

I R O N D O M E

A Chanukah Story



by Rabbi Debra Nesselson

Open

Perhaps,
the
real miracle
of Chanukah is...



Rabbi Debra Nesselson

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I R O N D O M E

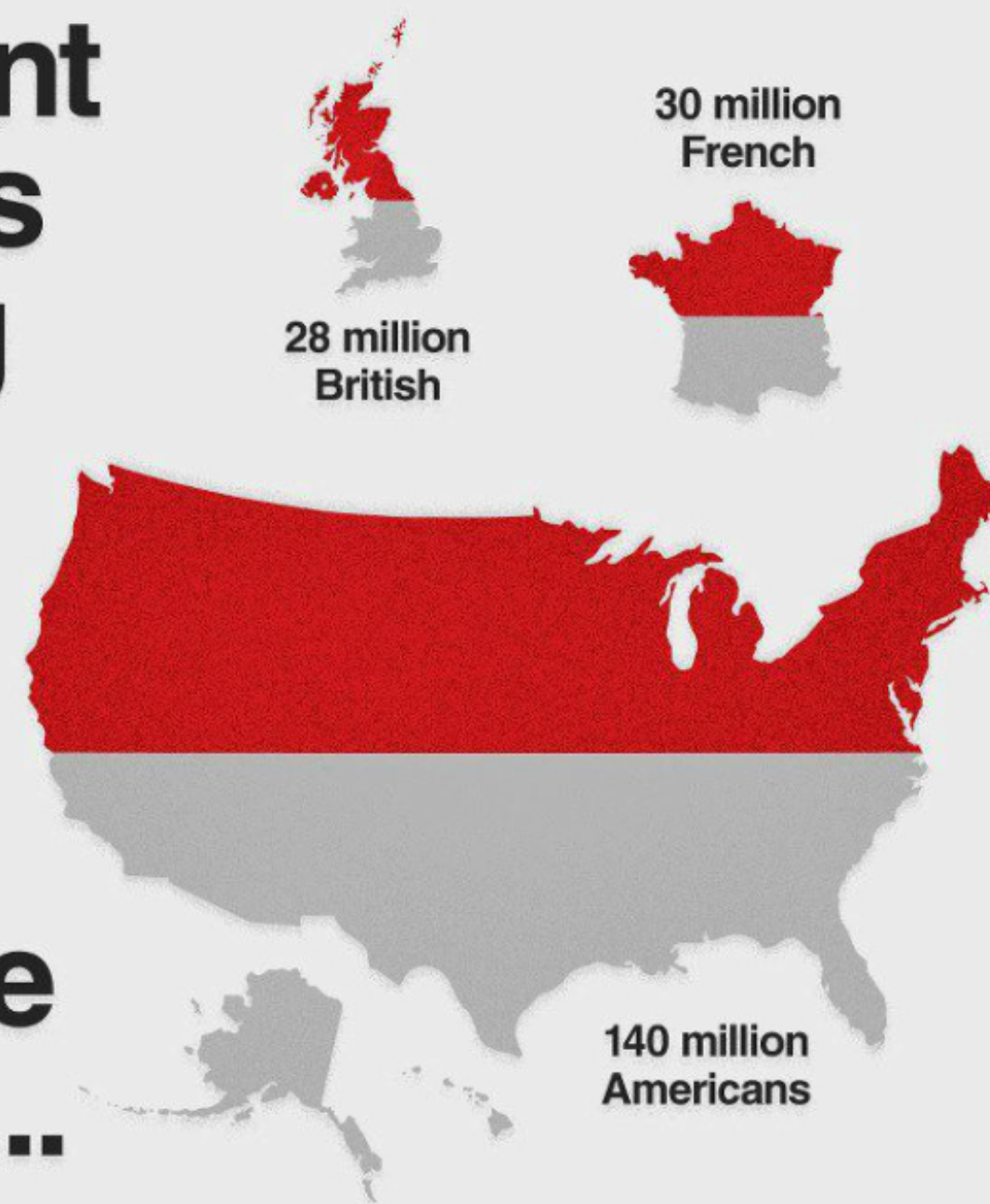
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For eight nights, we light the Chanukah candles, not any other number but eight, and this is odd because the oil was supposed to last for JUST one day, not eight, meaning that the actual miracle is found only in the additional seven days of lighting. And, yet, we light eight beckoning us to ask why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days and not seven? Why that first day? What's so special about being the first? Perhaps, the real miracle of Chanukah is to be found in the realization that miracles only happen when we decide to take the first step, to not remain silent. Chanukah is the story of the triumph of light over darkness, of the few against the many.

