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# The Legitimacy Crisis of the Conscription Model

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The heated public debate on the mandatory draft in Israel invites a broad discussion of the legitimacy crisis of the model, particularly as the majority of the Jewish public support abolishing compulsory service. The conscription model is beset and weakened by contradictions that have resulted from in-depth social processes, including a growing civil-liberal and neoliberal socioeconomic discourse and a decline of the republican ethos. Moreover, the military itself exacerbates these and other contradictions, mainly the incongruence between the ethos of egalitarian enlistment and the rise in the non-enlistment rate. The IDF is not aware of the intensity of the crisis and, rather, defends the model in the name of its social and economic contribution. However, this line of defense is flawed, as not only is this not normative justification for conscription, but it is not grounded in research findings and it ignores the negative impact of conscription and the military's abilities to contribute to society, even if conscription is abolished. Accordingly, the article proposes a transition to an official, overt selective conscription model.

*Keywords:* IDF, recruitment model, civil-military, egalitarian ethos, selective recruitment, liberalism, legitimacy crisis, republicanism

Israel is among very few democracies where military conscription has survived. Conscription applies to both males (serving 32 months) and females (serving 24 months), with the exception of Arab citizens, haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews (who are partially exempted), and religious women. The army's core is a small regular army, comprising primarily conscripts, with the officer corps and part of the professional echelon staffed by career personnel. A large reserve army was also established, composed of conscripts obligated to serve up to 54 days in a period of three consecutive years, mainly in order to maintain their fitness as soldiers in case of war.

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However, during the 2000s, a heated debate on the future of conscription has resounded and peaked with the publication of a survey by the Israeli Democracy Institute in November 2021, according to which the majority of the Jewish public support abolishing conscription (Hermann et al., 2021). This debate invites the discussion that follows of various aspects of the conscription crisis. The first section presents the conscription crisis and argues that it should be seen as a legitimacy crisis that stems from the model's collapse under the weight of its inherent contradictions. The second section addresses the claims made by the IDF, through the Chief of Staff, regarding the army's contribution to society and the economy as a justification for continued conscription, and presents counter-arguments. The third section presents an alternative proposal for an official selective conscription model.

## The Legitimacy Crisis of Conscription

The problem of conscription can be presented in several ways, for example, as general public criticism of controversial aspects of the model, which is intertwined with broad criticism of the army's performance to the point of the erosion of public confidence in it. This is the direction taken by Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi in his lecture at the annual conference in memory of Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak at Reichman University in June 2021, in which he highlighted the army's social and economic contribution as a basis for the trust between the military and the public (Kochavi, 2021). Alternatively, it is possible to examine the issue as a reflection of the eroding motivation for enlistment (MK Mossi Raz, in Bender, 2018). There are those who see it as a problem of adapting the model to changing needs, chiefly surplus human resources in the army (Elran et al., 2021; Shelah, 2003). And of course, the recruitment crisis is perceived as stemming from a distortion of the principle of sharing the burden equally in light of declining recruitment rates, and in particular, the continuing failure to regulate the recruitment of ultra-Orthodox men (Piron & Harush Gity, 2020; Kabilo, 2021). Each of the diagnoses of the problem invites to its own solution, such that if the central problem of the model is a poor public image, as implied by the Chief of Staff's statement above, it is important to convince the public of its advantages, meaning its contribution to society and not only its military necessity.

Taking a different approach, this paper contends that the recruitment model weathers an ongoing legitimacy crisis. For simplicity's sake, a legitimization crisis results from contradictions developed between different logics inherent in the action of state institutions. This creates a crisis of confidence, to the extent that the institutions lack the administrative capabilities to achieve their end goals effectively (Habermas, 1975). Assuming that an institution commanding legitimacy means that "there is

a generalized perception that its normative precepts are rightful, that they warrant respect and compliance for more than self-interested reasons, for reasons of their normative standing” (Reus-Smit, 2007, p. 159), then the crisis creates a significant normative gap that challenges the capacity to govern and to attain compliance.

In the case of the IDF’s conscription model, the source of the contradictions lies in deep social processes evolving from the 1980s until today (Levy, 2007, pp. 29-76). These processes cultivated contradictions between the ethos of sacrifice, which is at the basis of conscription, and competing ethoses. These contradictions can be divided into two categories: contradictions stemming from external factors, and contradictions that the army exacerbates through the policy that it enacts.

### **Contradictions that are External to the Military**

The first category covers contradictions that emerge due to factors that at least in part are outside the direct control of the army.

