



UNDERGROUND AND OVERGROUND BUNKERS, SHELTERS, AND SAFE ROOMS IN ISRAEL – POLICY AND REGULATION

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PART A: PREAMBLE

Lessons in a nutshell

- While the Planning System is pretty resilient and has adapted over the years to war and terror attacks-
- A recent (September 2025) State Comptroller report has found that government bodies/ministries have utterly failed in coordinating their budgets and personnel, to face the challenges of recent war.
- The needs of the civil population were not fully addressed / no prior preparation.
- See: <https://library.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Pages/Publications/1457.aspx>
- E.g. - empowering local cities to deal with civil defense challenges;
- Making budgets available to psychological treatment (Trauma, PTSD).
- No manpower in the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA);
- No coordination between NEMA and the Home Front Command (HFC).

STATE COMPTROLLER REPORT

Government Management of the Civil Domain During the Swords of Iron War

STATE COMPTROLLER

Sept 2025 report

“the government failed to complete the requisite actions for appointing **an authoritative body** endowed with overarching responsibility to manage and lead the home front during emergencies. An operational system aimed at supporting the provision of assistance in this area has also **not been established** as mandated”.

“The activity of the **Socio-Economic Cabinet** – the political forum tasked with leading the management of civil needs – was scant and limited”.

STATE COMPTROLLER

Sept 2025 report

The characteristics of the overall management constituted an unstable foundation for the government's response to the public's needs during the conflict. This instability is attributable to the continuous failures of Israeli governments since the Second Lebanon War, including the current government, in completing the actions for regulating the overall authority and responsibility for managing civilian aspects of home front operations during wartime, and in organizing its activity. Accountability for the principal findings presented in this report rests with several key individuals: Prime Minister MK Benjamin Netanyahu, who throughout his cumulative years of service has not established the requisite functional infrastructure; the Minister of Defense during the audit period, Mr. Yoav Galant, along with his predecessors, who failed to regulate the status of the emergency agencies over the years; the Minister of Finance MK Bezael Smotrich who has been heading the Socio-Economic Cabinet since the outbreak of the war.

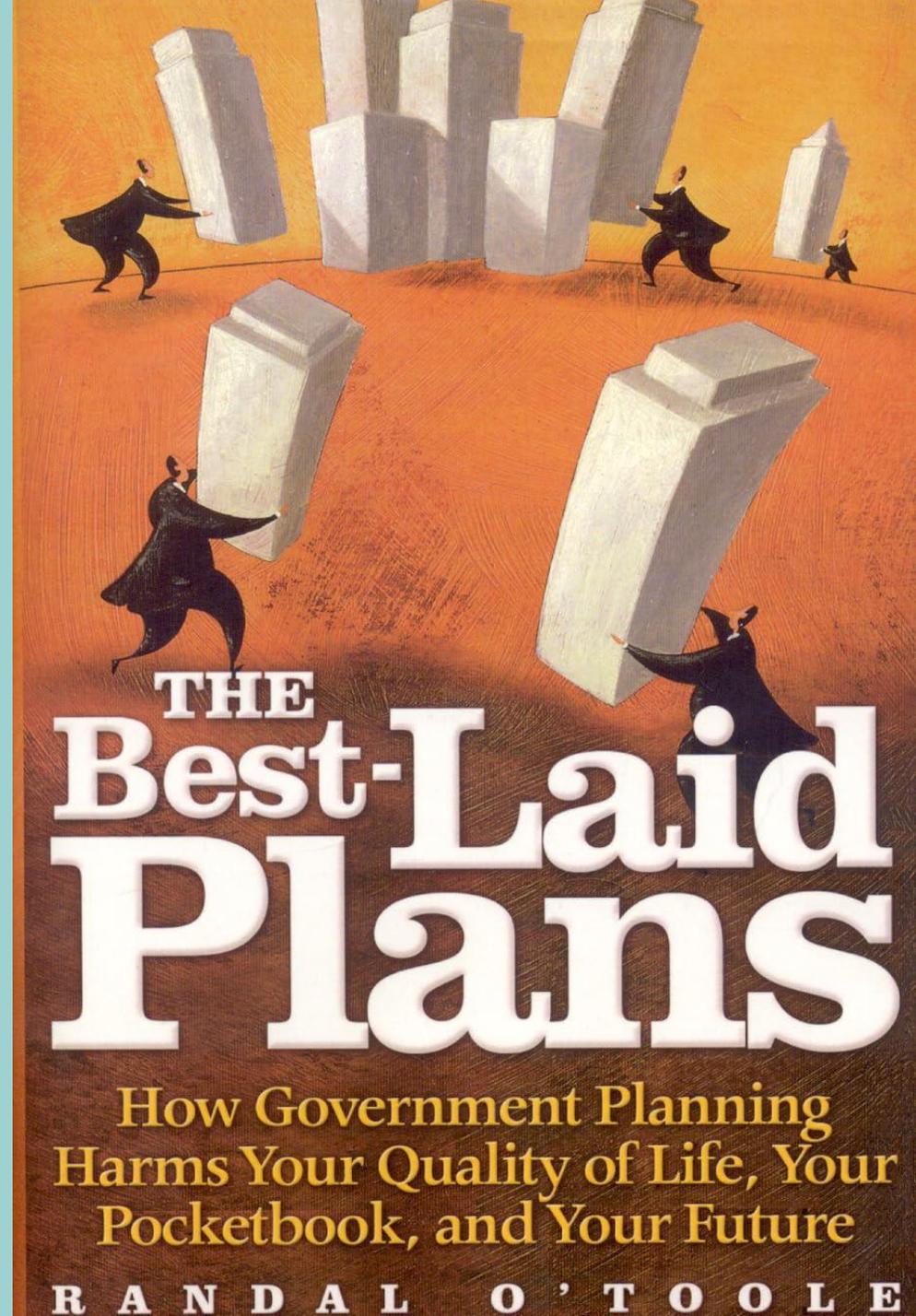
STATE COMPTROLLER REPORT
**Government Management of
the Civil Domain During the
Swords of Iron War**

IN TERMS OF PLANNING

Can we prepare for the future?

- Some planning scholars allege that it is impossible and unnecessary to prepare for the future, which in totally unpredictable.
- Example: TWA Terminal in NYC (1962)

O'Toole (2007)



IN TERMS OF PLANNING

Can we prepare for the future?

