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Lessons from Lebanon: A Defense Budget Wish List

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Israel's recent experience on the battlefield demonstrates that certain conventional military capabilities are needed to combat groups like Hezbollah. These include directed-energy defenses, submarines, and advanced soldier systems. Congress should fully fund the programs supplying these capabilities to the U.S. military. These capabilities will prove crucial to American forces, as well as our friends and allies, in future combat.

Countering the Rocket Threat

As Israel battled Hezbollah, rockets rained down on northern Israel. The United States and Israel had developed a weapon that could have defeated Hezbollah's Katyusha rockets. The Tactical High Energy Laser (THEL) uses directed energy to engage and destroy incoming rockets, incoming artillery and mortar rounds, and shoulder-fired missiles that can knock down military and civilian planes. It was never fielded. But the rocket threat remains, as does the need for a defense.

Just one or two THEL systems could protect the entire Baghdad Green Zone, and just five systems could protect almost all of northern Israel. The systems could be produced and fielded in 18 months. The first unit would cost about \$150 million, but additional ones would be much less expensive. The current U.S. defense budget does not fund THEL development or production.

Knowing More Than the Enemy

Israel lacked good intelligence on Hezbollah's military capabilities. The capacity to covertly gain

information on the enemy from a distance, deploy special operations forces to conduct reconnaissance on the ground, and strike at critical targets is invaluable. The U.S. nuclear submarine force provides these capabilities and more. Few weapons in America's arsenal are more versatile.

Yet the U.S. submarine fleet is shrinking. The Pentagon is not even spending enough to build two submarines a year and keep submarine manufacturers productively employed.

Winning on the Ground

The Israelis relearned the lesson that airpower alone cannot control the battlefield. Empowering soldiers on the ground is essential. The U.S. Army is developing technologies to strengthen the capabilities of ground troops as part of its Land Warrior System and Future Combat System. These programs' advances include reducing the weight of equipment, improving soldier protection, furthering soldiers' abilities with robotics and exoskeletons, and delivering critical information directly to the foxhole. Accelerating the development and fielding of the Army's soldier systems should be a priority. In the current defense budget, it is not.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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Congress Can Help

Submarines, directed-energy defenses, and soldier systems need improved funding immediately. These are all modest investments that Congress could easily fund by cutting earmarks and non-defense related spending from the Pentagon's budget. Congress should learn from Israel's experience fighting Hezbollah and take steps to ensure that U.S. military capabilities are up to task.

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