

Obama's plan to fund £140m Israeli rocket defence

President Barack Obama will ask Congress to provide \$205 million (£140 million) to Israel to spur production and deployment of a new short-range rocket defence system.

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The "Iron Dome" defence system uses small radar-guided missiles to blow up rockets and mortar bombs in mid-air.

Its development was spurred by the 2006 conflict in Lebanon with Hizbollah and the Gaza Strip war against Hamas a year ago.

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In both cases, Israeli towns within reach of short-range rockets were considered vulnerable.

"The president recognises the threat missiles and rockets fired by Hamas and Hizbollah pose to Israelis, and has therefore decided to seek funding from Congress to support the production of Israel's short range rocket defence system called Iron Dome," said Tommy Vietor, White House spokesman.

Bryan Whitman, Pentagon spokesman, said it was the first direct US investment in the Iron Dome system.

"This funding will expand what they can produce and deploy, and how quickly they're able to do it," he said.

The money comes on top of annual US assistance to Israel.

State Department records show that American military aid to Israel in 2009 totalled \$2.55 billion (£1.7 billion).

This will increase to \$3 billion in 2012, and will total \$3.15 billion a year from 2013 to 2018.