The first contradiction is between the growing liberal ethos and the principle of mandatory enlistment. Since the 1980s, Israel’s exposure to globalization has increased, accompanied by structural changes in the economy in the spirit of neoliberalism. The 1985 Economic Stabilization Plan that successfully coped with hyperinflation was a central turning point. Globalization strengthened the ethos of the market society, that is, “a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavor. It’s a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market” (Sandel, 2012, location 142). The result was a cultural-political change that is characterized by the strengthening of a civil-liberal and neoliberal socioeconomic discourse (Shafir & Peled, 2002). The new discourse has been adopted mainly, but not only, by the secular middle class. In a market society, the military burden is seen as excessive in subjective terms and

the sacrifice is challenged by affluent groups’ desire for normalcy (Mautner, 2013), particularly in light of the systematic decline in the sense of existential threat (Israeli, 2020, pp. 56-57).

A second contradiction emerges between the market society ethos and the principle of conscription, which coerces labor without adequate monetary compensation on young people and delays their acquiring higher education and entering the labor market—a contradiction that intensifies as the market becomes more competitive. From the perspective of the state, this is also a contradiction between striving for economic efficiency and delaying young people’s entry into the labor market, a contradiction that leads to pressure to shorten military service and lower the age of exemption from military service for the haredi sector in order to encourage them to work (Levy, 2019).

A third contradiction is between the republican ethos designated to provide those serving in the army with privileged rights and the weakening of this ethos. Armies have a “reward regime” that is based on rewarding soldiers in two main ways—material rewards and symbolic rewards. Material rewards are based on the payment of money and goods with monetary value, while symbolic rewards are based on those in uniform enjoying status and prestige that derive from their military service, the nature of their role in the army and the resulting level of sacrifice, the status of their unit, and their personal rank. These are converted into valuable rewards in society. The value is not just for those recruited but also—and perhaps mainly—for the social group that they come from. The main forms of compensation are first and foremost civil, social, and political rights granted to those who have served in the army. This is the conversion of soldiering into citizenship that is embodied in the French republican model of the “citizen-soldier,” whereby military contribution is a condition for acquiring first-class citizenship. Alongside these rights, less official forms of rewards are

also granted, such as social recognition. These symbolic rewards are the main ones granted by a conscripted army. In Israel, this republican contract was one of the sources of the secular middle class's social dominance in return for its military sacrifice (Levy, 2015b).

The growth of liberal discourse has been accompanied by the weakening of *mamlachtiut* [statism], collectivism, and pioneering—the main symbols of the republican discourse in Israel (Shafir & Peled, 2002). The weakening of republicanism has several driving forces. First, the liberal discourse has strengthened individual rights to the point of natural rights, with access not necessarily dependent on the individual's contribution to the state. Meanwhile, the ability of groups, especially haredi and Arab citizens, to accumulate rights irrespective of their military contribution has increased. In parallel, the role of criteria that give preference to army veterans has been weakened to the point that under the auspices of liberal legislation and case law, the status of "army veterans" has to a large extent lost its value as an important symbol through which army veterans received preference in the labor market. Furthermore, military service began to entail a negative premium in the labor market as the market became more competitive. Claims of discrimination against reservists in workplaces are an important indication of this.

Second, the social dominance of the secular middle class became established without further need for military sacrifice as a mechanism providing legitimacy for social standing in the market society, which develops alternative criteria for the acquisition of standing. Third, the political-symbolic dominance of this class weakened following the political reversal of 1977, which gradually strengthened religious and Mizrahi Jews (Jews from Western Asia and North Africa), combined with the military failures that undermined the prestige of this class that was identified with the army. Fourth, the republican *mamlachtiut* discourse was challenged by the growth of the ethno-nationalist discourse following the

Yom Kippur War, which was promoted mainly by religious and Mizrahi groups. The ethno-nationalist ethos sees the criterion of citizenship not in contribution to the common good but in belonging to an ethno-national group (Shafir & Peled, 2002, p. 6), in this case the Jewish collective. Fifth, the systematic decline in the collective sense of existential threat that has developed since the 1980s caused a decrease in the social value of military sacrifice. And finally, the universalization of the welfare state, which weakened group criteria in access to rights, was one of the main driving forces of the erosion of the unique symbolic rewards that strong groups derived from their military service, such as child benefits (Shalev & Gal, 2018).