Finding herself in a lethal sea of nations which continuously seek Israel's destruction, Israel's latest military go-around with Hamas-controlled Gaza lasted 8 days and caused far fewer casualties on both sides than previous conflicts, however tragic those deaths may be. The last major military engagement with Hamas occurred in December, 2008, an encounter which lasted three weeks including both ground and air assaults in response to an unrelenting barrage of rocket fire by Hamas into Israel.

**this time the stakes
were even higher**

**45 percent
of Israelis
are living
within
range of
Hamas'
rockets.
That's the
same as...**



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

 **ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES**

This time, the stakes were even higher as incessant missiles fired by militant groups in Hamas-controlled Gaza reached the heart of Israel's population centers around Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Is it a miracle that the hostilities lasted for only eight days?



Is it a miracle that Egypt's new Muslim Brotherhood leader stepped up and played a pivotal role in forging a cease-fire, however flawed it may be?

Or is the miracle to be found in Israel's Iron Dome which knocked out 421 rockets, (an 84% success rate), bound for Israel's cities and thereby hastened the end of the hostilities?

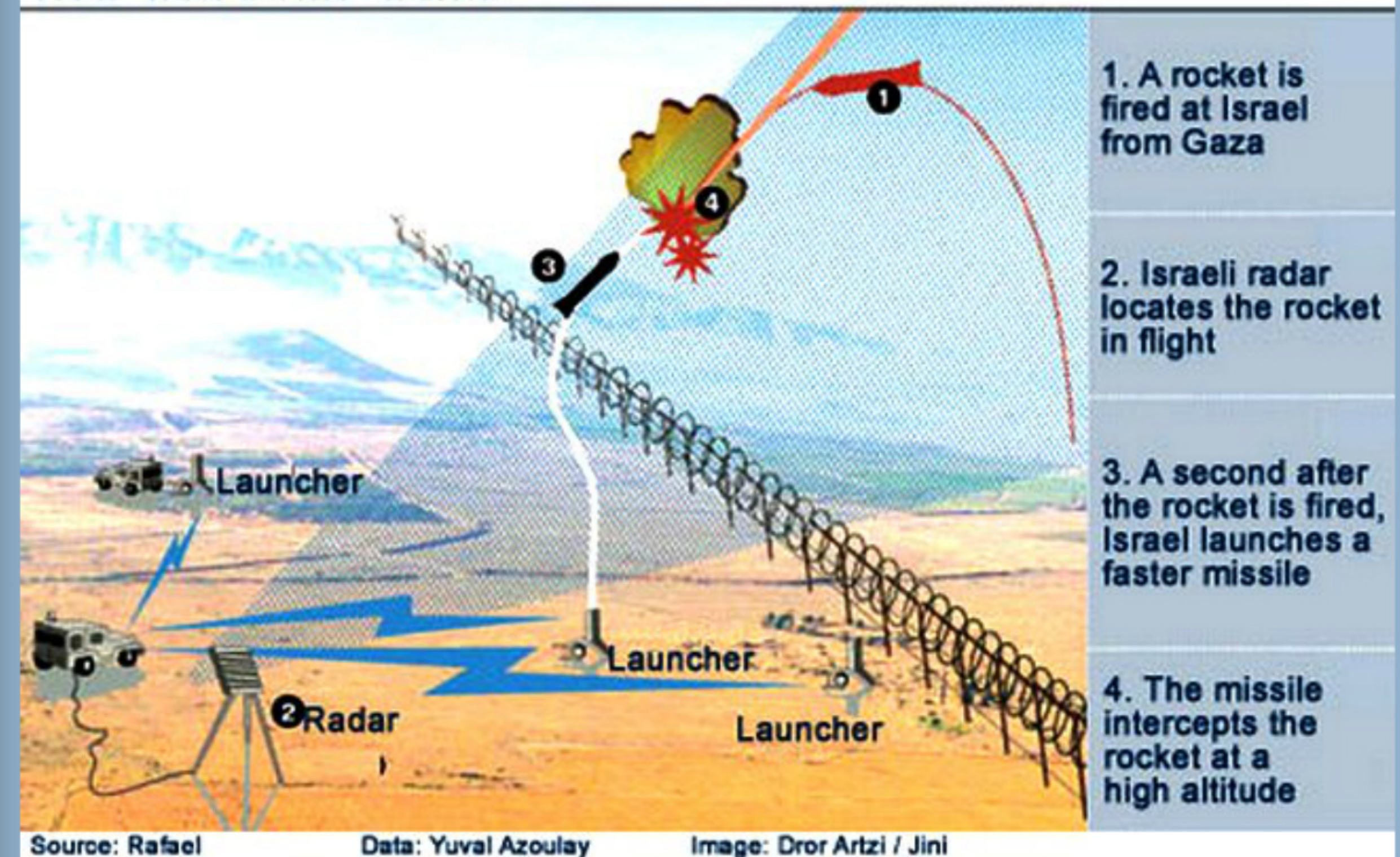


the potential to change the whole calculus

Iron Dome seems to be a godsend. After all, the system limited Israeli casualties to six during the seven days of actual bombardment. Moreover, due to the success of Iron Dome, there was less pressure on Israel to engage in a ground incursion, enabling many more lives to be saved. And, significantly, as a result of Iron Dome's efficacy, Israel's foes may find that their strategy of raining down rockets and missiles on Israel daily may soon be obsolete.

In other words, Iron Dome, along with some even newer technologies like David's Sling and Arrow, have the potential to change the whole calculus in the Middle East not just for Hamas and Hezbollah but for Iran as well. This would be an enormous game changer! Is there a miracle to be found in any of this?

How 'Iron Dome' works



the real miracle
is to be found **in the leadership**

We may be tempted to say Iron Dome is the miracle. Eight days of war ended because of the genius of technology. But, the real miracle is to be found in the leadership of two Israeli leaders who against all odds were responsible for the creation, acceptance and funding of a rocket defense system when many were skeptically dismissive including both the Israeli and US military who advocated other technologies.

The success of the Iron Dome project was due to the foresight, vision and conviction of Brig. General Daniel Gold, an Israeli mathematician-general, who, in 2004, was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the development of new weapons systems along with labor organizer-turned defense minister, Amir Peretz, an individual from Sderot with little military experience.

