

Following Romney's "blank cheque" support during a visit to Israel, missiles on Tel Aviv would unleash unprecedented response says Israeli former intelligence chief, as first phase of hardening infrastructure gets under way and the Cabinet considers further measures.

JERUSALEM, Aug. 2 (Xinhua reports) -- Israel's former army intelligence chief said Thursday that a missile attack by foes against Greater Tel Aviv would mean that "Israel's legitimacy to take action will drastically increase." Speaking at a conference on "Israel's Home Front Preparedness," retired Maj.-Gen. Amos Yadlin sought to quell concerns over recent assessments that Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas could wield unprecedented 200,000 missiles and rockets in any future conflict.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has repeated threat to target Tel Aviv. Yadlin, however, discounted the degree of threat Israel would face in a clash which experts say would most possibly turn cities and towns into primary targets rather than military forces at the front.

"Israel is under threat of perhaps 1,000 effective missiles and another 9,000 long-range rockets, but the rest of the 190,000 rockets in the region are inaccurate and short-range," Yadlin was quoted by Israel Hayom daily as saying. "Let's put the threat into perspective, and stop talking about missiles and start talking about rockets," said Yadlin, who headed the Israel Defense Forces Military Intelligence division between 2006 and 2010. "Missile" usually refers to a projectile with a guidance system, whereas "rocket" commonly refers to an unguided projectile aimed in a simple ballistic arc at a target.

Yadlin, however, did not seek to minimize the significance of such a conflict for the nation's civilians, and pointed out that such an attack on urban targets could open a Pandora's Box of Israel responses. "When missiles start hitting Tel Aviv -- and this will happen -- and people will be killed, Israel's legitimacy to take action will drastically increase and our ability to do things that we have not done until today will be much greater," said Yadlin, who now directs the Tel-Aviv University-based National Institute of Security Studies.

As a further testament to Yadlin's words, Israel will next week launch a number of large-scale projects to harden its critical infrastructure. Millions of U.S. dollars have been earmarked for the fortification of dozens of facilities designated by the government as strategic assets that could be targeted in a war, including water, power, oil refineries and communication towers, the Ynet news site reported Thursday. (Verbatim extract below)

The army's Home Front Command is overseeing the project, which is being underwritten by the companies undergoing the upgrade. Plans call for raising the protection of the facilities to a level that would enable them to either completely withstand a missile strike or sustain short-term, containable damage. Contractors hired for the job will use reinforced concrete and other

measures to that end, Ynet said.

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The fortification of dozens of critical infrastructure facilities, including water, power, oil refineries and communication towers, is set to begin next week, Ynet learned Tuesday.

The massive project, headed by a designated Home Front Command division is estimated at tens of millions of shekels – a cost carried in full by the companies undergoing the security upgrade.

The facilities in question have been defined by the government as "strategic facilities" that may be targeted in an event of a military strike against Israel . The project, which includes the use of reinforced concrete alongside other protective measures, aims to see the facilities either withstand a hit completely or sustain "containable damage," i.e. – provide them with the ability to resume regular activity as soon as possible.

The project will be headed by the National Infrastructure Division – a new department formed in the Home Front Command. The division is headed by an officer holding the rank of lieutenant-colonel who, in concert with a team of specialists, will map out Israel's critical infrastructure facilities and outline their necessary fortification.

The new division will also help the facilities ward off cyber-attacks. The first phase of the project is set to start next week. The cabinet will vote on the second phase, which is set to include 15 facilities, in two weeks.

The UK maintains four minehunters in the Gulf - over one third of its entire fleet - and the USA recently reinforced its capability there