Declining republicanism and the growth of a liberal and ethno-nationalist discourse and the market society ethos erode the ability to convert military sacrifice into social rewards. This violates the "republican equation" that balances between sacrifice and compensation. The breakdown of the equation led to the weakening of the secular middle class's willingness to continue to maintain the army on the human and monetary level, and to greater conditions for its willingness to sacrifice. This laid the foundations for the cultural demilitarization that has developed since the 1980s, reflected in the removal of the taboo on criticism of the army; casualty sensitivity alongside a departure from the ethos of heroism and greater focus on the cost of prolonged war; erosion of the motivation to enlist in general and to enlist in combat and command positions in particular; pressures to cut the defense budget; the phenomenon of the refusal to serve; various expressions of aversion to military culture; and more (Levy, 2010, pp. 49-63).

For example, in the 2019 Democracy Index, more Jews who identified themselves as belonging to strong groups than those who identified themselves as belonging to weak groups reported that they would encourage their sons and daughters to evade service, and



in particular combat service (Hermann et al., 2019, p. 120). A study by the IDF's Behavioral Sciences Center among youth ages 17-18 during the years 2008-2010 showed that while people from affluent families cultivate a liberal-republican discourse that sees service as an opportunity for self-fulfillment, even in the canonical discourse that internalizes republican principles, a liberal discourse is represented from the very emphasis on the element of choice in enlistment and seeing it as based on internal obligation (Rivnai Bahir & Avidar, 2017). A decade later, in 2017-2018, the discourse of candidates for service reflected the expansion of individualist conceptions in society, and even if about half of women and the majority of men prefer combat positions, the motive of employment and the acquisition of prestige have a decisive weight in motivation for professional roles (Waldman et al., 2021). It is no wonder that the army has often become a bargaining arena between the command and the conscripts, their families, and their social groups (Levy et al., 2007).

The declining motivation of the secular middle class has encouraged the army to deepen the recruitment of peripheral social groups that previously were relegated to the margins of the army's core, and they increased their presence in combat units. These groups included religious people, people from the former Soviet Union, lower middle class Mizrahi, immigrants from Ethiopia, Druze, and gradually also women. For these groups the army was seen as bestowing republican rewards such as social mobility. However, the decline of republicanism also harmed them, although less so for religious young men.

### **Contradictions Exacerbated by the Military**

The second category comprises contradictions that the military intensifies due to the policy that it enacts.

The first such contradiction is between the egalitarian ethos of conscription and the

increase in rates of non-enlistment. The IDF was established on the basis of an ethos of equality among Jews, one of whose expressions is universal conscription (which extended to include Arabs as well), an almost complete lack of sectoral distinctions in recruitment laws (until the 1990s), the precedent-setting conscription of women, and the immediate responsiveness to groups that sought to integrate in the army without limitations (such as Mizrahis in the 1970s from the lower class, through the Black Panthers).

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Starting in the 2000s, however, the selective recruitment became exposed to the public. It is worth clarifying that the military recruitment model in Israel was always selective, that is, a model of conscription that officially applies to the entire population, but also exempts a relatively high percentage of citizens from conscription: Arab citizens, religious women, and over the years also Jewish young people with a low level of formal education and some ultra-Orthodox (Safrai, 2010). The exemption rates of these Jews declined following the Yom Kippur War, but in the 1980s increased again, including for educated males from the middle class, females from the middle class, and males from lower classes, in part due to the army's inclination to refute market-based criticism about surplus human resources created mainly due to natural population growth and immigration from the former Soviet Union. Therefore, recruitment exemptions and shortened service were expanded (Stern, 1998). Starting in the mid 1980s, the army also attached an economic price tag to those serving in the reserves, to the point where only a few percent

participate in significant reserve service, with a decline in reserve days from 10 million in 1990 (Even & Yashiv, 2018, p. 171) to about 2 million in 2017 (Amit, 2018), even before the legislation of the Reserve Service Law (2008), which reduced the scope of mobilization for active service.

If we summarize the growth of the selective recruitment regime quantitatively, the percentage of people serving in the army out of the entire population, including reserves, declined from about 16 percent in 1983-1984 to about 9 percent in 2004-2005 (Hadad, 2009, p. 99). However, only starting in the 2000s did the figures on the scope of selectivity begin to be exposed to the public, to a large extent due to skyrocketing rates of non-recruitment of haredi males. In other words, the selectiveness became overt though not official, but its revelation prompted various processes that erode the legitimacy of the conscription system. As of the time of this writing, only about half of the Israeli population serves.

