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Defense costs money

By Gabriel Siboni

In light of the budget discussions being held as we speak, it would appear that the Second Lebanon War had taken place 30 years ago, rather than just three. It would behoove us to recall the first few months following that war, during which the public began gaining a greater awareness of the Israel Defense Forces' shortcomings and lack of readiness in many fields, including training, ammunition supply and emergency weapon caches. This situation did not stem solely from administrative failures, but also from the decreasing amount of resources at the army's disposal.

The threats facing Israel have intensified significantly in recent years. The IDF must address these threats, even though it has not been as small as it is today since the Yom Kippur War. Aside from building its force and maintaining its readiness against conventional threats, such as an invading army, the IDF must also respond to the threat of large-scale rocket fire. This comes on top of having to address a nuclear Iran.

In one fell swoop, the Second Lebanon War crushed the fundamental assumption that served as the basis for the extensive budget cuts of 2003. That year, the air force's units were pared down, armored divisions and brigades were shuttered and thousands of career officers were dismissed. The underlying assumption was that reducing the size of the military was a calculated risk and that if given proper notice, the IDF could respond if the security situation were to worsen. The outbreak of the Second Lebanon War debunked this assumption. Aside from the operational surprise, Israel was also astonished to discover that the volume of strategic threats had increased dramatically. One of the key lessons of this war is that the security situation could worsen at any moment, without warning.

Following that war - and recognizing the threats and their complexity while taking into account the budgetary limitations of the state - the Brodet Commission formulated an outline for a 10-year defense budget. This outline, which was agreed upon despite internal disputes, should have allowed the IDF to formulate a budget plan that would serve as the basis for its multiyear efforts to build its force. The treasury's plan to cut the budget endangers the Brodet plan. When one also considers that the IDF is being asked to bear the cost of Operation Cast Lead, it may become impossible to close the gaps and reach the necessary operational readiness.

The IDF's process of force-building requires long-term planning based on the most stable allocation of resources possible. The annual tugs of war between the treasury and the IDF do not help. It is true that the budget planning is accompanied by a ruckus due to the lack

of political stability, but goodwill from the professionals in charge could have made this a negligible factor.

Indeed, the global financial crisis, which has not skipped over Israel, requires a complex set of responses. But one must remember that security is the most fundamental component that a state provides its citizens. The current condition of the IDF will make it harder for it to provide a sufficient response.

The writer is an IDF colonel (res.) and director of the Program on IDF Force Structure at the Institute for National Security Studies.

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