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Progressives' Protest Removes Iron Dome Funding

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On September 21, progressives in the House of Representatives indicated they would not vote for stopgap legislation preventing a government shutdown later this month because it allocated \$1 billion to the Israeli government for its Iron Dome air defense system, which is co-produced with the United States. With only a slim majority in the House, Democratic leadership conceded and removed the funding from the continuing resolution. Because the Iron Dome is a defensive weapons system that saves Israeli and Palestinian lives, Congress must quickly fund President Biden's promise to replenish the IDF's supply of Tamir interceptors.

- **RESPONSE:** Congress should immediately pass legislation to restore this funding, keeping President Biden's pledge to replenish Israel's depleted supply of Iron Dome Tamir interceptors. This could be done either as part of the final continuing resolution bill or as the recently introduced stand-alone bill that would receive strong bipartisan support.

What Happened?

- On Tuesday, September 21, the House released the [text](#) of legislation which would keep the government funded through early December and lift the limit on federal borrowing through the end of 2022.
- Though the bill was widely expected to pass shortly after the text was released, a group of progressives [reportedly informed](#) Democratic leadership that they would not vote for the bill while it included \$1 billion in funding for Israel's Iron Dome. This led to the removal of the Iron Dome funding from the bill.
- On Wednesday, September 22, Representative Rosa DeLauro, the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, introduced a [standalone bill](#) providing \$1 billion in funding for Iron Dome.

Previous Bipartisan Support for Iron Dome Funding

- President Biden previously [said](#) he would replenish Iron Dome interceptor inventories, which helped Israel fend off most of the more than 4,300 rockets fired from Gaza during its conflict in with Hamas and other Gaza terrorist groups this May.
- On June 1, 2021, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) [indicated](#) that Israel would request the \$1 billion in funding and praised the aerial defense system, saying, “The Iron Dome performed incredibly well, saving thousands of Israeli lives and tens of thousands of Palestinian lives, so I would imagine that the administration will say yes to this request and it will sail through Congress ... I will make sure in the Senate that they get the money.”
- On Tuesday, June 2nd, a bipartisan group of 56 Members of Congress, led by Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-5), [wrote](#) to U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to express support for replenishing Israel’s stock of Iron Dome interceptors.

Why Is It Important?

- The Iron Dome provides crucial defense for Israeli citizens and will be increasingly essential for Israel as the likelihood of a major war with Iran and its proxies escalates.
 - The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) made significant improvements to Iron Dome since the 2014 conflict, enabling it to defend effectively against the much larger rocket salvos Hamas was able to launch in May 2021, which also marked the first time Iron Dome was used to intercept unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV).
 - Because it can defend against the vast majority of rockets and other projectiles headed to built-up areas, Iron Dome helps enable Israel to limit civilian damage in Gaza to extraordinarily low levels by buying precious time, or “strategic patience,” that affords Israel greater opportunities to utilize extensive precautionary measures in neutralizing launchers; it also reduces the need for an Israeli ground invasion – which would be costlier to both Israel and Gaza – to eliminate rocket launchers and other offensive Hamas capabilities.
- This opposition to Iron Dome funding reflects a growing trend of progressive calls more generally for conditioning U.S. security assistance to Israel.
 - As a December 2020 [JINSA report lays out](#), this assistance is vital for maintaining Israel’s qualitative military edge (QME), which helps defend U.S. national security interests in the Middle East, while simultaneously reducing the direct burdens and risks to the United States for upholding regional stability.
 - Contrary to progressives’ concerns, historically such U.S. assistance actually helps Israel afford to take risks for peace, and U.S. defense aid to Israel cannot be used for activities in the West Bank.
 - The removal of Iron Dome funding from the continuing resolution could set a precedent for future progressive action that delays or conditions security assistance to Israel.

- Funding the Iron Dome helps the U.S. economy as well, since it is manufactured by Israeli defense company Rafael with U.S.-based Raytheon as Rafael's U.S. partner in production. [Roughly](#) 70 percent of the components of the Tamir interceptor are now manufactured in the United States before final assembly in Israel.
- Palestinian militants demonstrated their ability to continuously fire on Israel during the most recent conflict, occasionally circumventing or breaching the Iron Dome air defense system, and repeatedly stress-testing the system for potential weaknesses.
 - Iron Dome intercepted around 90 percent of the rockets that reached Israeli airspace and would have fallen on population centers. But Israel reportedly has just 10 Iron Dome batteries, forcing it to strategically choose which population centers or infrastructure to cover and leaving other vital areas relatively vulnerable. In the May conflict, the IDF had to redeploy batteries from the north and move them to central and southern Israel.
 - As in 2014, Hamas heavily utilized mortars during the recent conflict, which still proved highly difficult for Iron Dome to intercept. A mortar barrage of over 50 shells on May 18th injured over 10 civilians and killed two in the Eshkol region of Israel.
- As JINSA laid out in a [2018 report](#), in a conflict with Hezbollah and/or Iran, Israel's adversaries would be able to launch significantly larger bombardments of rockets, missiles, drones and other projectiles at Israel that could overwhelm its air defenses.
 - A large-scale multifront conflict with Hezbollah and/or Iran would severely deplete Israel's stockpiles of air defense interceptors.
 - The IDF believes that Hezbollah could sustain a rate of fire four times that of Hamas while also using larger, more precise and longer-range rockets and missiles.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- With Hamas and other Gaza terrorist groups demonstrating their rockets' [increased range and firepower](#), it is imperative that Congress quickly fund President Biden's promise to replenish the IDF's supply of Iron Dome Tamir interceptors, similar to the emergency funding that passed Congress easily, and was supported by President Obama, when Israel faced similar challenges in 2014.
- The United States and Israel should cooperate on research and development programs to improve the Iron Dome's capabilities and explore other possible air defense options that could improve cost efficiency or better counter mortar fire, such as directed energy.

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