Despite the revelation, the army has adhered to the egalitarian ethos. It increased the use of egalitarian discourse and supported this in actions such as encouraging enlistment among the haredi sector and expanding civil service, and it mobilized the education system and local authorities to increase enlistment. The IDF also tried to curb the exemption of soldiers due to mental health problems, even at the price of employing unsuitable soldiers (State Comptroller, 2010, p. 110). In short, the army adopted “legitimacy of numbers” and at its height, in the second decade of the 21st century, this led to a distortion of haredi enlistment figures in order to paint an image of meeting recruitment targets (Investigatory Team, 2020, p. 32). But because the egalitarian ethos is not implementable, the use of this discourse and its intensification and the display of numbers create a gap that further erodes the fairness of conscription, and thus undermines its legitimacy.

This approach also challenges legitimacy from another direction. Since the 1990s,

recruitment efforts have been accompanied by “motivation ceremonies.” These are crisis events that warn of the erosion of motivation for enlistment, along with branding individuals as “rebels” such as young people from Tel Aviv or the kibbutz movement and presenting a threat to society’s collective values (Pomerantz & Sher, 2009). During 2007-2009, after it was revealed that a quarter of males do not enlist, a “bottom-up” campaign was launched against draft dodging, with the covert encouragement of the army (Stern, 2009, pp. 255-256); the slogan “a real Israeli doesn’t dodge the draft” was coined in this context. These ceremonies also eroded legitimacy in that they presented conscription as no longer taken for granted, rather, as something that you need to convince people of in order to enforce, and thus conscription went through a kind of institutionalized process of being perceived as “voluntary.” To illustrate the negative effect of these findings, as the Democracy Index showed, the rates of those who reported that if they had been asked to enlist, they would have made an effort to avoid military service, rose in the midst of the campaign from 18 percent in 2007 to 24 percent in 2008 (Arian et al., 2007, p. 90; Arian et al., 2008, p. 65).

Furthermore, a historical comparative study shows that the legitimization of the draft rested on “contingent consent:” a citizen’s decision to comply or volunteer in response to a demand from the government only if he/she perceives the government as trustworthy, whose procedures for making and implementing policy meet standards of fairness largely by implementing universalistic policies of coercion, and he/she is satisfied that other citizens are also engaging in ethical reciprocity and the government performance and the citizens’ compliance are transparent to the public (Levi, 1997, pp. 16-41; 1998, pp. 90-92). In Israel, the army itself undercut this legitimacy by creating the gap between the egalitarian ethos and reality, by the very cultivation of the belief in the ethos. It also harmed legitimacy by adopting

a selective recruitment policy that is not official, and therefore it relies on unofficial and non-transparent criteria for recruitment and for exemptions.

The second contradiction lies between the selective recruitment policy and the decline of republicanism. As long as republicanism rewarded groups from the secular middle class, such as the benefits that were given to the kibbutz movement and were often justified by their unique military sacrifice, the selectiveness served the preferred status of those serving in relation to those not serving. The exclusion of Arabs, the exclusion in practice of haredis, the official access barriers (by means of the IDF's selection system) for Mizrahis (until the 1970s), and the cultural barriers for religious people (until the 1980s) to their integration into the prestigious combat core of the army and the exclusion of women from this core—all of these were rewards for the dominant group. This structure set the boundaries of “standard Israeliness,” according to the identity of the secular Ashkenazi Jewish man, with the rewards provided by the definition of this boundary.

But from the moment that republicanism began to decline, those serving in the army—mainly from the secular middle class, from the middle layer and up—not only are not rewarded but also feel like “suckers,” and the selectiveness no longer creates the sense of a “service elite” for them. Therefore, beginning in the late 1990s, service turned from an asset into a “burden,” and accordingly, a demand for “sharing the burden equally” began to resonate. Furthermore, due to the decline in the standing of army veterans, the state is limited in its ability to try to restore the positive discrimination of those serving. Attempts made have failed on charges of illegality. For example, since 2013 the attempt to complete the legislation of a State Contributors Rights Law granting a series of benefits to army veterans has failed, due to the argument over the preferences' level of legality. It was the Attorney General who insisted on the constitutional difficulty of giving

soldiers preferential treatment in access to limited resources (Lavie, 2016, pp. 166-168).

