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Top front-page headline

# **Israel asks US for urgent answer: Is the Nautilus workable**

By Ben Caspit

The defense systems controversy

## **Checking, to make sure**

**Defense Dept. Director General, who is now in the US, submitted an urgent request to the Americans to receive information about the qualification (workability) of the rocket-interception system "Nautilus". This, despite the fact that the defense dept. prefers "Iron Dome". Buchris will meet tomorrow with Mayors of southern towns, to explain his arguments against the Nautilus**

By Ben Caspit

Israel has urgently turned to the US to receive a quick, updated answer as to the degree of preparedness of the laser rocket interception system "Nautilus" for immediate use in the South of Israel.

Defense dept. Director General Pinchas Buchris made this request, following the mounting public pressure from Nautilus supporters in Israel. A rather large group of Defense experts and former defense dept. people have founded a public NGO called "Magen La-Oref" ten days ago, and hired the services of the Strategist and PR man Motti Morell, from Morell-Tzur Communications Ltd.

Following this activity, public uproar began, resulting in a firm letter sent by Mayors in the south to the Defense Minister, demanding to re-check the Laser system urgently. It is noteworthy to mention that the defense dept. position has not changed – it rejects the possibility that the present Nautilus system will be able to give an answer to the Rocket threat on the south of Israel.

Despite this, and to eliminate any doubts, Buchris, who is now in the middle of a short professional trip to the USA (on another subject), decided to act immediately: He approached the General in the Pentagon in charge of the liaison with Israel on the subject of rocket threats and asked him to find out, ASAP, within a few days, by conducting a deep and

thorough check, if there actually exists a workable Nautilus system that can reach Israel and enter an operational state in the near future. Buchris told Maariv that he does not know of any workable nautilus system, but promised to deliver an answer within a few days.

Buchris will meet tomorrow with the Southern Mayors in the Zikim camp, where he plans to show them a presentation on the subject and prove to them that the talks about the laser system are not serious and constitute spreading of empty illusions, and exploiting the distress of populations and towns in Israel. In closed talks, Buchris expresses rage against the claims leveled at the defense dept. as if it blocks the arrival of the said system because of foreign considerations. "We have set up a team of dozens of people, the best experts, including external experts, and all of them reached the same conclusion" he says. Buchris takes the accusations about "foreign considerations" personally.

### **IS EVERYBODY WRONG?**

Buchris paid a special visit to the Northrop Grumman plant, the company who makes the Nautilus, on March last year. The visit was aimed at checking the degree of operability and readiness of the Nautilus, and it was found out that it will take months just to prepare the system for testing.

"Maybe I was drunk in this visit" says Buchris, "maybe I am not intelligent enough, but it seems impossible that everybody is wrong and only these people, doing such an aggressive lobbying, are right. The Director General raises questions about the financial sources funding the PR battery of the Nautilus supporters, and about their motives.

Additionally, Buchris is examining another system that works on a totally different principle: the Vulcan Phalanx cannon, used by the Americans in Iraq. Buchris asked the manufacturers, General Dynamics and Raytheon, to be personally present in a test of the phalanx, to check the environmental effects of the tremendous noise it makes.

The Minister of Defense has asked several weeks ago to check again the effectiveness of this system (phalanx). In Iraq, the Phalanx defends area-specific points; it can defend areas of 300 square meters. Its cost is high, around 40 million dollars per unit, and to protect Sderot, several will be needed. Also, the altitude of interception which is extremely low, can cause environmental damage to a populated city. The fact that the Americans use the Phalanx and not the Laser, despite the laser's supposed ability to cover a greater area at a lower cost, proves, according to Buchris, the fact that the laser is currently inoperable.

Buchris is convinced that the defense dept. is doing everything possible to face the rocket threat challenge. "I have no obligation to former decisions. I come from matter-of-fact motivation only. He says the Iron Dome will be ready within a year and will give appropriate answer to the threat. It may be, claim Buchris people, that the Nautilus Lobbyists understand that their window of opportunity is closing, which explain why they act with such vigor. This is the reason Buchris decided to conduct another fast check and to submit the question to the Americans.

Motti Morell, the PR man handling the "Magen La'Oref" NGO, said yesterday to Maariv: "It's Buchris who is under pressure. Fact: He hurriedly summoned the editors of all the media to his chambers to explain to them that the laser system is nothing. And he spreads accusations. The NGO is comprised of people with no economic interest. These are experts who think that the State of Israel should bring here all the possible systems and check them in the field. We, too, know that the nautilus is inoperable right now, but it will take several weeks to bring it to usability and fly it here,

to test it in a real fire zone. The rocket threat is the gravest threat on Israel. Syria and Iran invest almost nothing in fighter planes, they invest only in rockets and missiles. We should understand it. As for my pay: my agreement with Magen La'Oref says that if they manage to raise contributions, they will pay me. If not, I work voluntarily with no pay".