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Congress Should Act on Directed-Energy Defenses That Could Protect Israel from Hezbollah's Short-Range Rockets

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The border between Lebanon and Israel is quiet now because Hezbollah is attempting to replenish its supply of short-range rockets used up or destroyed in its August war with Israel. Nothing practical is being done to defend against a renewed Hezbollah rocket campaign, and so a resumption of conflict and further suffering is more, not less, likely. There is a practical military solution: short-range directed-energy defenses. These defenses could be deployed in time to make a difference, but Congress and the Pentagon are missing an opportunity to make this happen.

The Problem

Hezbollah is a well-armed militia, operating independently of the democratically elected Lebanese government. Iran funds and supplies Hezbollah, and Hezbollah acts in concert with Iran. Iran supplied Hezbollah with Katyusha rockets that were fired at Israel, a provocative act that escalated into a full-scale war. Hezbollah must now replenish its arsenal so it can threaten war with Israel whenever it wants. These rockets are smuggled across the Syrian border with the cooperation of the Syrian government. Syrian and Lebanese governments will have to work earnestly with international forces to cut the supply line. That work is not happening now. Syria does not consider rearming Hezbollah "smuggling."

If Israel had an effective way to shoot down the incoming rockets, the current state of affairs would be far less threatening. Israel and the United States

have jointly developed a short-range directed-energy system that could shoot down these weapons, but they chose not to deploy it. The Pentagon wanted to put its money into more advanced directed-energy research that would lead to more mobile systems that could be quickly shifted around the battlefield. At best, the prototype of these advanced defenses won't be available until 2013. By that time, Hezbollah could instigate a war, rearm, and instigate another war a half-dozen times.

The Answer

If they acted now, the United States and Israel could put a system on the ground using available, proven directed-energy technologies in less than two years. These systems could defend all of Israel's borders, and the U.S. could use these systems domestically to defend against short-range missile attacks on commercial aircraft or protect critical infrastructure like nuclear power plants.

Opportunity Missed

Congress has an opportunity to jump-start the process by including the necessary funding in the

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annual defense appropriations bill, but so far, it has let the opportunity pass. The Pentagon doesn't want the proven directed-energy defenses—an attitude that clearly proves the old adage that the perfect is the enemy of the good. Waiting for futuristic technology won't help deter war in the Middle East, but deploying a directed-energy defense now will take the threat of rocket wars off the table.

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