In contrast with the middle class, self-recognition as a new service elite has developed among the hardal (nationalist haredi) group, which feeds into the army mainly through the hesder yeshivas and the religious pre-army preparatory academies. For this reason, the demand for sharing the burden equally is not strong among them. For this group, military service is an asset, not a burden. Not only does it not have an urgent need to share it with others; the very image of unequal distribution of the burden provides this group with a significant symbolic resource. The issue of equality in bearing the burden was not even part of the platform of the Jewish Home party, which sought to represent the identity of the new religious soldiers. The platform emphasized the need to reward those serving but not to enforce equality in carrying the burden (Jewish Home, 2013). But even if the motivation for sacrifice among these groups is high, it cannot fully balance the decreasing motivation among the secular middle class.

But while the army promotes “legitimacy of numbers” in order to create an image of equality, it also intentionally did the opposite, first and foremost in significantly reducing the reserve system, which in the past was the backbone of the “people's army.” The logic was to adapt the numbers to the needs of the system (Kabilo, 2018), alongside reducing the number of mobilizations in practice. The result was an increase in inequality between combat soldiers and other soldiers, whose recruitment for reserve duty was reduced. The demands for professionalism and efficiency prevailed over the needs of legitimacy.

Theoretically, unequal recruitment does not necessarily undermine the legitimacy basis of conscription. On the contrary, the reward regime is based on inequality in and outside the army, such that unequal sacrifice is compensated by unequal rewards (Levy, 2015b). There is a reason why struggles have been waged worldwide over

access to enlistment on the part of different sectors, usually minority and lower-class groups, on the assumption that in so doing they would improve their civil standing. But they encountered the opposition of power groups who dominated in the military, and therefore tried to prevent the entry of other groups on the assumption that this would threaten their standing. Considerations of sharing the burden did not play a role for the dominant groups, but rather the opposite, as long as the burden was exchanged for rewards (Levy, 2013). If we return to Margaret Levi's "contingent consent" theory, return for compliance can enhance citizens' trust in state institutions (Levi, 1998, p. 93), but when reduced rewards are paired with unequal conscription, this explosive combination may further undermine the legitimacy of recruitment.

A third contradiction emerged between the ethos, or perhaps myth, of the army as a "melting pot" and the practice of ethno-class tracking. Any army has inherent inequality, which is expressed in the tracking of various social groups into positions that are differentiated from one another in the returns that they provide to those serving, in terms of prestige and recognition, professional returns, and even economic benefits. This is also true in Israel. Inequality even supports the rewards system. At the same time, the Israeli army also disguised the inequality in order to preserve its image as an egalitarian melting pot and to prevent opposition by those who might feel discriminated against. This is one of the sources of legitimacy of the conscription model in Israel, but also of the army's historic ability to serve as a social calming mechanism that contributes to reproducing social inequality (Levy, 2003, pp. 33-81). Alongside the fixed gender-based inequality, the most prominent inequality is ethno-class, which was expressed in barriers that prevented Mizrahis, especially from the middle and lower classes, from entering prestigious combat and officer positions in the first years of the state (Lerer, 2021) and prestigious white-collar positions, when they

developed with the bureaucratization of the army after the Yom Kippur War (Sasson-Levy, 2006). From the 2000s, ethno-class tracking took on a new form, when the army's technology orientation took off, centered on the prestigious Unit 8200. In the second decade of the 2000s, there were many reports of how recruits from affluent groups were tracked into the unit at disproportionately higher rates than their percentage in the population (Orpaz, 2012; Yehoshua & Weiss, 2020; Levy, 2020). These reports were accompanied by revelations of the economic success of the unit's veterans (Orpaz, 2014). In 2017 the head of the Manpower Directorate first admitted the existence of tracking (Dov Lautman Forum, 2017).

At the same time, a sociological map of the army's fallen illustrates the peripheralization of the combat level. As of September 2021 (after Operation Guardian of the Walls): a comparison between the first week of the First Lebanon War (June 1982), in which the majority of the army fought, and in the conflicts of the 2000s (the second intifada, the Second Lebanon War, the rounds of fighting in Gaza, and the routine missions in the West Bank, Gaza, and the Lebanese border, about 500 fatalities), shows that the relative proportion of fatalities from groups from the secular middle class, including Mizrahis in the middle class and higher and the kibbutz and moshav movements, declined from 68 percent to 45 percent. Meanwhile, the relative proportion of religious groups, Mizrahis from the middle class and lower, the West Bank settlers, immigrants, Druze, and women increased from 32 to 55 percent.<sup>1</sup> The latter groups are, evidently, those carrying the main burden of the combat policing in the West Bank and along the border with Gaza.