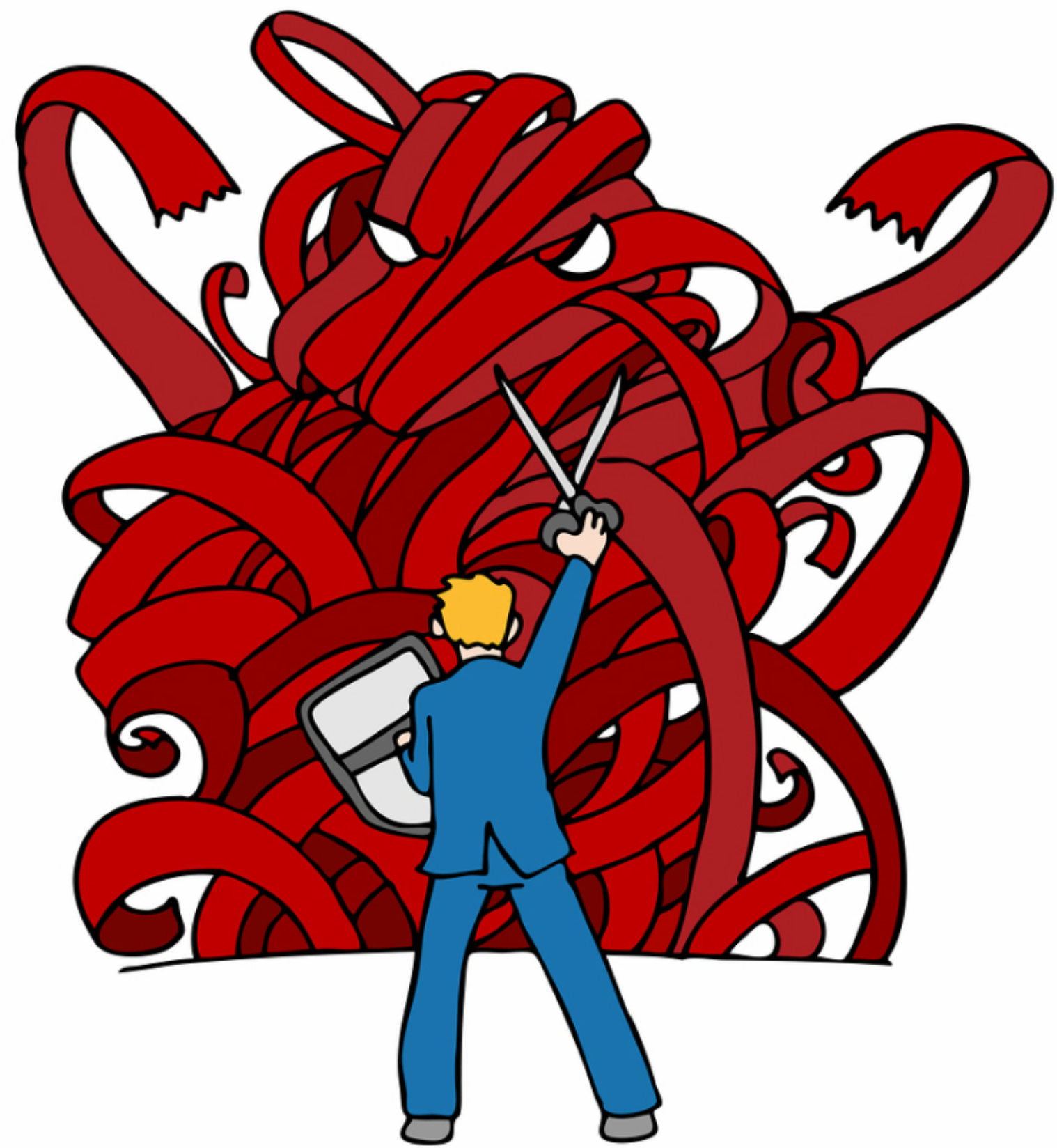


Former Brig General Daniel Gold



Former Defense Minister Amir Peretz

pushing it through
gridlock
of Israel's enormous
bureaucracy



The challenges were daunting from the creation and manufacture of such a sophisticated system to pushing it through the gridlock of Israel's enormous bureaucracy. Success was never a given. At every juncture, General Gold would have been justified in walking away from the project. Instead, General Gold, according to **Wall Street Journal** reporters, Charles Levinson and Adam Entous, (*Israel's Iron Dome