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84260 - המרכז הבינתחומי הרצליה -					

Ya'alon, Arens stress the 'war between wars'

• By EYTAN HALON

Former defense ministers Moshe Ya'alon and Moshe Arens emphasized on Tuesday the importance of conducting "war between wars," in order to maintain Israel's readiness for future military conflicts against its enemies.

Ya'alon, speaking alongside three-time defense minister Arens at the IDC Herzliya Conference, said that the Israeli security establishment had progressed from its "conceptual limitation of always preparing for the previous war" and is no longer resting on its laurels, and is instead looking towards evolving, future threats.

"It is called the 'war between the wars.' In that context you don't allow entities in the region to become stronger," said Ya'alon.

"We don't make everything public but do whatever it takes so that Iranian arms don't reach Gaza. The same is true of Lebanon and Syria... When we undermine their capability, we are postponing the next round of violence.

"The army must run smoothly and be prepared for the next campaign. We have been doing that for a significant period of time, both in Gaza and the West Bank.

"The moment someone tries to shoot at us, there are steps taken," Ya'alon added.

Arens reiterated the importance of maintaining Israeli superiority between conflicts, but stated that the country's approach to tackling the growing missile threat, from more remote adversaries such as Iran, was overdue.

"I tend to think that for quite a time now we never really perceived missiles as a real tangible threat but ranges have developed and extended," said Arens.

"All of Israel is exposed, from its most northern tip to its most southern tip. We live with this danger and, over the last two years, we have taken correct tactical steps wherein we act to reinforce our deterrence. We're willing to work actively in Syrian skies," he added.

"What we're doing nowadays should have been done years ago. We should have wiped it out when it was small – before it expanded and grew up."

Ya'alon highlighted that the key principle guiding Israeli defense should be that the "best defense is always offense," while simultaneously strengthening active defense systems, intelligence capabilities and cyber technology.

Yet while praising the "worthy cause" of Israel's current attempts to prevent war, Arens warned that such a policy also carried risks.

"I think it is clear that those actions that we take against Iranian targets in Syria could possibly trigger war.

"We take those actions because if we allow the number of missiles to grow and be deployed, reinforced by the Iranians, it could be even worse," said Arens. "If we are realistic, we have come to know in recent months that there could be an escalation. We're prepared for it, that possibility exists."

Both Ya'alon and Arens stressed that the key immediate threat facing Israel today emanates from Iran and its destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

However, they stated that there remains considerable room for optimism.

"Those who still use the term Israeli-Arab conflict, you are out of date," said Ya'alon.

"There are shared interests that have brought the Sunni Arab camp, led by Saudi Arabia, to be in the same boat with us. We need to hold a big stick to survive but we have a lot to offer countries in the region."

"The main points of light are the strength of Israel, our army, air force and the current cooperation and willingness of leaders of Arab states to work with us. This is a result of their appreciation of our capabilities," said Arens.

"The point of light is that we are a power, an important power in the Middle East and that is what leads us forward," he added.