The use of the melting pot ethos harms the legitimacy of conscription for three reasons. First, the performance of the army as a melting pot is no longer necessary as it was in the first years of the state, when at least according to the image that Israel's first Prime Minister and Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion promoted,



“In our day the army is the only framework in the state in which all of the ethnic, political party, class and other barriers disappear.”<sup>2</sup> But the use of a symbol that is out of date is a tool for bashing the legitimacy of conscription (for example, Arlosoroff, 2019), as the army is making a promise that cannot be kept.

Second, a gap between ethos and reality can encourage struggles over powerful resources in the army in the name of the equality that it promises, such as the controversy that developed following the Elor Azaria shooting incident,<sup>3</sup> which emphasized claims regarding differences in the army between “the first Israel” and “the second Israel.” The combination of overt tracking, declining republicanism, the penetration of identity politics into the army, and the service model becoming a selective model that strengthens the voluntary basis of service all encourage groups serving in the army to demand from the state preferred rights and protection over groups not serving or whose contribution is seen by the demanding groups as lower but providing more rewards, which was the rhetoric of Azaria’s supporters (Levy, 2022). The cumulative result is that the more arguments about how the army performs, which seep from the political arena into the army ranks, the more this weakens the public’s confidence in the army’s performance. The erosion of confidence will also weaken the legitimacy of military sacrifice, including conscription. The legitimacy for sacrificing is built on exchange between sacrificing and returns for those offering their sacrifice, in this case the effective provision of security (on the theoretical context see Suchman, 1995, pp. 578-580).

From another perspective, the gap between ethos and reality can encourage demands for changing the obligations of recruits. For example, perpetuating the gender gap, in light of significant combat positions being closed to women, could in the future encourage women to demand the phasing-out of the conscription of women.

Third, theoretically, the more the social roles of the army are shrouded in myths, the weaker its ability is to carry out reforms that adapt the recruitment system to changing needs. This can cause deep fissures in the system of legitimacy of recruitment (Leander, 2004). A similar argument is also heard in the context of Israel in the form of “the ‘people’s army’ is against conscription” (Levy, 2015b).

A fourth contradiction developed between the “people’s army” ethos and the “market army” ethos. The former grants priority to the universality of service over the needs of the military organization based on seeing the broader social role of the army; this was highlighted in Kochavi’s lecture (2021). At the same time, adopting a “market army” ethos, that is, a lean and economically efficient army, is the way the army adapts itself to the market society discourse. This leads the army to reduce the demand of reserve days to the point of making the reserve corps marginal, to release those who are not necessary (as it did in the past), and to cancel the Track II option for new immigrants, i.e., a shortened period of service. These steps helped puncture the legitimacy that relied on the egalitarian ethos of service (Levy, 2019). This is also true of the selective recruitment policy: even if from the perspective of the army this selectivity enables it to reduce surplus human resources while maintaining the ethos of conscription (Ben-Ari et al., 2021), this takes a toll on long-term legitimacy in undermining the fairness basis of service.

Another expression of the contradiction is a change in the payment doctrine for soldiers from subsistence allowance to salary. Until 2017, the prevailing doctrine was that the payment to soldiers is a kind of subsistence allowance for fulfilling their basic welfare needs and granting compensation for their activity, but it is a “payment that is not defined as a salary,” in the language of the General Staff’s order.<sup>4</sup> Until 2015, the salary was gradually adjusted both to increases in the consumer price index and to changes in the subsistence allowance

needs (Bassok, 2015). In 2016 the payment was increased by 50 percent (Ministry of Finance, 2017), and a year later a differentiation was instituted between the payment to combat soldiers and the payment to “spearhead fighters” (Even, 2017). From this point, the salary component, which compensates for activity and is justified by the need to increase motivation, became official. An additional 50 percent increase approved in 2021 institutionalized the change in doctrine in the direction of salary.

The pressures for salary improvement were expected, as material rewards and selectivity are mutually reinforcing—the decline in symbolic rewards conferred by the military increases pressure for material rewards. Increasing the material rewards encourages selectiveness in order to reduce costs, and the selectiveness in turn encourages rewards as demanded by recruits for compensation for the selectiveness, that is, for their contribution, whose weight increases as the non-contribution of those not enlisting becomes clear. This is the result of making the selectiveness overt. This circularity develops until the stage when the market forces of supply and demand regulate recruitment, and then the transition to a voluntary army develops (Levy, 2010, pp. 215-216). The need to reduce economic costs also encourages various forms of privatization or outsourcing that reduce the recruitment base (Seidman, 2014, pp. 275-278). Furthermore, the growth of the salary discourse accelerates the transformation of mandatory service into a profession, as former Manpower Directorate head Orna Barbivai said: “We need to be careful not to slip here; the narrative must not be economic” (Zeitoun, 2017). Against this backdrop, a study by the army’s Behavioral Sciences Center also warned (in vain) of the risks of turning the subsistence allowance into a salary (Avidar, 2019).

