



Iron Dome Shoots Hamas Rockets Out of Sky

In its first week of operational deployment, Israel's Iron Dome rocket defense system stunned observers by shooting down eight out of nine Grad-style Katyusha rockets fired by terrorists toward Israeli cities. The system's success in April against rockets fired by Hamas from Gaza marked the first time in history that any military has intercepted short-range rockets.

Iron Dome aims to help protect Israeli civilians living within striking distance of short-range rockets. Southern Israeli cities such as Sderot, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Beersheba, with a combined population of hundreds of thousands of people, have been victimized by more than 7,000 indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks since Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. In the north, some 4,000 rockets launched by Hizballah during the second Lebanon War in 2006 killed 44 people and spurred the evacuation of 250,000 others.

Iron Dome is just one part of a multilayered defense shield that Israel is assembling to protect itself. While the system guards against short-range rockets, a system known as David's Sling or the Magic Wand is being developed to take down missiles with a medium range of 25-185 miles. Meanwhile, the Arrow, which was jointly developed by the United States and Israel, was created with long-range, high-velocity missiles in mind.

According to Israeli Defense Ministry Director General Udi Shani (Maj. Gen. Res.), Israel's air-defense system "will be the largest technological development project in the field of missile interception in the world." Getting its multi-tiered defense system in place is crucial for Israel, which seeks to blunt the impact of future missile barrages that could come from any one of a number of adversaries, including Iran, Syria, Hizballah, Hamas, or other Gaza-based terrorist groups.

Israel currently has two Iron Dome batteries deployed, each one at a cost of \$80 million, but it needs another 13-15 systems to simultaneously defend cities and citizens across the country. The United States is assisting in the effort by providing funds for four of those systems this year.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military has closely monitored the progress of the Iron Dome, which it sees as a potential tool in its own defense efforts against similar short-range rocket threats that could emanate from a number of places, including Afghanistan, Iraq and North Korea. The United States' fiscal year 2011 budget included \$205 million to help fund Israel's urgent procurement needs of Iron Dome batteries.

The allocation for Israel received overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress. Funding of this program reflects the importance of U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation, including the missile defense programs that have long been a cornerstone of the bilateral partnership.