Defense Battled to Get Off Ground, November 26, 2012*) broke many rules in pushing the project through Israel's vast bureaucratic network.

to begin **full scale development**

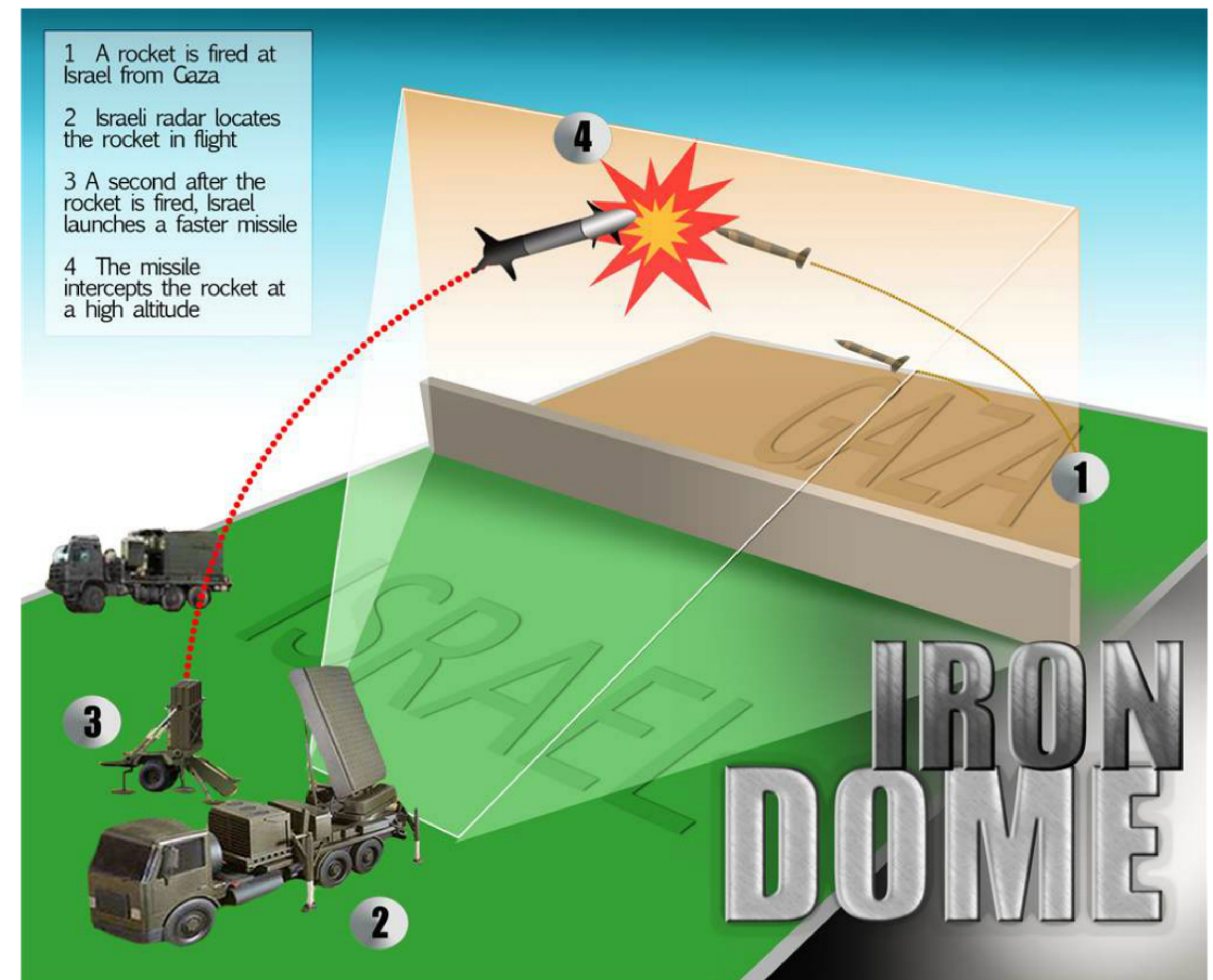
Critical support from the highest levels was also missing without which funding the project would have been impossible. Even just subsequent to the 2006 war with Lebanon, during which over 33 days of war, Hezbollah showered Israel with 4200 rockets killing 44 Israelis, then Prime Minister Olmert along with military experts refused to direct government funds for Iron Dome.

