

Jewish Community Honors Congress For Support Of Iron Dome

By Devora Mandell

Putting political differences aside, members of Congress came together on Capitol Hill last week for the third annual Congressional Tribute to the U.S.-Israel Security Alliance. The award ceremony, coordinated by the New York-based Friedlander Group, recognizes lawmakers for their commitment to Iron Dome, an integral part of Israel's multi-tiered missile defense system.

Iron Dome has proved critical to intercepting rockets launched by Hamas terrorists into Israel's major population centers.

"During the last Gaza conflict, Iron Dome achieved a 90 percent success rate at shooting down incoming rockets," Rep. Nita Lowey (D- NY) pointed out during the ceremony.

Referring to the founder and CEO of The Friedlander Group, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) told those in attendance, "In matters of Iron Dome, Ezra Friedlander consistently makes sure the Capitol Hill community understands how important it is that we remain vigilant."

Funding for Iron Dome has not been without problems. In August 2014, as Israel was being bombarded by missiles from Gaza, the Israeli government submitted an emergency request for \$225 million to accelerate production of components used in the Iron Dome system and to maintain adequate stockpiles. Sen. Tom Coburn (R- OK), concerned about budget deficits, blocked the funding until Senators John McCain (R- AZ) and Lindsey Graham (R- SC) convinced him to change course.

An earlier congressional bill to provide the funds failed due to partisan gridlock over a separate measure regarding the migrant crisis at the southwestern U.S. border.

The invocation and benediction for the Congressional Tribute were delivered by Bukharian Chief Rabbi Itzhak Yehoshua and Rabbi Sheftal Neuberger of

Ner Israel Rabbinical College. The event's honorees were Rodney Frelinghuysen, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense; Steny Hoyer, House Democratic whip; Derek Kilmer, member of the House Appropriations Committee; Doug Lamborn, vice chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces; Nita Lowey, ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee; Luke Messer, Republican Policy Committee chairman; Peter Roskam, co-chair of the House Republican Israel Caucus; Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa; Hal Rogers, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee; Mike Rogers, chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces; Ed Royce, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee; Debbie Wasserman Schultz, chair of the Democratic National Committee; and Mike Turner, chairman of the House Armed Services Subcom-

mittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces.

Event co-chairmen Eli Verschleiser, Miles Berger, Joseph B. Stamm, Sol Goldner, Leon Goldenberg and Stanley Treitel expressed their deep gratitude for Congress's commitment to protecting civilian populations.

Noting that several Arab countries are reportedly interested in buying Iron Dome to defend against the growing threat of Iranian missiles, Verschleiser said, "We see how Israel is once again 'the canary in a coal mine,' and with the help from the U.S., how Iron Dome has saved countless lives and prevented escalation on numerous occasions."

For that reason, he continued, "We owe a special appreciation to the members of Congress whose leadership has enabled this crucial funding. Now more than ever we must continue to honor the U.S.-Israel Security Alliance and those who work tirelessly to maintain it."



L-R: Ezra Friedlander, Eli Verschleiser, Miles Berger, Sol Goldner, Stanley Treitel, Rep. Lee Zeldin, House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer, Joseph B. Stamm, Leon Goldenberg, Appropriation Chair Hal Rogers, Rep. Mike Rogers, Rep. Derek Kilmer, Chief Rabbi Itzhak Yehoshua, Tamara Holder, Fox News commentator.

(Photos: Shmuel and Dov Lenchevsky)



L-R, seated: Rep. Lee Zeldin, Deena Hershel, Miles Berger, Sol Goldner, Eli Verschleiser, Foreign Affairs Chair Ed Royce, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (speaking), Chief Rabbi Itzhak Yehoshua. L-R, standing: Stanley Treitel, Keili Cohen, Ezra Friedlander, Dr. Laurie Baumel.

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Silverman's call a day earlier for post-Iran deal unity, Netanyahu said, "No matter what disagreements there have been within the Jewish community, maintaining the unity of our people is of paramount importance...we must work together to unite the Jewish people and secure the Jewish state."

Regarding U.S. military aid to Israel, amid reports that Israel is seeking an increase in annual aid from \$3 billion to \$5 billion, the prime minister said he had a "wonderful discussion with President Obama [at the White House] on how to secure that assistance for the coming decade."

"Thank you, America," he said.

Commenting on Israel's values, the prime minister said, "I know that all of you are proud of Israel's outstanding technological achievements, but I think we should no less be proud of Israel's values." Netanyahu cited such specifics as passionate speeches in the Knesset, spirited debate in the Israeli media, the presence of an Arab justice on the Israeli Supreme Court, and the fact that Israel has the only Christian population in the Middle East that is growing and thriving.

"This is democracy. This is intense, robust democracy," Netanyahu said, adding, "What is truly remarkable is that Israel upholds these values in the darkest and most oppressive region on Earth."

Speaking on the convergence of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, Netanyahu said the lies once leveled at the Jewish people – such as that Jews are "poisoners of wells, spreaders of plagues, killers of children" – are "now leveled at the Jewish state."

"Today we have a voice, and we must ensure that our voice is heard loud and clear. We must speak out against the slander of the Jewish people and the Jewish state....The only way we fight lies is telling the truth," he said.

On Monday at the White House, Netanyahu and Obama met for the first time in more than a year in a bid to put aside past differences over Iran's nuclear program and advance peace in the region.

"This is going to be an opportunity for the prime minister and myself to engage in a wide-ranging discussion on some of the most pressing security issues that both our countries face," Obama said before the meeting. "It's no secret that the security environment in the Middle East has deteriorated in many areas, and as I've said repeatedly, the security of Israel is one of my top foreign policy priorities. And that's expressed itself not only in words but in deeds."

According to the White House, the two leaders tackled regional security issues, including the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, how to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, and countering Tehran's destabilizing activities.

In his public comments, Obama referenced the differences with Netanyahu over the Iran nuclear deal but said both leaders are committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Netanyahu thanked Obama for his commitment to Israel's security.

Obama also condemned the recent wave of terrorism in Israel, saying it is his "strong belief that Israel has not just the right but the obligation to protect itself."

Netanyahu assured Obama that he remains committed to see "two states for two peoples, a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes a Jewish state."

A day before the White House meeting, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro told JNS.org in an interview on the JFNA General Assembly's "Press Stage" that the meeting marked the latest chapter "in a relationship that obviously goes through certain phases and certain cycles, the fundamentals of which, the bedrock and the basis of which, really has never changed, and that's a positive thing."

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