- Even with a large ecosystem of regulations and policies to protect residential areas from missile attacks, we cannot anticipate everything.
- Example: Ballistic attacks directed at a World Heritage Site.

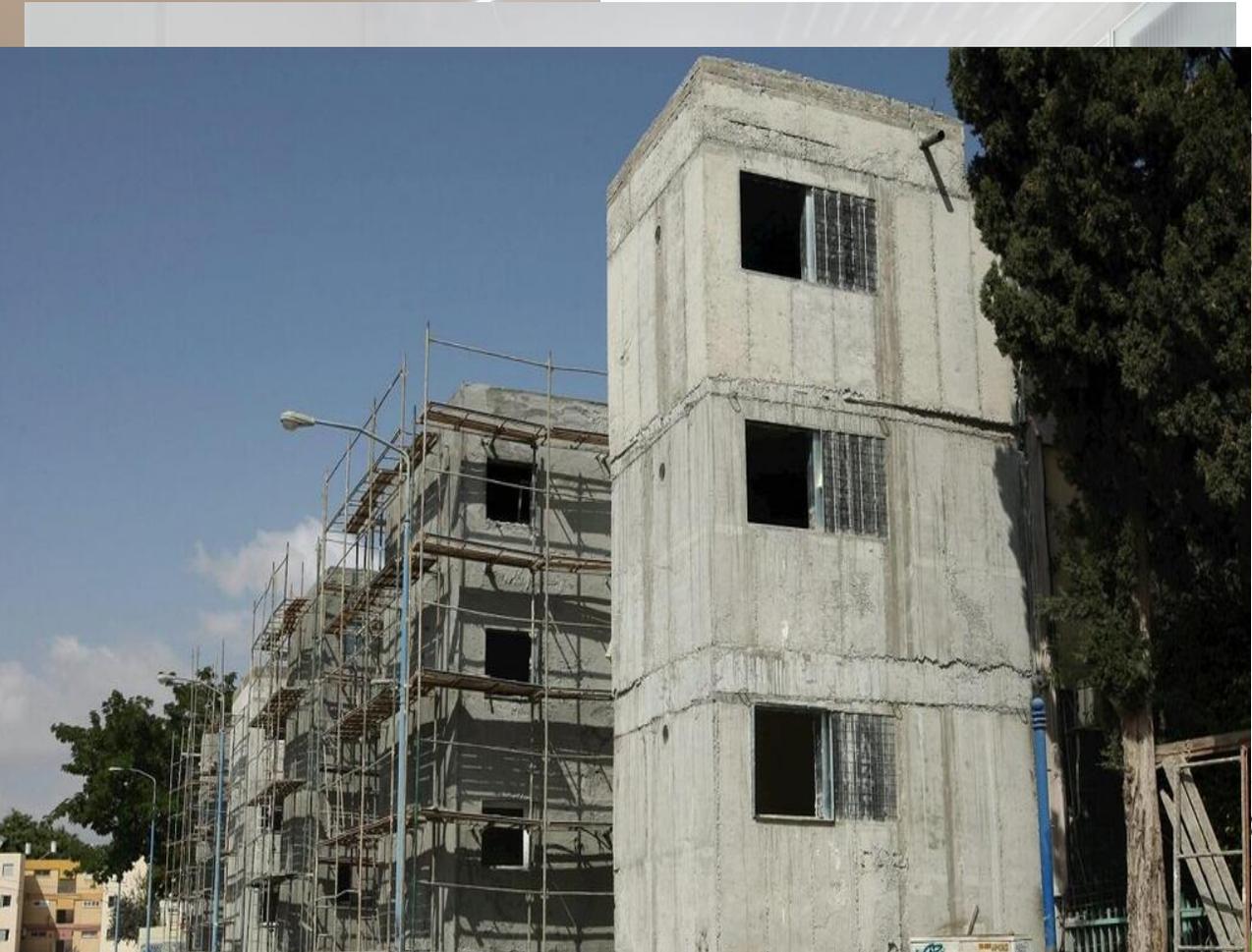
Tel Aviv – UNESCO recognized World Heritage Site (2025)
Image by Nir Mualam



