

Israeli Ingenuity Takes on Global Terror

For decades, Israel has relied on brainpower to help boost its security. In the anxious new world, sadly, there's unprecedented interest in the innovative products of that bitter experience.

Hanan Sher and Erik Schechter

THE DISPLAY CASES AT Weiss & Mahoney, an army-navy store on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, are filled with commando knives, military uniforms and outdoor-survival books. On the front counter is a sign, handwritten in black ink on white cardboard: "No Gas Masks, Don't Have Anymore!"

The gas masks in question arrive from Israel — when they arrive. Larry Lopez, the store's wiry manager, says he's had trouble keeping them in stock since

them. The phone was ringing off the hook." He adds: "There's a sense that Israeli equipment is good."

Many of the masks Lopez sold were made at Shalon Chemicals of Kiryat Gat, a Negev town plagued with unemployment. Until recently, Shalon hardly sold to anyone except Israel's Defense Ministry; foreign consumers saw no need to protect themselves against biological or chemical attack. Then came September 11, the anthrax scare and the fear of terrorist attacks with chemical or biological weapons. "We've had tens of thousands of orders

cost has been in human lives. But there's another price: Terror and war have driven away tourists and foreign investors, boosted taxes, dragged down the economy. They've also forced Israelis to devote much of their ingenuity and resources to protecting themselves. Now, suddenly, the whole Western world fears suicide hijackers, high-rise death traps, bio-booby-trapped letters and dangers that don't quite have a name. Those apprehensions have brought increasing numbers of governments and businessmen to Israeli firms, looking for the expertise and products needed to make people safer.

Already on the marketplace are products ranging from a made-in-Israel self-opening parachute designed for escape from burning skyscrapers to super-sophisticated warning systems that can protect airports, fuel tank "farms" and other high-risk installations from intruders. Just patented and about to hit the market is Magal Security Services's "immobilizer" that will keep terrorists from stealing small planes to load them with high explosives or deadly biochemical agents. Still in development, but attracting sudden attention, is a flying platform designed by Ashdod engineer David Metreveli to rise up the sides of skyscrapers and carry stranded terror or

Gas-mask maker Shalon Chemicals has tripled its staff in the past two months from 150 to 450, working three shifts around the clock

September 11. "They come in and they go right out," says Lopez, who wears a black baseball cap with a "U.S. Army Veteran" logo. "People are still nervous."

In the first days after the Trade Center attack, Lopez estimates, the store fielded up to 3,000 requests a day for gas masks. "People were packing the place looking for

since then," says CEO Michael Bar-El. In the last two months, he's tripled his work force from 150 to 450, working three shifts around the clock.

It's hard to know whether to laugh or cry: At the dark edges of Israeli life have always been terrorism and the fear of external attack. The most obvious and painful



ESTEBAN ALTERMAN

GALLERY OF GADGETRY: Israteam's emergency skyscraper evacuation device, Duram's escape mask and Beth-El's Rainbow air-filtration system

disaster victims to safety.

