



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 24, 2012

U.S. Funds Israeli Missile Defense But Can't Get the Technology

The United States has spent over \$200 million on a highly effective missile defense system and plans to spend nearly \$700 million more on it — yet U.S. troops in the field, including the [highest-ranking military officer in the land](#), are still largely at the mercy of insurgents' rockets. Why?

The answer is that U.S. taxpayers have been shelling out big bucks for the defense of a foreign country; and that country, in turn, has been unwilling to disclose to Washington the details of the missile defense system it is funding. All the while, a company owned by that same country's government is raking in profits manufacturing and selling the system.



The country in question is Israel, and the missile defense system is called Iron Dome.

According to *Wired's* [Spencer Ackerman](#):

The broad outlines of the Iron Dome system are widely understood: It's a mobile set of interceptor batteries capable of shooting down rockets that adversaries launch from a distance of between five and 40 kilometers — difficult targets to hit, since they fly low, in a straight line, and quickly....

Using radar and a bit of math, the Iron Dome software figures out if a rocket is likely to land near a populated area. If so, Iron Dome fires its interceptor; if not, it finds a rocket that might.

"The Israelis say it has an 80 percent success rate," Ackerman adds, "which is all the more impressive when considering that the rockets Iron Dome shwacks can take as little as five *seconds* to hit a target."

That, unfortunately, is about the extent of U.S. knowledge of Iron Dome. Washington supplied \$205 million in funding for the system in 2011, and Israel is asking for — and will almost certainly get — another \$680 million this year. But despite contributing a significant portion of the funds, "the United States has no rights to the technology involved" in Iron Dome, according to a report from the House Armed Services Committee.

[Walter Pincus](#) of the *Washington Post* provides some background on the missile defense system:

Iron Dome was developed and built by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd., an Israeli government-owned, profit-making company that, since 2004, has been headed by retired Vice Adm. Yedidia Yaari, the former commander in chief of the Israel Navy. Rafael's board chairman is retired Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, former general director of the Ministry of Defense. In August, Rafael joined Raytheon Co. to market the Iron Dome system worldwide. The two are already partners in one of the other anti-missile systems that is being jointly run by Israel and the Pentagon.

When it comes to Iron Dome, however, Rafael is playing things very close to the vest. House Armed



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Services Committee spokesman Claude Chafin told Ackerman that “the U.S. doesn’t have the necessary transparency into the details of Iron Dome that it has with other U.S.-Israeli anti-missile partnerships.”

The committee is hoping to rectify that. Its version of the 2013 Defense Authorization Act includes the requested \$680 million for Iron Dome but also instructs the director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency “to explore any opportunity to enter into co-production of the Iron Dome system with Israel, in light of the significant U.S. investment in this system.”

“The committee believes the Director should ensure, prior to disbursing additional funds on Iron Dome, that the United States has appropriate rights to this technology, as is consistent with prior U.S.-Israel missile defense cooperation,” the committee’s bill markup reads.

[DefenseNews.com](#) reports that “the Pentagon is pushing for similar caveats in markups to come from Senate authorizers as well as appropriators from both houses of Congress.”

Note, by the way, that the \$900 million the United States will have given to Israel in exchange for — thus far — exactly nothing is on top of the annual \$3.1 billion in military aid the country already gets as a matter of course. (Needless to say, this aid — like all foreign aid to any country — is unconstitutional.) Then there’s the additional \$168 million in the committee’s bill for other U.S.-Israeli joint missile defense projects plus \$100 million that the Obama administration requested for those same projects.

Israel, meanwhile, has been cutting its own defense budget. The budget took a five-percent drop this year and is expected to be cut by the same amount next year.

Observes Pincus:

So here is the United States, having added to its own deficit by spending funds that it must borrow, helping to procure a missile defense system for Israel, which faces the threat but supposedly can’t pay for it alone.

To add insult to injury, Pentagon officials must ask the Israeli government-owned company that is profiting from the weapons sales — including Iron Dome — if the United States can have a piece of the action.

There is no guarantee, of course, that Iron Dome would be effective in protecting U.S. troops from insurgents’ rockets. But for \$900 million, Washington ought at least to have a chance to find out.

Photo: Photos: “Iron Dome” launcher near Sderot, Israel (left); “Iron Dome” radar installation



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