Defense Ministry to establish center to combat cyber attacks

* By YAAKOV LAPPIN

The Defense Ministry will set up a new body to support local defense industries in coping with cyber threats, ministry director-general Maj.-Gen. (res.) Udi Shani announced Tuesday.

Speaking at the Herzliya Conference, Shani said the new center would be based at the ministry's Authority for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure.

“Our big challenge is the system. It’s made up of [data] storage, and products that are totally civilian, like laptops,” he said.

Noting that most military networks, such as the Ground Forces’ Digital Ground Army system, use Windows and that many components are made abroad, he said the threat “can’t be fenced in for sure.”

He called for Israeli manufacturers to begin producing routers, hardware and microchips to decrease the threat of contaminated components entering sensitive systems.

“If we do this all in-house, we enter a whole new budget vector,” he said, arguing that supervision of manufacturing would help contain new threats.

Israeli defense firms must be encouraged to provide in-house solutions when they build systems, and medium-sized and small start-ups should receive such encouragement as well, he added.

The private sector, he noted, is filled with creativity and can help the country obtain state-of-the-art defense tools to cope with emerging cyber threats.

Declaring that criminals and terrorists in the virtual world represented a whole new threat category, he said the time had come to do away with “traditional, linear thinking.”

He recommended that security agencies cooperate to ensure “transparency and commitment” in the cybersecurity realm.

Relating to Shani’s call for supervision, Dr. Eviatar Matania, head of the National Cyber Bureau at the Prime Minister’s Office, warned that the state could not supervise computer and network manufacturers to an excessive degree, since such companies were global and free.

“We have to be very, very careful,” he said.

Still, he agreed that cyber challenges were posing a “threat to Western civilization as we know it,” adding that terror organizations and criminals could undermine whole states.

“The West doesn’t know how to deal with this,” he said.