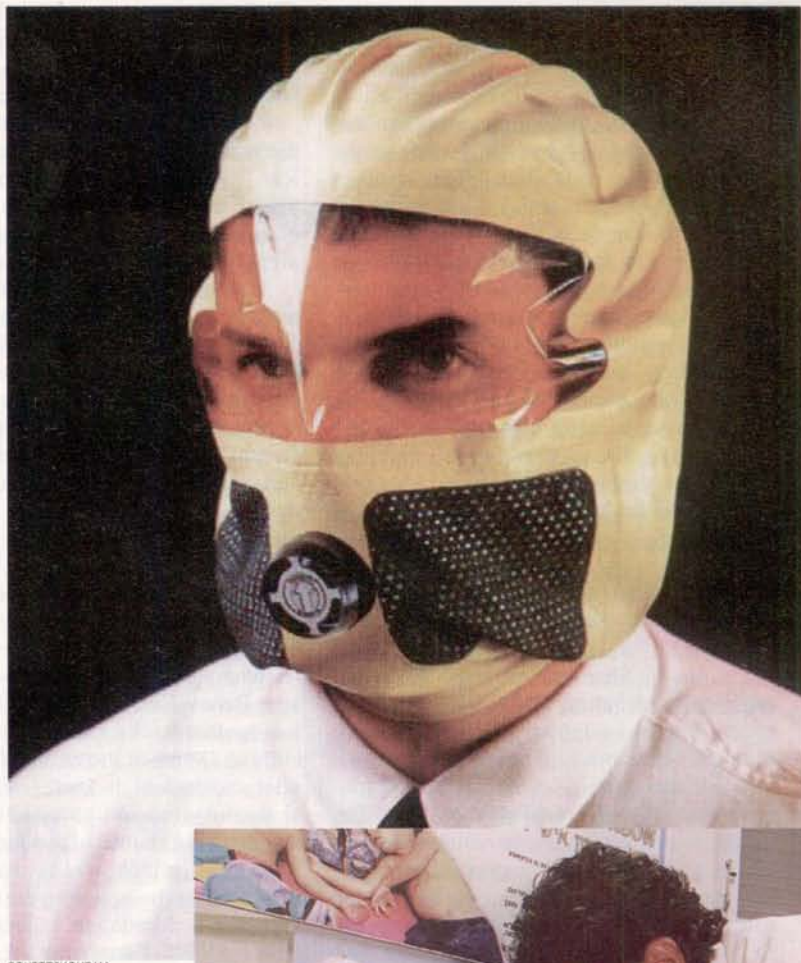
Expertise is also in high demand. Israeli companies, many of them staffed by veterans of specialized army units, offer airport security staffing, special forces-style training for guards, and consultancy in preparing for chemical and biological attacks.

Israeli security has always had a good reputation; the country has been exporting similar goods and services for years. Sales of civil defense products and services amounted to almost a tenth of Israel's \$2.5 billion in defense exports in 2000. But since September 11, there has been a sharp upturn of interest. A steady stream of visitors has been flying quietly into Ben-Gurion Airport, shopping for made-in-Israel security. The callers include government officials, representatives of established companies selling defense-related products — and a series of entrepreneurs.

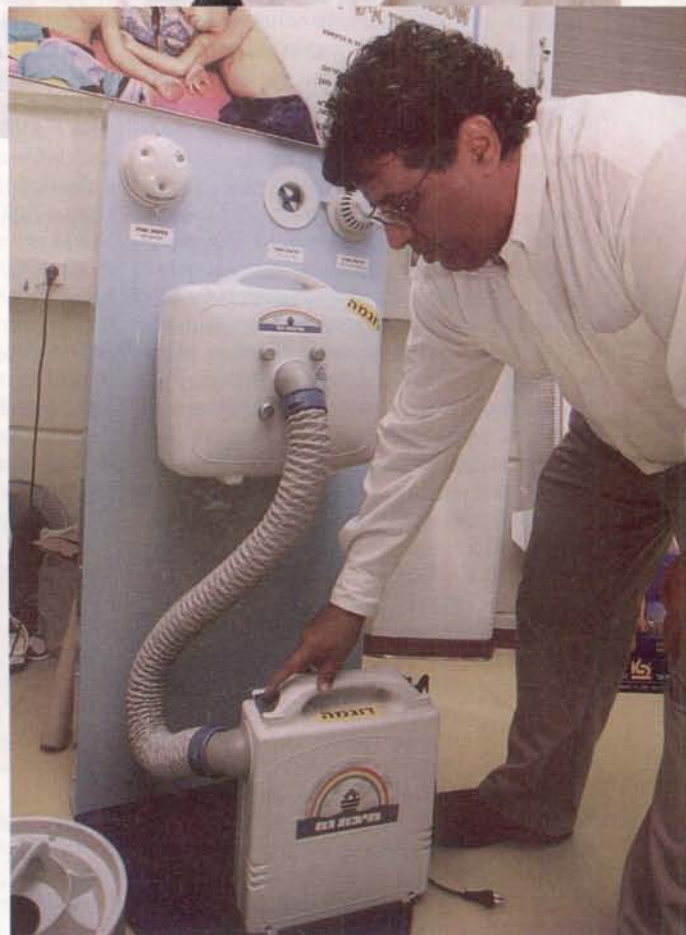
With understandable sensitivity, Israeli businessmen such as Jacob Even-Ezra of Magal prefer to talk cautiously about the

financial implications of the emerging interest. But the fact is that Magal — a maker of sophisticated electronic fences and intruder-detection systems — recently signed a contract to provide the perimeter-defense segment of a \$30-million-plus new security system at Chicago's busy O'Hare airport. While negotiations on the O'Hare contract had begun before September 11, since then Magal has had dozens of serious inquiries from additional facilities on the list of 110 major U.S. airports.