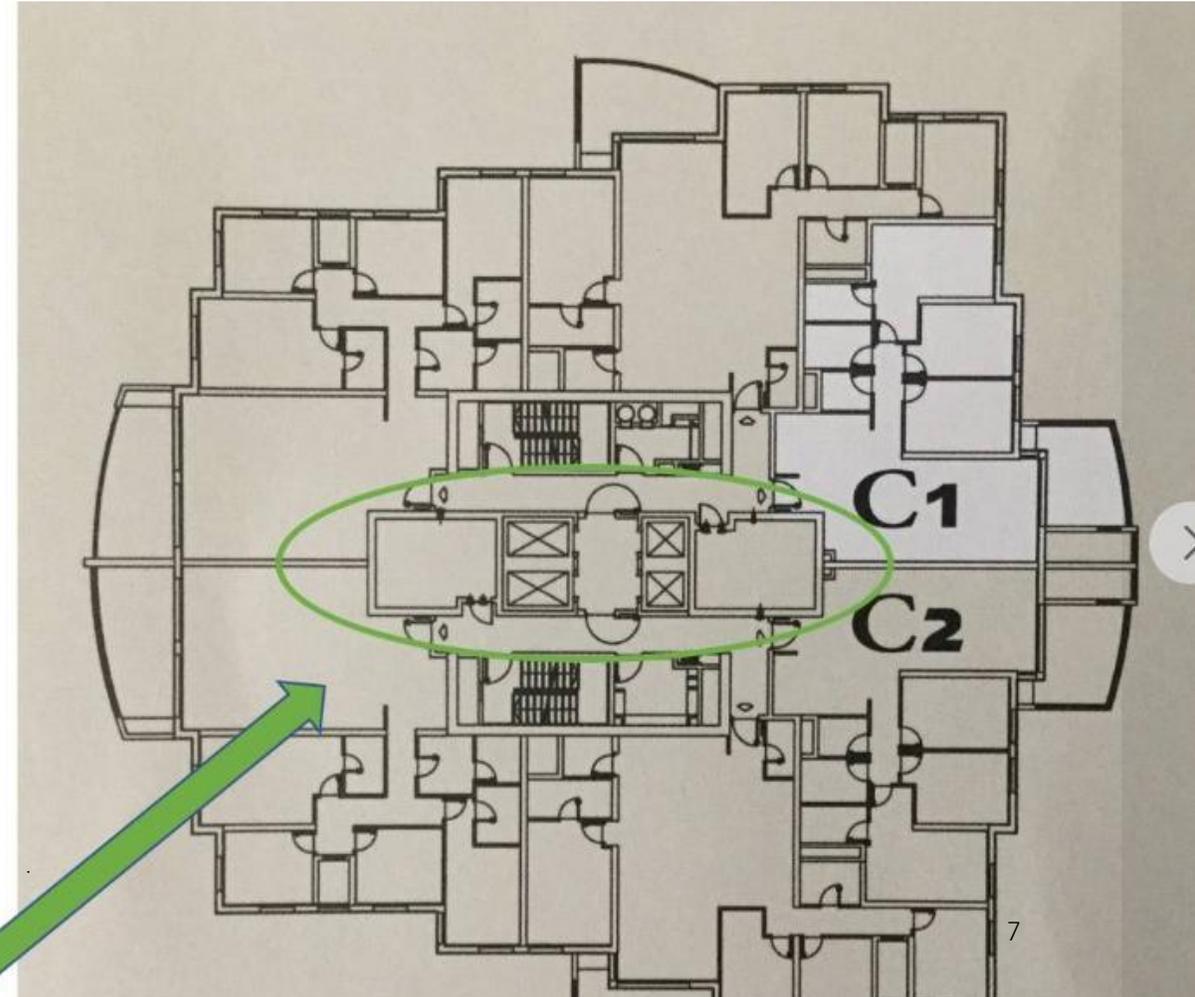
THE UPSIDE: AN ECOSYSTEM FOR CIVIL PROTECTION

Glossary and types of structures: SAFE SPACES

Safe rooms per every apartment (a.k.a. MAMADs)



Floor-based safe rooms (MAMAK)



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BUNKERS

Glossary and types of structures

Public Bunkers (MIKLAT)



City of Even Yehuda : Image by Nir Mualam

Private Bunkers (Miklat)



Tel Aviv Apartment Building : Image by Nir Mualam

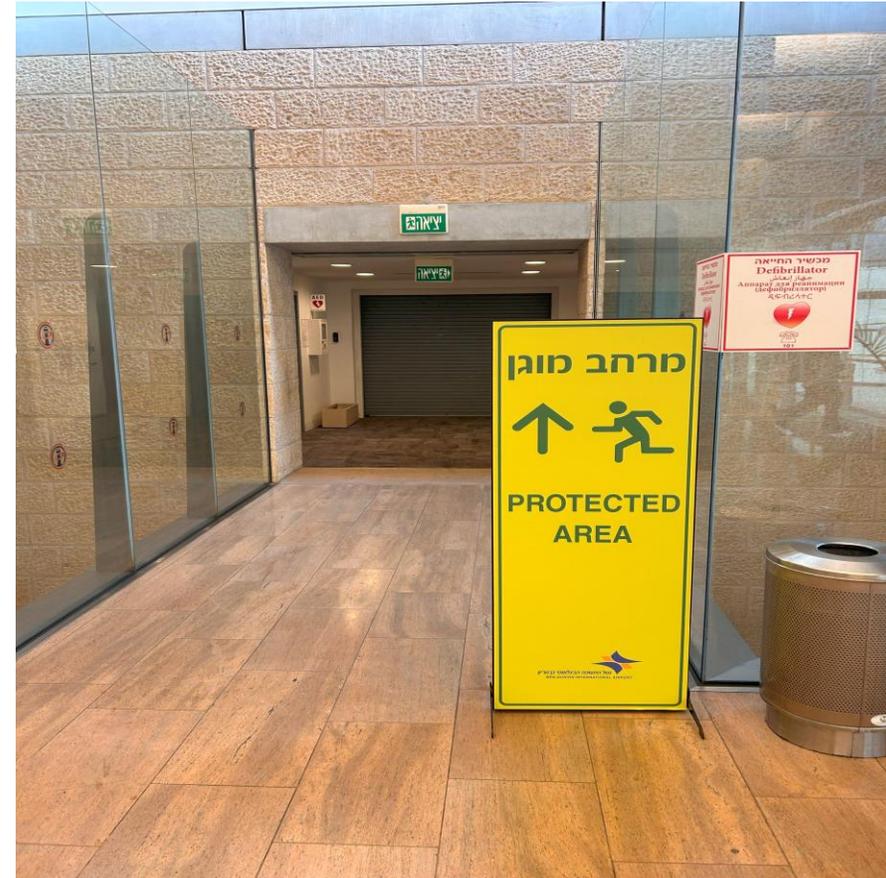
OTHER PROTECTED AREAS

Glossary and types of structures

Site specific shelter (MIGUNIT)



Other Protected Areas (Reinforced inner stair-cases + underground installations).



PART B: RELATIONS BETWEEN URBAN PLANNING & CIVIL DEFENSE



1. WHAT IS THE CONTRIBUTION OF URBAN PLANNING TO CIVIL DEFENSE?

- Mandatory requirements in the Planning & Building Act (1965), and its amendments.
- Strategic outlook about the civilian population in national-level plans. Different National Outline Plans.
- Urban planning allows civil defense also at the micro level- family safe rooms.
- Urban planning takes into account national and local considerations, by allowing planning authorities to enable development in times of emergency, without permits and without plans.

2. WHAT ROLE DOES CIVIL DEFENSE PLAY IN URBAN PLANNING?

- Decision-makers at all levels of government are cognizant of the need to embed civilian resilience & defense considerations into planning processes.
- Civil Defense has a key role in granting **building permits**. Local government must take into consideration the existence of shelters \ safe rooms in new projects.
- Civil Defense plays a key role in **plan approval** \ plan preparation (binding plans).
- Planning committees (boards) are supposed to **take into consideration** a broad range of safety issues (in accordance with Supreme Court decisions).
- A special planning committee is charged with approving military-related plans (some of which include camps, and civil defense facilities). The committee is known as the **VALMAB** (the committee for security structures).
- Representative of the Minister of Defense is present in any discussion by the National and District Planning Committees.