The contradiction between the ethos is also reflected in the shortened period of service. Mandatory service by men was shortened by legislation in 2014 from 36 to 32 months and was meant to be shortened to 30 months in

2020, but in 2021 the additional reduction was canceled retroactively and postponed to 2025. The Ministry of Finance advocated the reduction for a decade, based on the central recommendation of the Ben-Bassat Commission (Commission Examining the Issue of Shortening Mandatory Service, 2006), which the government largely approved in 2006 (Prime Minister’s Office, 2006). This was based on the premise that a reduced month of service saves the economy about 1.4 billion NIS per year, thanks to young people entering the civilian labor market earlier (Elran et al., 2021). And here is the contradiction: in agreeing to the reduction under Chief of Staff Eisenkot, the IDF recognized the transformation of soldiers into an economic resource that must have a price tag attached to it, similar to the process that was applied to the reserve system starting in the 1980s, which led to a significant reduction of its size. Shortening the duration of service also creates irreversible movement, which will ultimately require lengthening service in the form of supplementary professional service in order to ensure fitness and utilization, that is, a gradual transition to a volunteer army. This is the experience learned from other countries that saw shortened mandatory service before moving to a voluntary model (Ajangiz, 2002). In other words, the market ethos contradicts the ethos of the people’s army but gradually prevails over it, for example, in the decision to expand the institution of long service tracks that combine mandatory and professional service in combat units (Fishman, 2017), which brings voluntary service in through the back door. It is for this reason that Chief of Staff Eisenkot took pride at the time of his retirement in the addition of permanent positions that the Finance Ministry provided in return for shortened mandatory service, which were directed toward establishing the new tracks in the army’s frontline units, such that in his words, “We are talking about a *mamlachti* people’s army, but one that is more professional and adapted to what is needed” (quoted in Fishman & Yehoshua, 2018).

The ethos of the market army is also gaining strength in the internal army discourse. Organizational changes in the army since the 1990s have been expressed in new language that reflects the adoption of managerial trends, from TQM in the 1990s to a change in the professional service model in the 2000s (Levy, 2019). An illustration that highlights the tension between the values is provided in the change to the professional service model that was implemented as part of Eisenkot's multiyear Gideon plan. The model was based on adopting neoliberal themes of human resources management to a greater extent than what is in the accepted model in voluntary armies in the West (Safrai, 2019). But for our purposes the discourse is also important, for example a promise "to create a competitive structure that strives for excellence," pride in that unsuitable career soldiers will be fired, and as emphasized, the competition will increase such that "only 1 in 10 people serving reaches retirement age" (Gideon Multiyear Plan, 2015). The principle of the people's army as public service, which relates to its career soldiers as those bearing a mission and thus also ensures them a stable work environment, has been pushed aside in favor of neoliberal language. Under these circumstances it is only natural that career soldiers relate to their service as a professional career and not as a mission. It is no wonder that the IDF Ombudsman's 2017 report pointed out how this change has harmed the army's ability to retain high-quality officers in permanent service (IDF Ombudsman, 2018, pp. 27-29).

In another aspect, in a well-publicized speech in December 2021, Chief of Staff Kochavi complained about the distortion of values in society, as represented by a sign placed in the city of Herzliya stating "the best—to cyber" and claimed that "the best are first of all the combat soldiers" (Kubovich, 2021). His intention was to stem the flow of personnel from combat roles to hi-tech. But it was the Chief of Staff himself who several months beforehand, in his lecture at Reichman University (Kochavi, 2021), publicly

took pride in how the army contributes to the economy and serves as a placement enterprise by each year releasing hundreds of professionals that it trains, including 2,500 technicians and practical engineers, 2,000 people in the digital and computing professions, 600 cyber graduates, 300 programmers, and more. The Chief of Staff did not include combat soldiers among those whose training contributes to the economy, and thus indicated the low economic value of those risking their lives. This rhetoric was part of the effort to paint the picture of a military that responds to the market ethos and the cultivation of the technological system as an elitist track that relies on affluent groups and offers them a professional internship as part of their mandatory service. This track has helped to maintain conscription as long as it has attracted these groups, the groups that starting in the 1990s were the first to criticize conscription and to promote the ethos of the market society.