David Birnbaum, an American businessman of the New York-based Defense Technologies, is currently developing security packages of equipment and expertise that can be sold to corporate America. In early November,



COURTESY DURAM



MOSHE SHAI

Birnbaum engaged in intensive consultations with possible partners during a one-week trip to Israel. How much Israel's products and expertise will be sought after, he stresses, will fit together only as the bigger picture — including the post-Afghanistan war capabilities of Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda and of other terror groups — become clearer.

No one can say for certain how many increasingly hard-to-get dollars Americans will lay out for sophisticated escape and anti-NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) systems, or whether demand in other countries will parallel that in the U.S. Yet the purchases already being made, the interest shown, the products in the pipeline all indicate that in an anxious new world, people will be looking toward Israel for security.

The First Line of Defense

There's simple evidence of how suddenly, unexpectedly the new wave of demand for gas masks hit Shalon Chemicals. Since the tense months before the 1991 Gulf War, every Israeli is supposed to have a government-issue mask. Foreign demand is new for the three types of masks Shalon produces for the civilian market. Most familiar is the adult version with two eyepieces and a round filter protruding from the front like an animal snout. The company also makes a pressurized plastic hood for young children and a mini-tent for infants.

"Business increased 600 percent in the three weeks after September 11," says Samuel Hershberg of Platinum Defense, Shalon's Miami-based distributor. Hershberg says that he recently sold over 100,000 masks in just one wholesale shipment. And he reports that consumer interest has spawned an online Internet market for second-hand Israeli masks. The company warns, however, that such old products — which can be spotted by the Hebrew-only instructions — may be next to useless.

Initial panic after Black Tuesday, and

of whether non-conventional terror is really an immediate danger, or of how effective the masks would be against germ warfare, often seems to be overlooked.

"Terror will not disappear quickly, and the war against it, if you believe the American government, will go on for a few years," notes Bar-El soberly. Indeed, foreign investors and marketing partners have already come knocking on Shalon's door.

Even if they fear terror attacks, though, most people are not going to sleep a full-sized gas mask — too large to fit in a hand-bag — with them to the office or mall. One innovative alternative — gas mask lite, as it were — is the "escape mask" made by Duram, a firm owned by Kibbutz Ramat Hakovesh, northeast of Tel Aviv. Duram's device weighs only 150 grams (5.3 ounces); unlike conventional gas masks, it fits over a beard or long hair.

"Our masks are small enough to fit into a purse or briefcase — or the pocket of an overall — so that they can be used no matter where you are," explains Duram manager Benny Nur. They are designed to protect against smoke, chemical toxins or even anthrax spores in the crucial first half hour after an attack or disaster, until conventional decontamination procedures get started and there is a chance of evacuating victims.

Duram, which makes various rubber products, has been selling the smoke masks for over a decade; its customers include police SWAT teams and fire departments and defense agencies in Israel and abroad, including the Pentagon and the FBI in the United States. "In war or time of tragedy," Nur says, "our orders increase. They did so in 1993, after the first Twin Towers attack, again in 1995 when Japanese terrorists released sarin nerve gas in a Tokyo subway, and in 1996-97, when the United States started to talk about the dangers of biological or chemical terror."

Since September 11, Nur says, demand is five times normal. The Duram plant is now producing about 5,000 masks a month.

An alternative approach to chemical at-

Mizrachi winery in Zikhron Ya'akov, south of Haifa, the sales staff informs customers that deliveries on its flagship Rainbow air-filtration system for homes can't be promised in less than six weeks. Daniel Shimoni, a Beth-El project manager, reports an "unimaginable" increase in foreign inquiries for Rainbow.