2.1 WHAT ROLE DOES CIVIL DEFENSE PLAY IN URBAN PLANNING?

- **Strategic national plans** are geared towards safety and defense.
- Part of a holistic emergency / security approach to planning (**TAMA 38** for earthquake preparedness + Article 70D and others in the Planning Act).
- National Outline Plan No. **40 A 1,1**: "Construction of Safe Rooms" (2019, amended December 2023).
 - (1) allows construction of safe rooms even beyond existing building lines.
 - (2) grants 'by right' floor area bonus for safe rooms to be added to existing (old) residential and public buildings.
 - (3) Trumps local planning in a centralized planning system.



2.2 WHAT ROLE DOES CIVIL DEFENSE PLAY IN URBAN PLANNING?

- National Outline Plan No. 40 A 1,1: Consequences. Building extensions beyond building lines.
- Local Planning Authorities **MUST** approve permits.



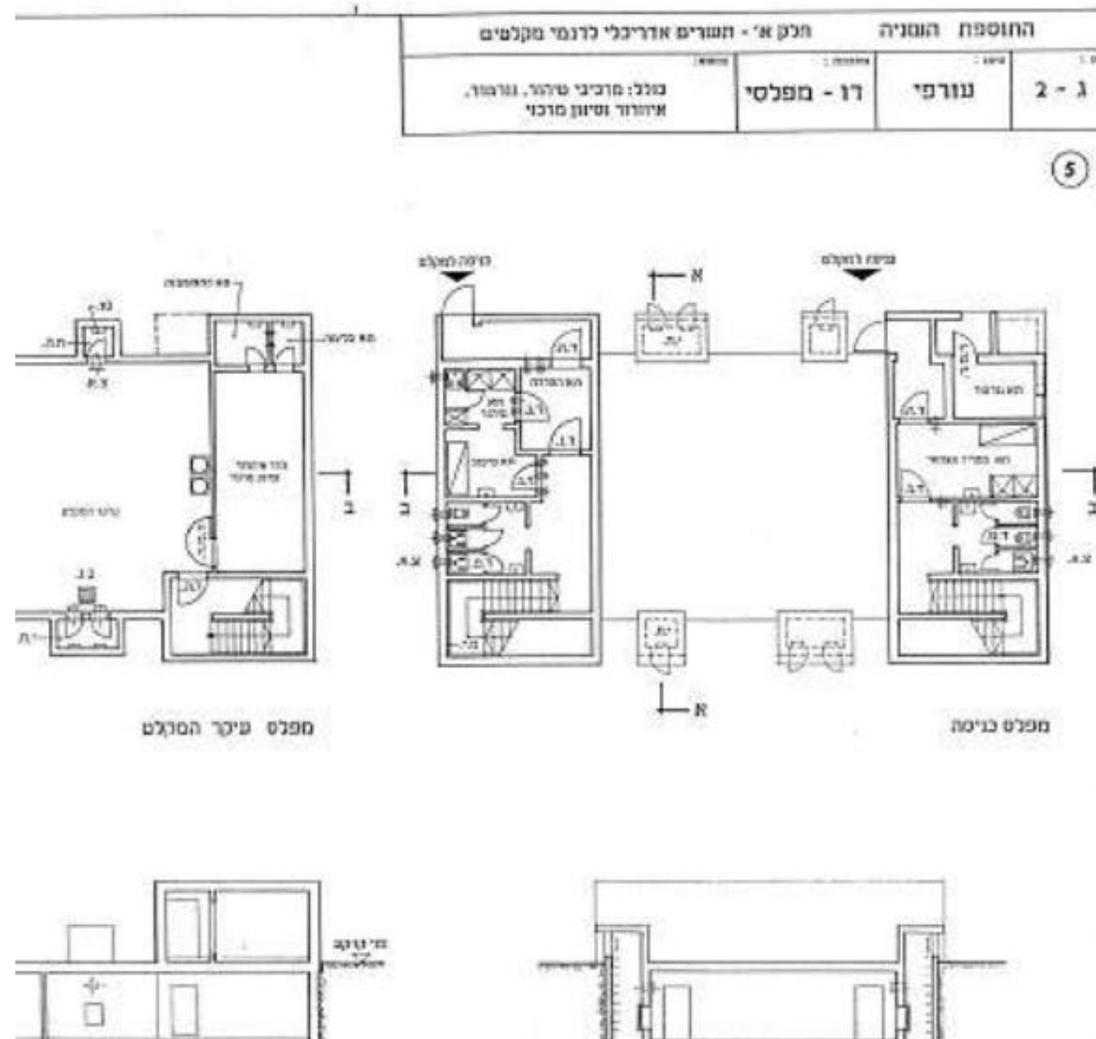
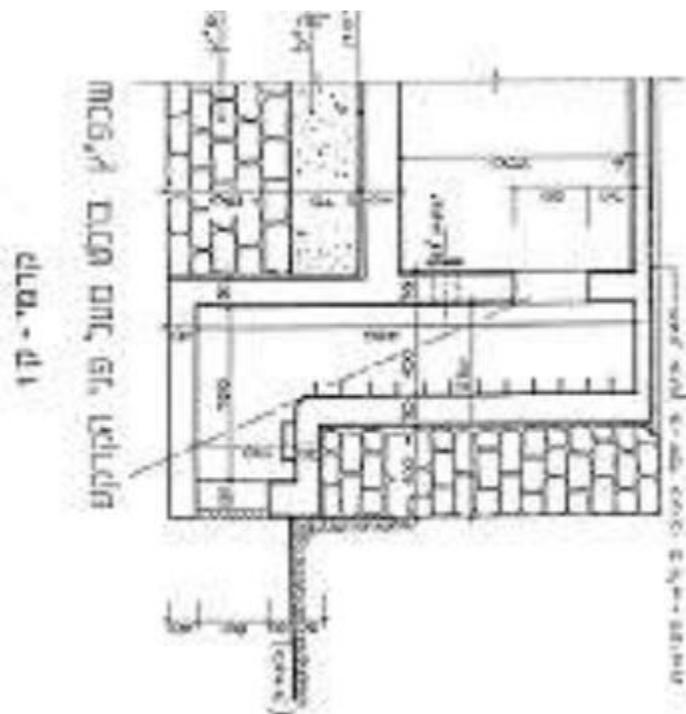
2.3 WHAT ROLE DOES CIVIL DEFENSE PLAY IN URBAN PLANNING?

