

Experts to the Prime Minister: Iron Dome will not be able to defend

By: Amir Buchbut, Maariv, 9.9.2009

The group that supports installing “Skyguard” sent a letter to Netanyahu and Barak in which they claim: The response time of the system to be installed next year -- too long.

While the Air Force is busy setting up a special battalion that will operate what is called the Iron Dome defense system against rockets, a group of experts and former army officers decided to send a sharp letter to the Defense Minister criticizing the system, which is to be placed by 2010 on the Gaza Strip border.

Board members of the *Magen Laoref* (Home Front Shield) Association, including physicists, laser specialists and reserve military officers, sent a sharp letter criticizing the decision to continue the development of the Iron Dome system, developed by Rafael. Among the addressees were Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, Commander of the Air Force Maj. Gen. Ido Nechushtan and State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss.

The letter sent to the Defense Minister's office states that the idea that the “Iron Dome” system will protect Sderot from short-range missiles and rockets is “just an illusion.”

“The Gaza periphery population will be defenseless.”

The experts claim that the “Iron Dome” system cannot intercept rockets which hit the target after a flight of just 25 or 30 seconds and reach ranges of up to 16 or 18 kilometers (such as the improved Grad rocket). “This is the minimum time from launch required by the Iron Dome system to destroy a rocket,” the experts wrote in the letter. “Any threat which stays in the air less time will not be intercepted. It will hit its target before the Iron Dome missile reaches it.”

The experts also claim that the Iron Dome will intercept low trajectory rockets (100 - 300 meters) at too low an altitude, hence the locations which it should be protecting may be vulnerable to exploding parts. The experts claim that these limitations of the Iron Dome should have been exposed in ordinary operational research before going forward with system development.

According to the map presented by the experts, the Iron Dome system will not be able to protect communities within 16 kilometers of the border. “So, villages in the Gaza periphery, including Sderot, Ashkelon and Netivot will be defenseless, as will be northern villages from Nahariya through Ma'alot, Zephath and Kiryat Shmonah.

The system conducted two successful experiments

Instead of the Iron Dome system, the group of experts are recommending the Skyguard laser system which, according to them, can be installed in Israel within 18 months. The Skyguard, they say, does not suffer the minimum-range problem that the Iron Dome does and incoming threats will be destroyed

within six seconds after launch or within three seconds after the discovery. The group also says that the Skyguard system can intercept mortars as well as chemical and biological warheads.

The letter is signed by many experts and former military officers, including Prof. Gideon Czapski; Professor Ariel Cohen, an expert in physics and lasers; Prof. Yeshaya Nebenzahl, a physicist from the Hebrew University; Prof. Gershon Grossman from the Technion; Brigadier General Zvi Shur, a former financial adviser to the IDF Chief of Staff; Dr. Oded Amichai, one of the initiators of the Nautilus project, a physicist and laser systems expert; Colonel Yossi Arazi; Colonel Ofer Lavie, former head of planning in the IMOD/DRDD; and Dr. Azriel Lorber, an expert in aerospace engineering.

The Office of the Defense Minister responded that “the answer will be delivered directly to the applicants.” It should be noted that contrary to what is stated in the letter, the Defense Ministry expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Iron Dome system project, conducting two successful tests of the system last month, in which the Iron Dome missile managed to hit two rockets. The assessment of senior officers in the Air Force is that the system will be installed in the Gaza Strip periphery by midyear 2010.