The system, introduced 18 months ago, comes in two parts, each about the size of a small suitcase. It's designed to be used in a sealed room of a house or apartment — since 1991 part of the standard Israeli protection against NBC attack. The customer has to prepare the room by sealing all windows and cracks. Then the Rainbow — which takes a few minutes to install —



slightly pressurizes the room to insure that no unwanted gases get in. It also draws in and purifies breathing air while pushing carbon dioxide out. Running on household electricity, it can protect six people for three to four months. "That's enough time for army NBC teams to clean up anthrax spores after a major attack," says chemical weapons expert Darny Shoham, at Bar-Ilan University's BESA Center. And if the power goes off, there's an emergency battery that lasts 10 hours, and an accordion-shaped hand pump.

Shimoni says that Beth-El — set up by followers of German Protestant preacher Emma Berger who moved here in the 60s — has had feelers from foreign investors, but has turned them all down so far. The philo-Semitic group's original goal in designing the system at the time of the Gulf War, he explains, was to protect Jews from

An Israeli adaptation of cannabis can be used to counteract the deadly effects of gases like sarin

the fear of non-conventional terror to follow, prompted the biggest surge in demand. But fears of anthrax — fueled by the series of deaths from inhalation anthrax — may contribute to further interest. The question

tack is to make a whole room safe from gases — and desire for that solution is also outpacing supply. At the showroom of Beth-El Industries, improbably located across the street from the historic Carmel

Where Eagles Dare

How an aborted Russian plan for a safer space shuttle gave rise to an immigrant scientist's revolutionary rescue craft

Mitchell Ginsburg

DR. DAVID METREVELI IS a meticulous man in a confined space. His mustache is neatly trimmed, his hair ruler-parted. The room in his

Ashdod home that he's set aside as an office is dominated by hundreds of model

ORLANDO/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO BY MITCHELL GINSBURG



NEW URGENCY: Metreveli and an artist's rendition of his Eagle in flight

airplanes and missiles; its walls are densely covered with his own oil-landish paintings.

But his passion is neither for painting, nor for his 9 to 5 job in aeronautical engineering. It's for innovation, and it is now manifesting itself in a pet project, the Eagle. "I work for bread," says Metreveli, who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet republic of Georgia in 1993, "but the Eagle is what puts interest into my life."

The Eagle is a Vertical Takeoff and Landing craft — a propeller-powered vehicle that can take off, land and hover in tight spaces. Privately developed by Metreveli and a handful of fellow enthusiasts in Israel over the past four years or so, it's a three-level construc-

tion: pilot at the top, up to 10 passengers in the middle, mechanics at the bottom.

It is kept airborne by propellers — like any helicopter. But unlike conventional open-propeller systems, its rotor blades are housed inside its body, and rotate in a relatively small circle, enabling it to slip into narrow canyons or scale high buildings in dense areas. That's what makes it unique and why, post September 11, e-mails are flooding in from potential investors.

As the Twin Towers burned on September 11, several helicopters circled the buildings, in factually, their rotors preventing them from coming near enough to manage any rescue effort. In theory, Metreveli's Eagle could have flown up alongside any window on any floor, and ferried up to 10 people to safety at a time.

While there's been no shortage of inventors touting rescue apparatuses since September 11, not all of them pass close scrutiny. Metreveli's craft, however, already has something of a track record: In the summer of 1998, Metreveli successfully flew and maneuvered a 1:10 scale model of the Eagle by radio control. Now, he is working with a 1:4 scale version, and envisages completing its testing — with a pilot this time — within a year. "I hope there will be many complications during this stage," he says dismally, "because if we find them now they won't rear their heads later."

Assuming all goes to plan, the final, full-sized craft would be unveiled four years from now, and he believes it could then be produced at \$500,000 per unit. Till then, of course, money is a major factor: He has one solid investor signed up, and he and his colleagues pitch in, but that still leaves him well short of his ideal million-dollar annual budget.

Metreveli had always envisaged potential buyers among fire departments, mountain rescue teams, power line

maintenance crews and even window washers. Since September 11, both fire departments and private companies have been in contact.

