

The Golden Dome (Iron Dome) for America: Overview and Issues for Congressional Consideration

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On January 27, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order (EO) 14186, titled [The Iron Dome for America](#). The EO announced a shift in U.S. missile defense policy, expanding the scope of the homeland missile defense mission and directing the Department of Defense (DOD) to develop “a next generation missile shield.” The EO directed the Secretary of Defense to submit several deliverables to begin implementing this new policy. In February 2025, the executive branch [redubbed](#) the project “Golden Dome for America.”

Some Members of Congress have asserted Golden Dome’s potential [benefit to homeland defense](#) and have introduced [legislation](#) to support it. Other Members have questioned its possible effects on [strategic stability](#)—that is, the balance of capabilities and policies among potential adversaries that diminishes incentives for engaging in a nuclear arms race or nuclear use. Projected costs, which vary widely, may feature prominently in debates over the FY2026 defense budget.

The security benefits, strategic impact, and cost of Golden Dome depend in part on characteristics of the proposed missile shield that have not been publicly detailed. Parts of the EO are stated generally and could be viewed as subject to interpretation. When Members of Congress have sought additional detail in public hearings, DOD officials testifying have largely refrained from commenting. DOD may provide more detail in the deliverables required by the EO, but it is unclear whether DOD will release these deliverables publicly or share them with Congress. Several of these deliverables were due to the President 60 days after the EO was issued. On March 27, it was [reported](#) that the President would receive three options for the architecture the following week, and on April 9, a DOD official [testified](#) that the Secretary was discussing options with the President.

Overview of the Executive Order

The EO generally expanded the scope of the U.S. homeland missile defense mission, in terms of the actors and the threats that the United States intends to defend against. The order declared that it is U.S. policy to “deter—and defend its citizens and critical infrastructure against—any foreign aerial attack on the Homeland.” It specified that this policy includes defending “against ballistic, hypersonic, advanced

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cruise missiles, and other next-generation aerial attacks from peer, near-peer, and rogue adversaries.” Previously, under the [Biden Administration](#), [first Trump Administration](#), and [Obama Administrations](#), homeland missile defense policy focused on the threat from intercontinental ballistic missiles and emphasized developing capabilities to *defend* against strikes from *rogue* states, such as North Korea and Iran, while relying on U.S. nuclear capabilities to *deter* attacks from *peer and near-peer* states, such as Russia and China.

The EO also directed the Secretary of Defense to take several actions. Within 60 days, the Secretary was to submit to the President

- a “reference architecture,” “capabilities-based requirements,” and implementation plan for the “next-generation missile shield”;
- “a plan to fund this directive,” submitted with the Office of Management and Budget;
- “an updated assessment of the strategic missile threat to the homeland”; and
- “a prioritized set of locations to progressively defend against a countervalue attack.” (The term *countervalue* often refers to nonmilitary targets for nuclear weapons, such as cities and civilian population centers.)

Although the EO focused on the U.S. homeland, it also directed the Secretary of Defense to review theater missile defense capabilities. (U.S. policymakers often use the descriptor *theater*—or *regional*—to differentiate between defenses tailored for threats abroad versus the U.S. homeland.) The theater missile defense review is to identify opportunities for increased international cooperation on missile defense and improved defense of U.S. forward-deployed troops and allied territories, troops, and populations.

Potential Issues for Congress

As Congress assesses the Trump Administration’s homeland missile defense plans and their potential budgetary and strategic implications, it may consider the following issues:

- **How is *homeland* to be defined?** The EO states that the United States will defend against “any foreign aerial attack on the homeland”; it also requires the Secretary of Defense to submit “a prioritized set of locations to progressively defend.” Congress may ask whether the EO proposes defending the entire homeland or a limited set of targets. If the former, how will DOD define the homeland? Neither the EO nor the [2019 Missile Defense Review](#) (MDR), published under the first Trump Administration, includes a definition. The most recent MDR, published under the Biden Administration in 2022, [defined](#) homeland missile defense as “the defense of the 50 states, all U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia.”

If the EO envisions protecting a limited set of locations, Congress may consider what criteria DOD uses to select those locations. Additionally, some Members may be reluctant to fund a shield that does not expressly aim to protect their constituents.

Although both options would require overcoming technological challenges and investing significant resources, defending the entire homeland as defined in the 2022 MDR would likely pose greater technological challenges and require more funding. Some observers have questioned the [feasibility](#) or [affordability](#) of defending the entire homeland.

- **What is an acceptable level of risk?** Missile defense comes with a degree of [risk](#), meaning some degree of probability that defenses will not succeed in stopping every incoming enemy weapon. While observers might disagree on the extent to which that risk can be reduced through improved technology and increased quantities of defensive systems, most acknowledge that risk cannot be eliminated in its entirety. Congress may

- consider how much risk it considers acceptable in homeland missile defense. The answer to that question could have significant budgetary implications because it would affect the mix and quantity of systems.
- **What is the desired timeline?** Some of the more sophisticated capabilities discussed in the EO may have become more technologically feasible due to recent technological advances in areas such as [remote sensing, image processing, uncrewed aerial systems, miniaturization of components, and decreased space launch costs](#). Even so, the Golden Dome architecture could take [years](#) to develop and build at the scale that may be suggested. During that time, the Golden Dome initiative would compete for funding against other DOD funding priorities.

Congress also may consider second-order issues, including potential responses from competitors, allies, and partners, and requirements for basing, launch platforms, industrial capacity, and manpower. The outcomes for these issues likely depend in part on answers to the aforementioned potential questions.

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