- A huge ecosystem of regulations, experts, engineers, architects, and designers.
- Regulations: Defining the size of windows in safe rooms.
- Size of safe rooms, typically 9-12 sq/m (net/gross).
- Gives examples of different possible models for bunkers and shelters.
- Few cases when no need for safe rooms in new apartments (availability of public bunker in certain townships).



2.3 WHAT ROLE DOES CIVIL DEFENSE PLAY IN URBAN PLANNING?

- More than 200 pages of regulations explaining how to build shelters, safe rooms, and more. Examples:



2.4. IMPACT OF HISTORICAL/CURRENT ATTACKS ON URBAN PLANNING

- 1948-1951: War of Independence. Civilian population continuously attacked.
- Ben Gurion encourages the creation of Civil Defense Services (HAGA).
- First government legislates the 1951 Civil Defense Act that relates to public bunkers and their maintenance. It also establishes the relationship between local government and HAGA.



2.4 IMPACT OF HISTORICAL/CURRENT ATTACKS ON URBAN PLANNING

- The 1951 Civil Defense Act:
 - Establishes the Civil Defense Services (**HAGA**). Its functions today- carried out by the Home Front Command (**HFC**).
 - Led by a Military Officer appointed by the Chief of Staff. Under the Authority of the Ministry of Defense (MOD).
 - May install alarms \ siren horns in public properties \ local government property.
 - Also, on private property subject to compensation.
 - When an emergency situation is declared by Central Government – may enter any property, give orders to civilian population and ask them to supply certain items.
 - More powers in emergency situations: e.g. order schools to close their gates.
 - Approves the technical features of shelters\bunkers\etc.
 - May order other public authorities to build or maintain shelters.
 - Determines rules for the construction of private (shared) shelters in certain apartment buildings.

2.4 IMPACT OF HISTORICAL/CURRENT ATTACKS ON URBAN PLANNING

- 1990-1991: First Gulf War. Saddam Hussein launches SKAD missiles onto Israel.
- This resulted in massive changes in (1) Laws and Regulations (2) Institutional Configuration.
- Laws: Every new residential buildings must include safe rooms (shared or for each apartment).
- Institutional Configuration: In 1992 the government formed PIKUD HA'OREF (Home-Front Command)- which is Israel Defense Forces military command, created in February 1992 in response to the lessons of the Gulf War, during which the civilian population was heavily targeted.
- Home Front Command role includes: alerting, informing and guiding the population, rescue and implementing an emergency routine (defense policy) and preparing the public and state bodies for an emergency: local authorities, government ministries and volunteers.



Skad missile hits TLV: source, Israel Today and IDF Archive

2.4. IMPACT OF HISTORICAL/CURRENT ATTACKS ON URBAN PLANNING



(Anas
Baba/AFP via
Getty
Images)

