

Buying Back the “Iron Dome” from Israel

U.S. taxpayers are being ripped off as U.S. Army buys back what we paid to develop.

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Even if one spends years exploring the dark corners infested by Israel's agents and its diaspora proxies in their successful effort to control much of Capitol Hill and the White House, it is still possible to be shocked by the effrontery of what many have dubbed the 51st state.

In early February, the U.S. Army announced that it would be buying Israel's Iron Dome antimissile system to protect American troops against incoming rockets, artillery shells, and mortar rounds. The sale means that the United States, which has the largest and most advanced defense industries in the world, is now agreeing to buy some of its military hardware from Israel rather than producing its own equivalent version.

The Iron Dome was developed and produced by Israeli government-owned Rafael Advanced Defense Systems company with some assistance from Raytheon in the United States. It has been operational since 2011 and was deployed to intercept mostly homemade incoming rockets from Hamas during Israel's large-scale ground and air attacks on Gaza in 2012 and 2014 as well as in the more recent bloody clashes along the border fences that separate Israel from Gaza, which have killed nearly 3,000 Arabs.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu inevitably took credit for the sale, describing it as “a great achievement for Israel and yet another expression of the strengthening of our powerful alliance with the U.S.” The U.S. Army is committed to buy two Iron Dome batteries for deployment next year for \$373 million as a first phase of a possible \$1.7 billion procurement to develop an enhanced mobile missile defense capability. It is believed that the purchase could lead to far bigger deals if Rafael proves able to upgrade Iron Dome to defeat the more complex battlefield threats envisioned by the Pentagon.

There are a number of problems related to the agreement to purchase Iron Dome. First of all, there is some dispute about whether it actually works. Israeli government sources unsurprisingly claim that it does, but some critics believe that its actual success rate might be considerably lower than the 90% that is being claimed by Rafael and by the Israeli government based on 1,700 reported interceptions. It has been observed that intercepting an incoming bottle rocket is a relatively easy task compared to an artillery or mortar round, which have lower trajectories and less flight time, making locking in the system's radar more difficult. And, as Iron Dome has not been used with any frequency against enemies firing military-grade rockets, mortars or artillery, so the testing of it has not been fully subjected to the actual field conditions if the U.S. Army were to deploy the system.

The second problem involves the purchase itself. According to a report examining the Iron Dome project, the United States has already provided at least \$5.5 billion of the development costs of the system since it was first proposed in 2010. In 2018, Congress provided an additional \$705 million to the Israeli government for various missile defense projects, which included Iron Dome. That means that Washington is buying back a system that it paid to develop and is therefore paying for it twice. This is a wonderful way to do business for Israel, but it is a complete rip-off of the American taxpayer. The fact that no one in Congress is complaining is perhaps attributable to the willingness of the government to do favors for Israel, including favors that undercut the U.S.'s own defense industries, as Israel will undoubtedly use reports of the sale to boost its own efforts to market the product worldwide.

A third problem is the cost effectiveness of the system, even if it does work. Each Iron Dome battery will cost close to \$125 million, but actually using the system is also expensive. Each Iron Dome-compatible Israeli-developed Tamir missile costs between \$50,000 and \$150,000, and two are normally used to counter each incoming target. In operations against homemade rockets emanating from Gaza, that means that \$100,000-\$300,000 is spent to destroy a projectile that might have cost less than \$1,000 to make if one is dealing with resistance groups, insurgencies, or terrorist organizations that might be improvising their armaments. And, as the supply of missiles is depleted either in training or in actual combat, it will be necessary to go back to Israel for more, creating a regular cash flow for government-owned Rafael.

When all is said and done, if the U.S. Army has no defense against low-level missile and projectile attacks and Iron Dome is the only tested option available, then there would be a certain desirability to obtain the system for deployment in parts of the world where the military faces that kind of threat. But, as is often the case when it comes to Israel, one has to suspect that politics are quite likely behind the purchase, most particularly in the form of Pentagon officials and congressmen who are desirous of enhancing the benefit packages that Israel receives from U.S. taxpayers.

The bottom line should be the bottom line. If the United States has contributed more than \$6 billion to the development of Israel's military antimissile defenses and actually needs Iron Dome, there should be payback. The two batteries should be freely provided to the U.S. Army as a thank you from the grateful people of Israel for the unprecedented financial aid totaling \$134 billion since 1948, as well as the virtually unlimited political cover for Israel's bad behavior that the American people have provided for the past 70-plus years. Perhaps someone on Capitol Hill or in the White House should remind Netanyahu of the \$38 billion that Congress has just approved for Israel on top of all the money that has already gone to Iron Dome. This presents a wonderful opportunity for Israel to finally demonstrate its willingness to do something for the United States, a reciprocity which its powerful American lobby always boasts about but which has never actually been the case in practice.

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