THE GENESIS OF THE EAGLE actually long predates Metreveli's arrival in Israel: In 1986, when the U.S. Challenger Space Shuttle exploded during liftoff, Metreveli was a young aeronautical engineer completing his Ph.D. at the Moscow Aviation Institute. Attempting to try and learn the lessons of the disaster, key architects of the Russian space program began considering ways to design a safer space shuttle in which, even if the engines failed or caught fire on takeoff or landing, the crew might emerge unscathed.

They began working with "ducted fan technology" — the internal rotors Metreveli was to use on his Eagle. But their research was never completed, because of lack of funds.

That shortage of resources was one of the factors behind the engineer's decision to leave for Israel in 1993; that and the fact, he says, that he felt he'd be "at home" here. (His mother is Jewish, his father not.) Because he'd been given high security clearance to work on the Russian space program, and expected he'd be barred from leaving the country if he publicized his exit plans, "I just left work one day, and never went back."

It hasn't been Israel all the way since then, however. Metreveli spent 1996-7 working for Boeing in Washington state, focusing on a design for the 767 airliner. Remembering the aborted safer space shuttle idea, he pitched it to Boeing as a revolutionary feature, got nowhere, and so began bombarding NASA with proposals — again, to no avail. "Nothing if not determined, he then began writing to President Clinton, "on the first of each month." After six letters, the White House broke, he was invited to detail his idea to a room full of "presidential security people," who professed interest... and referred him back to NASA. This time, he got to give a slide-show, but nothing more.

Back in Israel since 1997, he's been giving much of his free time to the project. "Now, though, I feel a new urgency. I always believed there was a real need for this kind of craft. Unfortunately, it's taken September 11 to convince others of that need too." ●

gas attacks and to that end the members taught themselves engineering. Even now they sound firmly un-businesslike. "We would love to see more competitors on the market," says Albrecht Fuchs, now the head of the Christian group in Zikhron, "because it would mean more people are protected from poison gas."

Shimoni, an Israeli Jew, proudly adds that Rainbow's \$870 price has not increased despite the overwhelming demand. "It would be immoral of us to raise it now," he says.

Neutralizing Deadly Gases

If gas masks and filtration systems are the first line of defense against chemical and

Gurion University pharmaceutical researcher Amnon Sintov altered the formula slightly. When the new iodine mix was applied to the mustard gas burn within 15 minutes of exposure, skin damage was reduced by 50 percent.

Sintov says the research is basically military-focused with grants from the U.S. and Israeli armies, but there's also been civilian interest since September 11. "I see this product being developed into a spray," he says. "Right now, there's nothing like it out there."

As for gases like sarin that attack the nervous system, an Israeli adaptation of cannabis can be used to counteract the deadly effects. Dexanabinol, a mirror-

ed guarding their public buildings in 1995, after the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City," Even-Ezra says. "But water reservoirs? Hardly anything at all." Foreign buyers have already been in contact.

Ready for an Emergency

In addition to immediate protection against noxious fumes, spores and bacteria, escape has also become a priority. Just a day after the Twin Towers attack, Anatoly Cohen of Apco Aviation received an e-mail from a client in Michigan, with specifications for a small escape parachute he wanted to sell and a request to fill the order quickly. It took three weeks for the staff of Caesarea-based Apco, a producer of air-leisure equipment including paragliders and sport parachutes, to design, produce and deliver the first shipment of the special chute, designed so that people who'd never parachuted before could jump from tall buildings. Such a device might have saved people in the Trade Center who were trapped on the floors above where the planes hit.

The product is now being marketed as the ExeChute, with a price tag of \$350. The ExeChute's main selling-point is its super-fast deployment; Cohen says it "opens after only 30 meters of free-fall, and you don't ever have to have parachuted to use it." That means anyone trapped 30 floors or higher in a skyscraper could use one.

The client — who has been selling Apco's line of products for years — told Cohen that he has received hundreds of orders for the compact chute, and anticipates thousands more. Cohen takes no credit. "It's his decision, all we did here was fill the order according to his specifications. To tell the truth, I'm not sure that I would have jumped into the business on my own. But there appears to be a demand for this kind of product."