Nevertheless, General Gold was amazingly undeterred as he directed the manufacturer, Rafael Defense Systems, Ltd., to begin full-scale development of Iron Dome, though he had absolutely no authority to do so.



with little or no
time to spare

Then, months later and with little time to spare, General Gold found an ally in Defense Minister Peretz, whose reputation had been badly sullied by his widely perceived bungling of the Lebanon War leading to his forced resignation. But, before he resigned, he threw his full support behind Iron Dome, and committed the necessary funding to keep Iron Dome alive, without the required approval of government auditors.



Graphic Courtesy of TheIsraelProject.org



And then again, another critical juncture—hundreds of millions of dollars were needed from the US in order to make Iron Dome viable, but the US team of military engineers sent to Israel came home skeptical and resistant.



Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak in July 2007 Photo by Tess Scheffan

Along almost every step of the way, General Gold encountered critical opposition but by the end of 2007 both Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak reversed the government's earlier refusal and decided to back the project infusing it with \$200 million to keep it alive.

needed to **shore up support**



Often politics and policy initiatives converge and in this case, just at the right time. President Obama, many would say, had misstepped politically and needed to shore up support given his controversial stance on calling for a freeze on Jewish settlement growth. As a result, US military experts were sent back to Israel to re-evaluate Iron Dome and this time, though Iron Dome competed with the US Phalanx system, they deemed Iron Dome a success, making further essential funding for the project possible.

because it's the **right thing** to do

This is a Chanukah tale, a real tale of an eight year struggle to see a dubious project through to its successful conclusion. Chanukah is a story of the few against the many and sometimes the many are also the good guys.

Yet, it is the rare individual(s) who has the ability to engage in struggle against almost every odd, with fortitude, vision and conviction, seeing every challenge as just another obstacle to negotiate around.



Sometimes, it's important to question existing systems; it is a form of sacred discontentment that has served as the calling card for the Jewish people over the millennia and constituted the basis for the Maccabean success which we celebrate during the eight nights of Chanukah.



For each night of Chanukah, we first light the Shamash candle which then lights each of the others. The Shamash candle stands taller; it can see what others who are shorter cannot; its vision and faith in its vision is broader and deeper. The Shamash candle reminds each of us to create moments during which we stand taller by bringing light and enlightenment into the world because it's the right thing to do.

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Much of this message is based upon reporting by Charles Levinson and Adam Entous in the Wall Street Journal, Israel's Iron Dome Defense Battled to Get Off Ground, November 26, 2012.

Happy Chanukah!

May the warm glow of our Chanukah season remind us who we are as a people conveying God's message to continue undeterred as a light unto the nations.

*Keyn Yehi Ratzon.
So may it be God's will.
Amen.*

Warmly,
Rabbi Debra Nesselson

