also moving forward with plans to deploy Rafael's David's Sling missile defense system, which is designed to defend against medium-range rockets and cruise missiles. Rafael recently completed a series of successful navigation and flight tests of the David's

Sling's interceptor and plans to hold the first interception test by mid-2012.

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