Avi Bachar, founder and head of Israteam, a professional crisis-management consultancy firm, doubts many people would ever be desperate enough to leap out of tall buildings. A reserve colonel who was formerly the chief administrative officer of the Israeli army's Home Front command, Bachar says he has an alternative in Phree — for Personal High-Rise Emergency Evacuator. The device consists of a seat-like cradle attached to a 400-foot rope designed to lower users to the ground from as high as 40 floors up in case of emergency.

The box containing the device — and the winch which unwinds the rope slowly, smoothly and safely, Bachar says — is unobtrusively pre-attached to the wall of a home or office, where it's no more conspicuous than an air-conditioning unit. "It's



MOSHE SHAI

PRIZED EXPERTISE:

Well-trained guards are just one element in a complex security system

biological attacks, Israel has also developed a second line to contain the damage inflicted by deadly mustard gas: iodine.

Introduced by the Germans in World War I and employed by Iraq against Iran in the 1980s, easy-to-make mustard gas causes hand-sized blisters, ravages the respiratory tract and internal organs, and can cause blindness or death. No one is certain that terror groups are working on using the gas, but that doesn't eliminate the fears.

In 1997 Hebrew University physiologist Uri Wormser found that povidone iodine antiseptic — the kind commonly found in pharmacies — was useful in limiting skin damage due to chemical burn, but that it had to be applied within 20 minutes of exposure to mustard gas and it didn't penetrate the skin deep enough to utilize its full neutralizing power. Wormser and Ben-

image of the THC molecule found in cannabis, is being marketed by the Rehovot-based Pharmos drug company to help repair nerve damage in accident victims. But, Pharmos CEO Haim Aviv points out, "whether it's from a car accident or a VX nerve gas attack, brain damage is brain damage." And Dexanabinol, Aviv maintains, is more effective than the atropine chemical commonly used to fight nerve gas, without some of atropine's traumatic side effects.

Not only air can be poisoned. Protecting water reservoirs represents a new challenge for Magal Security Systems, which bills itself as a world leader in perimeter security systems. Another developing field is protecting oil tank "farms" from attempts to detonate them. Officials in the U.S. have suddenly discovered that sensitive installations have had inadequate security, and have come looking for solutions, says Magal head Even-Ezra. "Nuclear plants have always been safe, and the Americans start-

not quite as simple as it looks," says Bachar, "and the secret is in the braking. This works for anyone, from a full-sized adult to a small child."

Several of Israteam's recent overseas customers have seen the product, and expressed interest in marketing it in the U.S. on a joint-venture basis, Bachar reports.

Bachar has also looked into a motorized scaffolding, which runs up the side of a building on a metal rail. He says the product has been tested during the construction stage of an apartment house in Ashdod, but had to be taken down because it didn't comply, for now, with Israeli building codes.

What is perhaps the ultimate building-rescue device, though, is a few years from potential customers. It's the Eagle, a propeller-driven craft capable of rising straight up into the air from the ground and hovering in mid-air to pick up as many as 10 stranded victims from high buildings or narrow-walled canyons. Space scientist David Metreveli of Ashdod, who once worked on the Soviet manned-flight pro-

gram, has developed a small-scale prototype of the sci-fi vehicle; with an investment of \$1 million a year for five years, Metreveli says he can have the Eagle flying and on the market (*see box, page 37*).

Boston's Logan Airport. And foreign interest has prompted Shlomo Dror, an ex-El Al European security chief, to recruit former top officials in the Mossad, the Shin Bet security services, and the former com-

Israel is the only country in the world that has made serious preparations for NBC attacks

September 11, sadly, may have created just the interest he needs.

What Israelis Know Best

In the long run, perhaps the most significant contribution Israel can offer in the security battle against global terror may be expertise.

With September 11 showing just how vulnerable airports and planes can be, Israel's reputation for air security is now extremely prized. For example, Rafi Ron, former head of security at Ben-Gurion Airport, has been hired as a special adviser at

mander of the Golani Brigade to join him at New World Security, founded at an investment of about \$40 million. Similarly, Yoel Feldschu, the ex-CEO of El Al, has put together Ganden, a consultancy firm, to help meet U.S. needs, working with Yisrael Ben-Haim, ex-head of Ben-Gurion Airport, and former Civil Aviation Authority director Avner Yarkoni.

