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## ISRAEL'S AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM: STRUCTURE, COMBAT CAPABILITIES, AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

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### Abstract

The article examines the modern air and missile defense system of Israel as one of the most effective examples of layered defense architecture in the world. The study analyzes the historical prerequisites for the formation of the Israeli air defense system, the structure of its main components, and the operational characteristics.

**Keywords:** Air defense, missile defense, Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow system, Iron Beam, layered defense, ballistic missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, air defense systems, military technologies, national security, laser weapons.

### Introduction

Israel's air and missile defense system represents one of the most technologically advanced and multilayered defense architectures in the modern world. The geopolitical position of the State of Israel, the presence of numerous regional threats, and the constant danger of missile and drone attacks have necessitated the establishment of a deeply echeloned air and missile defense system. Over recent decades, Israeli military and political leadership has prioritized the development of early warning systems, ballistic missile interception capabilities, and the protection of strategic facilities and civilian populations. The modern Israeli air defense system includes the Iron Dome, David's Sling, the Arrow family of systems, and перспективе laser interception technologies. A distinctive feature of the Israeli model is the integration of all components into a unified combat



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information network capable of functioning effectively under conditions of massive air assault [1; 2].

The development of Israel's air defense system began almost immediately after the establishment of the state in 1948. Initially, the Israeli armed forces relied on imported Western-made air defense systems, including American and British anti-aircraft weapons. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, Israeli leadership concluded that it was necessary to develop indigenous high-technology systems adapted to the specific operational environment of the Middle East. Arab-Israeli wars and the emergence of threats from operational-tactical missile systems deployed by Iran, Syria, and non-state armed groups significantly influenced the evolution of Israel's missile defense capabilities [2].

A key milestone was the joint development with the United States of the Arrow missile defense system designed to intercept medium-range ballistic missiles. Subsequently, Israel's defense industry established a multilayered architecture in which each system was responsible for defeating a specific category of threats. Israel became one of the first countries to implement a practical concept of layered missile defense under real combat conditions. The system evolved rapidly after conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon demonstrated the necessity of affordable and mobile interception systems capable of countering mass rocket attacks.

The modern Israeli air defense system is based on a multilayer interception concept. The lower echelon consists of the Iron Dome system designed to counter unguided rockets, mortar shells, and short-range unmanned aerial vehicles. The system automatically calculates the trajectory of incoming targets and intercepts only those threats directed toward populated areas or critical infrastructure. This selective interception approach significantly reduces operational costs and improves the effectiveness of the defense system during mass attacks [3].

The middle echelon is occupied by David's Sling, which is intended to intercept tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, aircraft, and drones. The system serves as an intermediate layer between Iron Dome and the Arrow systems. The Stunner interceptor missile used by David's Sling possesses high maneuverability and advanced guidance technologies. The upper echelon includes Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 systems designed to intercept long-range ballistic missiles, including targets outside the atmosphere. Such an architecture enables sequential



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interception at different stages of flight and creates multiple layers of defensive redundancy.

The most widely known component of Israel's air defense architecture is Iron Dome, developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems. The system entered operational service in 2011 and has since been extensively employed in real combat situations. Its primary mission is to protect cities and infrastructure from short-range rockets launched from the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon. Each battery consists of a radar station, a battle management center, and multiple launchers equipped with Tamir interceptor missiles. A high degree of automation enables the system to operate with minimal human involvement.

One of Iron Dome's most significant features is its trajectory prediction algorithm. If the system determines that an incoming rocket will land in an uninhabited area, no interception is conducted. This approach substantially reduces the expenditure of expensive interceptor missiles. According to Israeli officials, the effectiveness of Iron Dome during combat operations has reached very high levels, although certain targets can still penetrate the system during massive salvos. Despite criticism, Iron Dome has become one of the most successful examples of modern tactical missile defense and has attracted significant international interest [3; 6].