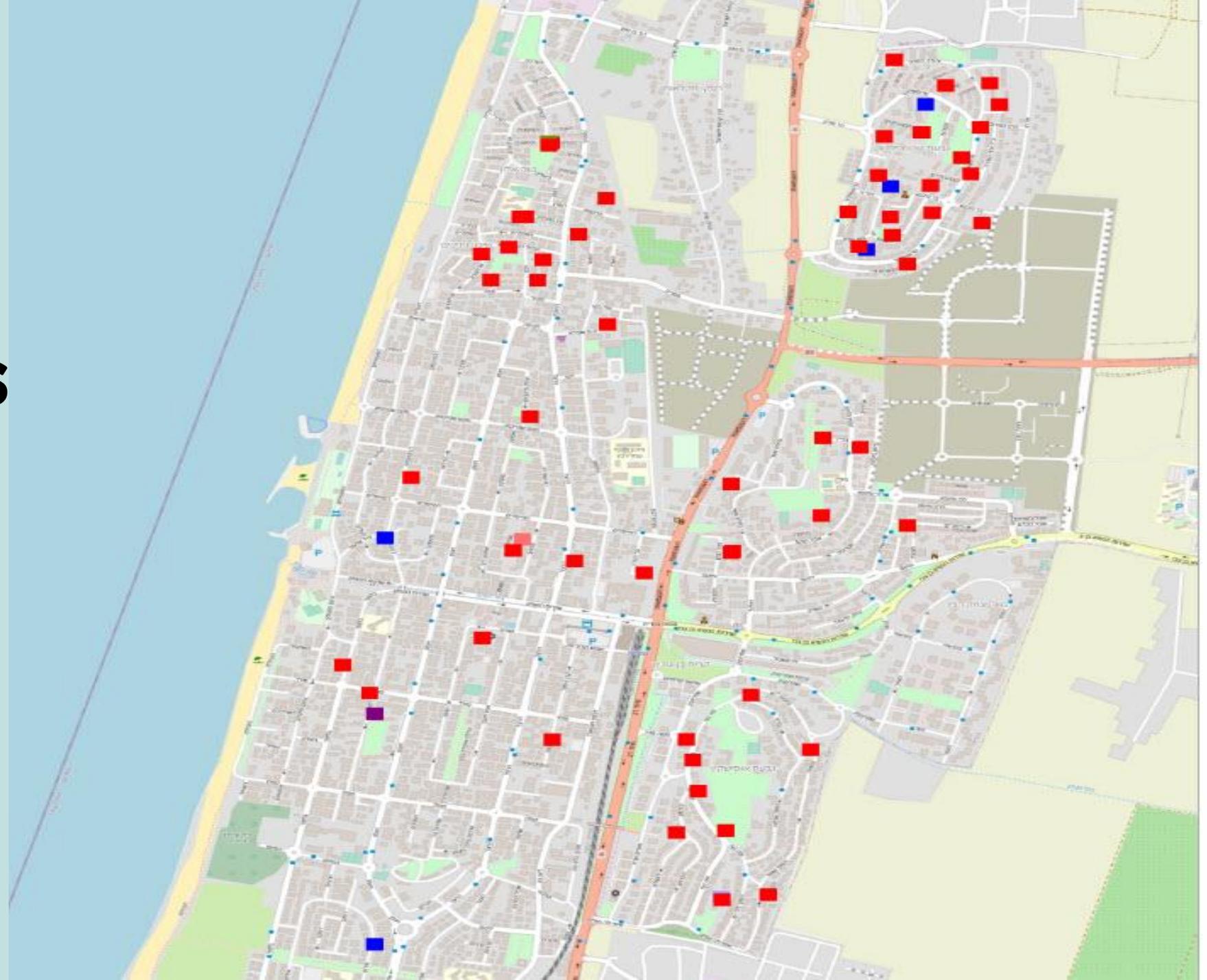
2.4 IMPACT OF HISTORICAL/CURRENT ATTACKS ON URBAN PLANNING

- October 7th, 2023. Israel's 9/11. Hamas and Hizbullah attacks on Israel resulted in New interim laws introduced (December 2023), allowing **fast approval** of safe-rooms in each dwelling.
- Specifically, safe rooms are allowed without permit in residential buildings comprising of up to 2 floors (Planning and Building Regulations, Amendment).
- This was **extended to public institutions** of up to 2 floors.
- In addition: A 2023 amendment to National Outline Plan 40A11 allows residents to build saferooms **beyond building lines** (no 'easement' stipulations).



A sign directing to the safe room in a local Tel Aviv municipal community center.

PART C: URBAN PLANNING PERSPECTIVES



4. WHAT CRITERIA ARE USED TO LOCATE CIVIL DEFENSE MEASURES IN URBAN AREAS (E.G. BUNKERS, SHELTERS, MILITARY INSTALLATIONS)?

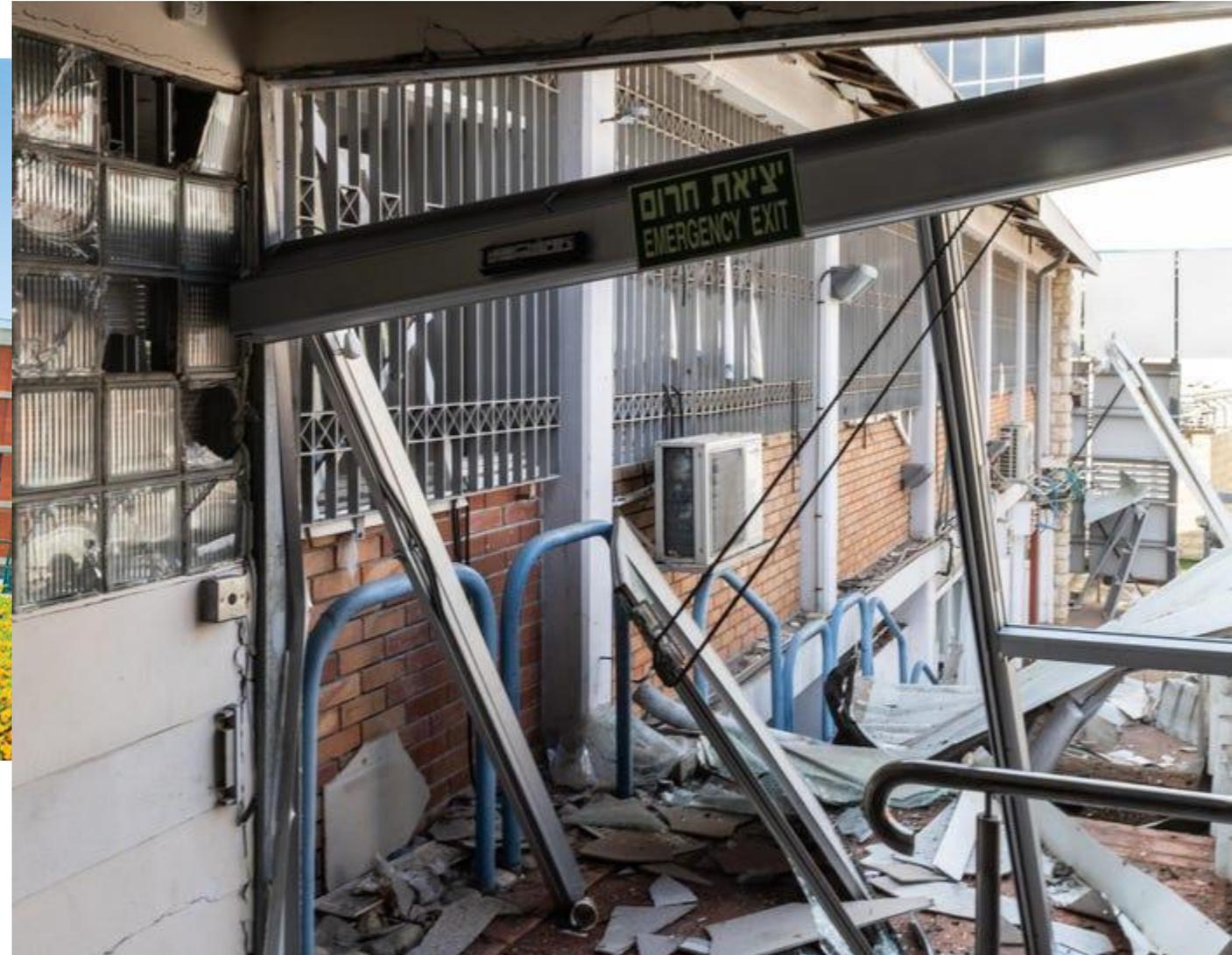
- Until the early 1990s most civil defense focused on community shelters spread along residential areas.
- 1950s-1980s: some residential buildings included private shelters on ground floors or underground (for use by all families living in the same building).
- Residences nowadays: Each must include safe rooms (private or shared on each floor).
- Public institutions nowadays: newly built are required to build safe rooms or other safe areas (e.g. saferooms for each kindergarten classroom or for 2 classrooms). Hospitals may decide to build whole wings underground depending on availability of budgets.
- **Public institutions** must create safe places for vulnerable populations (babies, kids wings in hospitals).
- Areas closer to the border will have more Site Specific Shelters (to protect from missile attacks). Usually financed and installed by the army and/or the local government. (TAMA 40 A 1 1 - in the past focused on 9 km from border...)



