Dichter: Mideast on its way to becoming a single Muslim Brotherhood bloc

Counterterrorism Bureau director says increased terror attempts from Sinai expected

By BEN HARTMAN and YONI DAYAN

The Middle East is on the path to becoming a single Islamist bloc run by the Muslim Brotherhood, Home Front Defense Minister and former Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter said Monday.

Speaking at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism’s World Summit, Dichter said “the Arab world in general and in particular the countries neighboring us have begun a long journey that will end with the Middle East being a bloc run by the Muslim Brotherhood, and possibly a single Islamism bloc.”

He also spoke about the civil war raging in Syria, saying that it is a question of when and not if the Assad regime will fall, adding that a massacre of the Alawite sect should be expected in such a case.

Dichter added that of great importance will be whether or not the new regime will be a liberal, secular leadership, or another regime based on the Muslim Brotherhood model.

In addition, he asserted that if Iran attains nuclear weapons it can be expected that Egypt and Saudi Arabia will follow suit.

Closer to home, Hezbollah has between 60,000 and 70,000 rockets aimed at Israel, Defense Ministry policy director Amos Gilad said Monday, speaking at the same conference.

Gilad said the Lebanese terrorist organization has stockpiled rockets of various types, and its arsenal is far more robust than the one it had prior to the Second Lebanon War.

“The next war will be aimed against the home front,” Gilad warned.

Gilad also blamed Hezbollah for a number of successful and unsuccessful terrorist attacks abroad.

Though admitting that the threat from Lebanon is growing, Gilad was largely optimistic about Israel’s security situation, citing positive developments in Syria, Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

“In Syria, there is good news,” Gilad said. “The Golan Heights remains the quietest region in the entire Middle East. Our deterrence capabilities are sufficiently, for the time being, keeping out warring parties in Syria.”

Gilad also warned that al-Qaida is starting to rear its head in Syria, with a view that the fall of Assad will allow it to open a new terror front against Israel.

Turning to Egypt, Gilad said that though there are many terror groups actively trying to strike Israel from Sinai, recently elected President Mohammed Morsy and his officials remain committed to peace.

Gilad called the situation in Gaza “relatively restrained,” with Hamas generally holding other Palestinian terror groups back from striking Israel.

Gilad also said that Israel is not facing a conventional military threat, a massive improvement over Israel’s historical security situation.

Focusing on Iran, Professor Uzi Arad, former national security adviser to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and head of the National Security Council, spoke of the coming year as being critical to the future of the Islamic Republic’s nuclear question.

“The first half of 2013 is when things must take place. There must be determination on the part of the Americans to act,” Arad said, adding that Israel reserves the right to turn to its allies for help, but also has the obligation to do what is necessary and that “one way or another, the Iranian nuclear program will be stopped in 2013.”

Arad said that the issue of “red lines” regarding Iran must be worked on between the US and Iran, but not through a public debate via the media.

The Arab Spring was a common theme at the conference, largely for bringing what speakers portrayed as ongoing disarray and instability to the Middle East.

Eitan Ben-David, director of Israel’s Counterterrorism Bureau, said that as a result of the Arab Spring, Israel can expect increased terrorism directed at its military and civilians “with an emphasis on terror, cyber terror and unconventional terror,” Ben-David added.

Nitzan Nuriel, former director of the Counterterrorism Bureau said, “Gaza and Sinai present an operational threat from Eilat to Kerem Shalom and the Gaza Envelope, and this is increasing.”

Nuriel described Sinai as awash in widely available, cheap firearms and advanced weaponry, and home to a large number of terrorists looking to strike Israel.

Nuriel added that the threat could justify Israel launching the type of security on the southern border that it has on the northern border against the Hezbollah threat.

At the same time, he sounded an optimistic tone, saying that in Gaza and Egypt, there is a government and address to which Israel can potentially reach.

Alongside the usual Iran and Arab Spring talk, a number of speakers described the dangers facing Israel closer to home, namely, the dangers posed by a failure to reach a diplomatic solution with the Palestinians.

Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz went as far as to say “the threat to Israel of a future bi-national state is greater than the Iran threat,” while former Shin Bet chief Ya’acov Peri said that if a breakthrough doesn’t happen with the Palestinians, Israel is on the way to a bi-national state.”