David's Sling was developed to counter more sophisticated threats, including operational-tactical missiles and cruise missiles. The system was jointly developed by the Israeli company Rafael and the American corporation Raytheon. It entered service in 2017 and has undergone several upgrades based on operational experience. The primary advantage of the system lies in its versatility and ability to engage a wide spectrum of aerial threats at ranges extending hundreds of kilometers [4].

The Stunner interceptor missile is equipped with advanced guidance systems and demonstrates exceptional maneuverability. The system is fully integrated into Israel's broader air defense network and operates in coordination with other detection and interception assets. In recent years, the Israeli Ministry of Defense has announced multiple successful tests of upgraded versions intended to counter new categories of threats, including highly maneuverable missiles and drones.



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David's Sling is regarded as one of the key elements of Israel's defense against potential missile strikes from Iran and its regional allies.

The most technologically advanced elements of Israel's missile defense architecture are the Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 systems. These systems were developed in close cooperation with the United States to counter medium- and long-range ballistic missiles. Arrow-2 is designed for atmospheric interception, whereas Arrow-3 is capable of exo-atmospheric interception, allowing warheads to be destroyed before entering Israeli airspace [2].

The Arrow systems are considered a cornerstone of Israel's strategic national security. Their primary mission is to defend the country against potential Iranian ballistic missile attacks. Unlike lower-tier tactical systems, Arrow operates at much greater ranges and employs sophisticated target-tracking algorithms. In recent years, the systems have repeatedly demonstrated high effectiveness during actual missile interception operations. Israeli defense specialists continue to modernize the Arrow family with particular emphasis on countering hypersonic threats and advanced penetration aids [2; 6].

The effectiveness of Israel's air defense system is based not only on the quality of individual weapons systems but also on the existence of a unified command, control, intelligence, and data exchange network. All components are integrated into a centralized structure that receives operational information from radar systems, satellites, airborne early warning aircraft, and other intelligence assets. This integration minimizes reaction time and allows efficient allocation of targets among various interception systems [2].

Automated battle management systems and elements of artificial intelligence play an increasingly important role in analyzing the air situation in real time. Israel is also actively developing cyber defense capabilities, since modern air defense systems remain highly vulnerable to electronic and cyber warfare. Close military-technical cooperation with the United States remains another essential factor, providing access to advanced technologies, satellite-based warning systems, and financial support for missile defense programs.

One of the most promising directions in the development of Israeli air defense is the implementation of laser interception systems. The Iron Beam project is intended to complement existing missile-based defense systems. The principal



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advantage of laser weapons lies in the extremely low cost per interception compared to traditional interceptor missiles. This is especially important in conditions involving mass attacks by inexpensive drones and unguided rockets, where the use of costly interceptor missiles becomes economically inefficient [5]. Israeli officials state that laser systems will significantly enhance the resilience of the country's air defense network and reduce pressure on existing defensive echelons. However, experts note that laser systems still face limitations associated with weather conditions, operational range, and high energy requirements. Nevertheless, Israel remains one of the world leaders in combat laser development and seeks to become the first country to establish a fully operational integrated laser-based air defense system.

Israel's air and missile defense system represents a unique example of a comprehensive approach to national security under conditions of permanent military threat. The creation of a multilayered architecture including Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow systems, and перспективе laser technologies has enabled Israel to establish one of the most effective defense systems in the world. Real combat experience has demonstrated the high effectiveness of Israeli air defense, particularly in repelling large-scale attacks of varying types.

At the same time, the Israeli model demonstrates that absolute protection against aerial threats does not exist. Even the most advanced systems may become overloaded during massive missile and drone attacks. Nevertheless, Israel continues to improve its defense technologies by developing new detection systems, automation tools, and interception methods. Laser weapons and artificial intelligence are expected to play a particularly important role in shaping the future of air defense over the coming decades.

Israel's experience is of considerable interest to military specialists worldwide. It demonstrates that effective air defense requires not only advanced missile systems but also the integration of intelligence, automated command and control, industrial capabilities, and a coherent military-political strategy. In an era characterized by the growing threat of precision-guided weapons, hypersonic missiles, and unmanned systems, the Israeli concept of layered air defense will remain one of the most studied and relevant models in contemporary military science.



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