Sheba Hospital - Premature babies moved into safe rooms
(mako.co.il/?תרחישי_חירום)

4.1 WHAT CRITERIA ARE USED TO LOCATE CIVIL DEFENSE MEASURES IN URBAN AREAS (E.G. BUNKERS, SHELTERS, MILITARY INSTALLATIONS)?

- Public institutions located near border areas: the government would seek new budgets to safeguard them.
- E.g. Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon.



5. CHALLENGES OF LOCATING CIVIL DEFENSE FACILITIES IN EXISTING URBAN STRUCTURES\BUILDINGS?

- Lack of government funds to safeguard its own facilities (hospitals: not all are protected).
- Existing apartment blocks: adding safe-rooms affects neighbors, and mandates large transaction costs (public-private cooperation).
- Design and architectural aspects: Ugly extensions. Unhappy residents.
- Some existing buildings are totally unadaptable (because of urban density, or the layout of the building).
- Creating adaptable spaces in the first place.

5. CHALLENGES OF LOCATING CIVIL DEFENSE FACILITIES IN EXISTING URBAN STRUCTURES\BUILDINGS?

- Costs of adaptations of existing buildings (both public and private).
- E.g. – kindergartens- not all manage to add safe rooms to existing structures because of budgetary constraints.
- Division between wealthy and not-so-wealthy localities (while central government is idle).
- December 2024: A gov decision to allocate 300 million USD to help finance the adaptation of older residential + public structures (70%/30%)

Israeli kids in a public kindergarten's safe room during Hamas attack. December 2023.



5. CHALLENGES OF LOCATING CIVIL DEFENSE FACILITIES IN EXISTING URBAN STRUCTURES\BUILDINGS?

Creating adaptable spaces in the first place (Parking lot turned into a safe space).

“Multiple Intensive Land Use” (MILU)



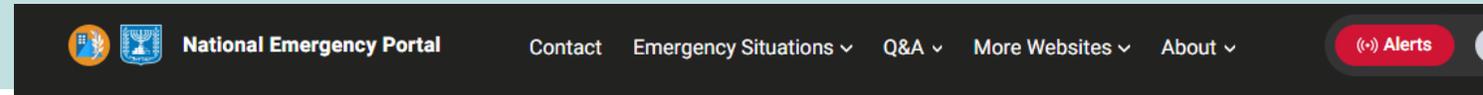
מתחם הטיפול התת קרקעי בהדסה (צילום: אבי חיון)

Underground storage and seminar rooms converted into a hospital wing.
Jerusalem, Hadasa Hospital

6. HOME FRONT COMMAND REGULATIONS

- Multiple intensive / dual use

[National Emergency Portal | Guidelines for Planning Protected Spaces](#)



Guidelines for the maintenance of shelters and the dual-purpose use of shelters in local municipalities

[🔗](#) - guidelines for the maintenance of public shelters and an examination procedure for their demolition.

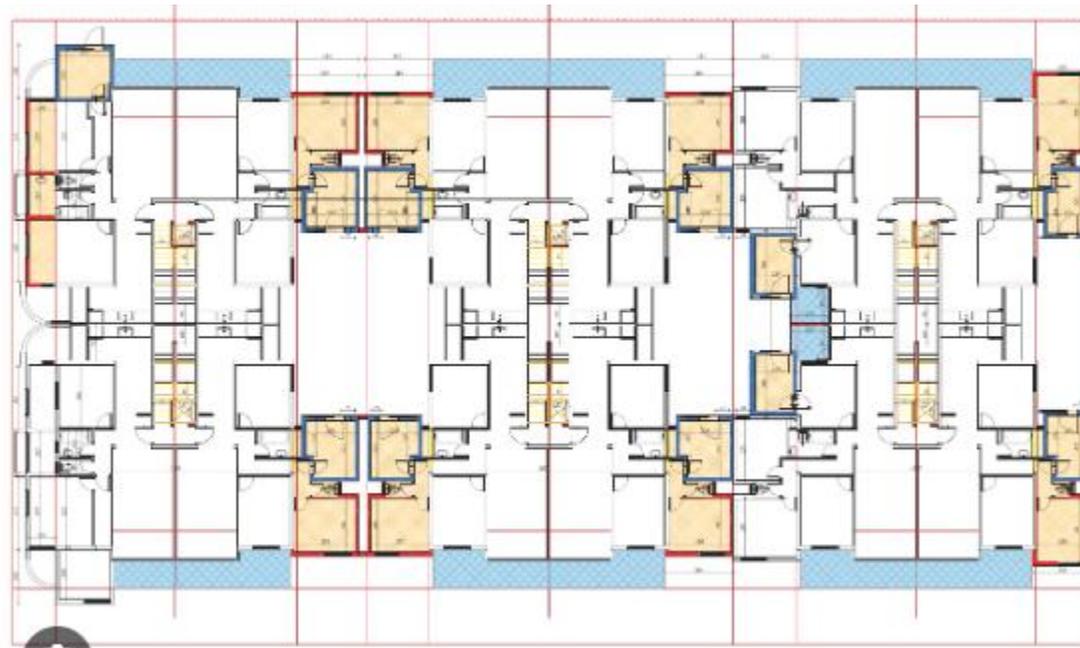
17.9.25

[Civil Defense Regulations \(specifications for building shelters\) 🔗](#) - link to the regulations on the Nevo website

[Guideline to planning room/s in a residential unit 🔗](#) - guidelines to planning protection in a structure that includes a residential unit room

6.1. HOW ARE CIVIL PROTECTION CONCEPTS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN DRAWING UP NEW BINDING PLANS?

- Local plans already take into account (in calculations of building rights) the BY RIGHT ability to build one saferoom (about 10 sq/meters) in each apartment.
- Some local plans allow extensions to existing structures, subject to design review.



6.2. HOW ARE CIVIL PROTECTION CONCEPTS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN DRAWING UP NEW BINDING PLANS?