Info-Files Ltd., which deals in business intelligence and VIP protection, is on the verge of signing a joint-venture deal with "a subsidiary of a major American law firm" to market security solutions for major

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U.S. installations, says company head Bentzion Magal. His firm will provide the security know-how. While Israelis have offered such services abroad in the past, demand has expanded drastically in recent weeks.

"Airport security is like nothing else," says Isaac Levy, a former Shin Bet security division head who's now VP/operations for the Sherutey Hashomrim Group, which provides consultancy and guard training for a variety of government institutions and private firms. "For example, 400 grams of RDX plastic explosive can destroy an airborne plane with 400 passengers. On the ground, it would only hurt people unlucky enough to be very close when it went off."

At any given time the school run by Levy's Herzliyah firm has about 1,200 students, mostly Israelis who guard "uncomplicated installations." For higher-profile jobs, he prefers veterans of elite combat units such as the paratroopers or the intelligence services.

Levy doesn't discuss fees, but Zeev Gefen, who runs the Israeli College for Security Investigations of Petah Tikvah, says he charges Israeli would-be private investigators and security men "from \$2,500 to \$6,000" for courses that range from a few

weeks to several months. For overseas students, who have to be housed and fed as well as instructed, the bill would be substantially higher. Before September 11 about one-fourth of the students were from abroad; the company says that proportion has increased since, though it declines to give an exact number.

Well-trained guards are just one part of a complex security system that might include combinations of "smart" fences, sensors and closed-circuit TV cameras. But they are necessary, Magal's Even-Ezra admits, because fences cannot possibly offer a complete solution.

"There are 110 major U.S. airports, and over 100 of them don't have proper perimeter protection," he says. "The Americans have put hundreds of millions of dollars into systems that search passengers and luggage for bombs and other weapons, but who's to prevent someone from walking onto almost any airport in the world, putting on a blue coverall — or a white one, if it happens to be in Switzerland — and taping an altimeter-detonated bomb to the bottom of a plane's wing, or its tail?" Properly restricting entry to the territory of the 100-odd inadequately guarded American airports, Even-Ezra says, would be an in-

credibly costly investment, running into the billions of dollars.

Other forms of expertise are available in Israel, but some of the people who could market them wonder whether America is willing to allocate the government resources needed to make the best use of their knowledge.

"Israel is the only country in the world that has made serious preparations for NBC attacks," says Bachar. But the U.S. government is unlikely to purchase full dosages of antibiotics for every one of its almost 300 million citizens, as Israel has for its 6 million-plus. Or buy that many gas masks. The U.S.'s entire stockpile of anti-anthrax antibiotics, as a matter of fact, is only enough to treat 18 million people for 60 days.

Some U.S. stockpiles are bigger. Last summer, Bachar discloses, U.S. civil defense authorities conducted Dark Winter, an exercise simulating a smallpox outbreak in a few key states. "When members of Congress saw the results of the exercise — which took six hours to run, but depicted what would take place over a period of a few weeks — they went to the White House. As a result, the U.S. government ordered 300 million doses of smallpox vaccine," Bachar says.

But such federal actions are limited, and likely to stay so — which could well mean an upsurge in interest for Israeli companies selling instructional videos, special courses and handbooks for individual citizens on protecting themselves. "American authorities talk about the threat of chemical and biological attack, and even say it's going to happen," Bachar notes. "But there's not a word, hardly, to prepare the citizen on how to react.

"Look at anthrax. They say what not to do, not to take Cipro. But there's hasn't been a word on how to defend yourself, or your family, or how to prepare a protective space where you can be relatively safe against chemical or biological attack," he says.

"A population that does not know what to do has only one recourse: panic," he observes. "And unless they're prepared you can be sure that if there is, say, a gas attack, more people will die as a result of the panic than of the gas itself."

Down the decades, Israel has had to improvise and innovate to try and minimize that panic. In the grim post-September 11 reality, the protective gear, escape tools, security fences and defense skills it has developed are proving increasingly sought after by targets of terror in the United States and around the world.

*With reporting by Yigal Schleifer
in New York*

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