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## Department of Defense to Equip Lebanon's Special Forces with Small Arms, Vehicles

By  
Christopher J. Castelli

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Amid U.S. concerns that Iran and Syria are destabilizing Lebanon by supporting Hezbollah, the Pentagon is poised to bolster Beirut's military with new shipments of weapons, trucks, and other gear.

The Pentagon will spend \$7.2 million to equip Lebanon's Special Forces with small arms, vehicles, night-vision sights for guns, Global Positioning System devices, and clothing, *Inside the Pentagon* [ITP] has learned.

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman informed Congress of the details last month, noting the gear will enable Lebanon's elite troops to conduct counterterrorism missions in both daylight and limited-visibility conditions.

The U.S. aid to Lebanon will be provided through DoD's global-train-and-equip authority, also known as the Section 1206 program. The authority lets DoD boost the capacity of foreign militaries, a task traditionally handled by the State Department. This deal marks DoD's first use of the authority this year.

The assistance package for Lebanon was coordinated with the State Department and approved by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Pentagon spokeswoman Lt. Col. Almarah Belk said Congress raised no objections, and DoD is ready to proceed with the assistance.

The \$7.2 million will come from dedicated funding in the FY2008 defense supplemental appropriations package signed into law last December.

Most of the money, about \$5 million, will be used to buy roughly 150 M24 sniper rifles; 150 M500 shotguns; and an unspecified quantity of M4 carbine spare parts, components, and accessories, according to a copy of Edelman's missive reviewed by *ITP*.

About \$906,000 will cover the purchase of roughly nine sport utility vehicles, two 5-ton trucks, and five tactical ambulances. Roughly \$800,000 will be spent on approximately 150 night-vision weapon sights and 200 hand-held GPS receivers with accessories. And \$562,000 will be used to buy clothing, textiles, and individual equipment for Lebanon's elite troops.

DoD expects to have all items on contract or ordered from stock by Sept. 30. The delivery of the gear to Lebanon, which could take 18 months, is not expected to start before May 1.

Last year, through the same authority, DoD provided \$30 million in assistance to Lebanon's armed forces, in addition to other U.S. aid for the country's economy, reconstruction, and military.

During a visit to Lebanon last October, Edelman told Lebanese television that DoD would like to create a strategic partnership with Lebanon's army, bolstering the country's forces so Hezbollah has no excuse to bear arms, the Associated Press [AP] reported. Edelman also suggested there should be a peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel, according to the AP.

Vice President Dick Cheney has accused Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran of meddling in Lebanon. He has also downplayed the 2006 Israeli bombardments and ground invasion into Lebanon which, according

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to the United Nations [U.N.], killed an estimated 1,200 Lebanese, injured over 4,000, killed four U.N. military observers, and displaced nearly one million people. The Israeli death toll exceeded 140, including 43 civilians; over 100 Israelis were hurt, many by Hezbollah rockets, according to the U.N.

“Hezbollah went through the dust up with the Israelis in ’06; they’ve been completely re-supplied by the Iranians, oftentimes providing materials through the Syrians and then flying materials into Damascus and then taking them by road into Lebanon,” Cheney asserted in a March 24 interview with ABC News.

Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, told Congress in February that international efforts to ensure free, fair, and constitutional Presidential elections in Lebanon “have been impeded by destabilizing actions of Syria, Iran, and their Lebanese proxies.” The rearming of militias in Lebanon and increasing political and sectarian tensions could lead to civil war, he warned in prepared testimony.

Presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) said in a March 19 speech that “Iran is handing out money left and right in southern Lebanon.” Unlike the Bush administration and Republican Presidential contender Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), however, Obama, Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY), and other Democrats advocate more diplomatic engagement with Iran.

Appearing April 6 on ABC’s “This Week,” Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA) said that during the Vietnam War the enemy shot at him with guns made in either China or Eastern Europe.

“That doesn’t mean that we should take military action against China based purely on that fact,” Webb said. “We developed a diplomatic relationship with China that over the years paid out. And the greatest mistake over the past five years of this occupation is that our national leadership has not found a way to aggressively engage Iran without taking other options off the table.”