- National Level Plan (TAMA 1, amendment 17) encourages use of underground as another urban layer (goals include: urban densification, smaller amount of land take, **and** civil protection).
- Goal: “Improving the protection of the population by reducing the existing protection gaps (between cities) and creating functional continuity in the underground, in emergency situations, while securing essential services”.
- Mandates local authorities to consult Home Front before approving plans on their own property that includes large parcels. In that case, Home Front would advise whether part of the new suggested building shall include protected areas for civilians.
- Likewise, amendment no. 101 to the Planning & Building Act (from 2014) extends the powers of certain Local Planning Authorities to add buildable rights in the underground (as much as they like).
- Multiple intensive / dual use

PART D: ACTORS AND THEIR COLLABORATION



NEMA: National Emergency Management Authority



HFC: Home Front Command



Local (City) Emergency Councils



The Planning Administration

7. WHO ARE THE MOST IMP ACTORS/STAKEHOLDERS IN TERMS OF CIVIL PROTECTION (PUBLIC\PRIVATE)?

- **Planning boards:** local, district and national.
- Special (district-level) planning board (**VALMAB**)- the committee for security structures.
- **MOD's National Emergency Authority (NEMA)**- in charge of devising new policies, risk analysis, evictions of populations, ongoing coordination, and more.
- **Home-Front Command** (army wing which guides city administrations, planning boards, practitioners, and the civilian population; performs rescue operations).
- **Central government** decisions (Cabinet). E.G. approval and preparation of strategic plans.
- **City councils:** management and upkeep of some civil protection infrastructure + allocation of land.
- **Private developers:** being incentivized to construct safe rooms and shelters.

8. HOW DO CIVIL PROTECTION ACTORS (MILITARY REPS. + SECURITY EXPERTS) AND URBAN PLANNERS COOPERATE ON CIVIL PROTECTION ISSUES?

- Home-Front command Embedded in the law: representative of the Ministry of Defense in some planning boards, gives advise and guidance throughout plan preparation and approval.
- Thus, when promoting **new plans, or planning permits** army personnel / MOD experts are part of the process.
- Civil engineers (not necessarily military) are empowered by Home Front to inspect planning permits (delineation of authority).

9 B. WHAT DEMANDS DOES THE MILITARY PLACE ON URBAN PLANNING?

- Online Permit-Granting system (Home Command Approval).



מערכת פיקוד העורף לאישור בקשות להיתר בנייה

לקהל הרחב שלום רב,

לתשומת ליבכם,

הליך בדיקת הבקשות להקמת ממ"ד וממ"ד ללא היתר ("הוראת שעה - חרבות ברזל") אושר וכעת ניתן להגיש תיקים במערכת.

לאופן עריכת נספח מיגון במסלול "הוראת שעה-חרבות ברזל" - [לחץ כאן](#)

לשאלות מקצועיות יש לעיין בנוהל אופן עריכת נספח מיגון והגשתו לרשימת ההנחיות, המפרטים והתקנות - [לחץ כאן](#)

אינך רשום
למערכת?

שלום רב! אנחנו מאוד שמחים
לקבל אתכם למערכת...

[להרשמה](#)

כניסה למערכת
למשתמש קיים

[מספר תעודת זהות](#)

[מספר טלפון נייד](#)

[התחבר](#)

10. WHAT FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS GOVERN COOPERATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND PRIVATE COMPANIES DURING PLANNING \ IMPLEMENTATION OF EMERGENCY MEASURES?

- Local authorities receive orders and guidance from Home Front. In accordance with 1951 Civil Defense law and its regulations (e.g. upkeep of public shelters, allocation of grounds for specific operations, and allowing Home Command to enter grounds and add installments like siren./ alarm horns.
- Home Front Command receives guidance from MOD and chief of staff, but mostly runs operations on the ground, and has a supervisory role.
- Local planning commissions approve permits that are in line with Home Front Command.
- Private companies / developers must abide by all regulations stipulating the size, dimensions, location of shelters and safe rooms.



PART E: CIVIL PROTECTION IN PRACTICE – PLANNING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT & CONSTRUCTION



WHICH MEASURES, ARE USEFUL / AVAILABLE TO PROMOTE CIVIL PROTECTION?

- **Tax relief:** no need to pay betterment levies to local planning authorities when building safe rooms (Article 19(b)(9), Third Supplement, Planning and Building Act).
- **Cutting red tape:** less bureaucracy when requiring permission for new saferooms, to be added to existing buildings (TAMA 40, New amendment to Planning law, 2023).
- **Circumventing existing planning hierarchy:** ability to build with no plans and no permits a range of urgent structures (section 266(E) of the Planning Law).
- **Exemptions from local plans:** The planning law (Section 151 (c)) stipulates that the construction of safe rooms and the likes, do not count as a violation of local plans in terms of the total buildable floor area.
- **Public funding to public institutions. Developers and bonus FAR** assist in creating private shelters.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF CIVIL DEFENSE IN PRE-EXISTING RESIDENTIAL AREAS

- TAMA 38 projects: earthquake preparedness + provision of anti-missile safe rooms
- Earthquake preparedness BUT ALSO civil defense using additional building rights to incentivize owners and developers to build safe rooms.



WORSE PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF CIVIL DEFENSE STRUCTURES

- Adding a whole new 'wing' / section of safe-rooms to existing buildings while blocking air\balconies in existing apartments.
- Deformation of existing architectural form / urban design.
- Adding bulk and mass.



SUMMARY

National security perceptions

- Changed over the years.
- The front lines (border) and the Home Front are 1.
- Protection of civilians is paramount to deter attacks, or to enable the country to withstand permanent attacks.
- National security is not solely about military capabilities.

Planning and wartime preparedness

- National security perceptions are embedded in the planning system in diverse ways.
- Continuous amendment responding to new events and threats.
- Critiques, but also opportunities for better planning.

MORE SOURCES

- Nir Mualam, Eyal Salinger, & Sarah Goldberg, "Implementing Value Capture in Israel: An Examination of Recent Tools and Policies for Urban Renewal and Earthquake Preparedness". Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Working Paper No. WP20NM1. 2020 (English).
- Civil Defense Law (1951)-https://www.nevo.co.il/law_html/law01/125_001.htm
- Civil Defense Regulations (1955)-https://www.nevo.co.il/law_html/law01/125_006.htm
- Home Front Command (English)-<https://www.oref.org.il/en>
- Home Front Command Online Permit System- <https://www.oref-rishuy.org.il/HomePage?ReturnUrl=%2f>

THANK YOU

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