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The result of this contradiction in cultivating tracks also undermines conscription, as while hi-tech soldiers can be attracted by promising future returns, encouraging the enlistment of "blue-collar" combat soldiers becomes more complicated as the gap emerges between the returns on the various military tracks, as well as the gaps in prestige between them, gaps that the army itself amplified. Therefore, there will be an increased need to use material rewards, although again, raising the salary of soldiers furthers the transition to voluntary enlistment.

A fifth contradiction emerged between the nature of the military hierarchy and network-based recruitment. Borrowing from Jessop

(1999), a network-based (heterarchical) form of coordination means that the governance of recruitment is not hierarchic any more (governed exclusively by the state), but not yet anarchic (regulated by the market typical to voluntary recruitment). In network-based recruitment, recruitment is regulated through enforcement but also with the involvement of intermediaries in the form of parents, rabbis, schools, various non-profit associations, and more. The pre-military academies—institutions created by civil society—also have a role. This is the result of the transition to a selective conscription model, which grants weight to the market and civil society in shaping the preferences of individuals and of groups when it comes to questions of whether to enlist and to which track, and in particular, in an army with an institutional heritage of relying on voluntarism and refraining from coercion (Levy, 2015b).

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### **Conscription is collapsing under the weight of contradictions, with the army itself exacerbating these contradictions and thus contributing to the creation of the legitimacy crisis of conscription.**

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Network-based regulation expands the bargaining range that groups and individuals have with the army to the point of disrupting the military hierarchy and disrupting the army's autonomy. Thus, for example, when in the midst of the Elor Azaria affair Eisenkot said that "an 18-year-old who enlists in the IDF isn't everyone's child; he isn't a baby who was taken prisoner. He's a fighter" (Cohen, 2017), he seemed to be trying to retake control over the soldiers away from parents and return it to the army, as the parents had deepened their foothold on issues that are subject to the army's autonomous management, first and foremost managing its internal discipline. But in fact it was the army that had encouraged the empowerment of parents and made them an intermediary arm (Herzog, 2004). Even more substantial harm to the army's

autonomy is caused by theocratization, that is, the intervention of rabbinical authorities in the army's management of areas such as the deployment of units in operations to evict settlements and the integration of women into combat roles in the military (Levy, 2015a). The seepage of disputes into the ranks of the army not only undermines its governance, but, as said above, also erodes the legitimacy for military sacrifice.

At the end of the day, conscription is collapsing under the weight of contradictions, with the army itself exacerbating these contradictions and thus contributing to the creation of the legitimacy crisis of conscription. Each expression of opposition on the part of soldiers surveyed here—such as mental health exemptions, declining motivation, and bargaining—reflects the erosion of legitimacy, but one of the clearest expressions of this crisis is the erosion of public support for it. If in the Peace Index of July 2015 about 20 percent of Jews supported canceling conscription and changing the model to voluntary enlistment (Yaar & Hermann, 2015), this percentage almost doubled to about 40 percent in the 2019 Democracy Index (Hermann et al., 2019, p. 107), and in 2021 had already reached a plurality of 47 percent of the Jewish public, with only 42 percent opposed (Hermann et al., 2021). Furthermore, support for abolishing conscription is solid among young people (up to age 44), which indicates the potential for opposition to the model to creep into day-to-day practices in relations between recruits and the army. A comparative study of Europe and the United States showed that what was once solid support for conscription waned when the discussion of alternatives to conscription began (Ajangiz, 2000, p. 3). This is also the case in Israel.

### **Why Don't the Social Roles Justify Conscription?**

Not only did the IDF not prepare properly for the legitimacy crisis of recruitment, despite an



early warning provided by the IDF Behavioral Sciences Center (Harel, 2014); it also appears that it is not aware of the intensity of the crisis. Here the point of departure is the Chief of Staff's lecture at Reichman University in June 2021, a few weeks after Operation Guardian of the Walls, in which he outlined his approach regarding the army's contribution to society and the economy, as none of his predecessors had done in recent years. One can see his words as a detailed defense of conscription, even if his direct reference only touched on his firm opposition to shortening the duration of service, but he anchored this model in its social merits.

On top of the basic layer of the army's need for skilled human resources in order to provide security, which is the accepted justification for conscription, the Chief of Staff highlighted the army's contribution. "The IDF is actually an accelerator, a social accelerator and an economic accelerator. The IDF is the State of Israel's national fitness room" said the Chief of Staff, and referred to three contributions through which the army returns the social investment in it: it empowers the personal capabilities of the individual, strengthens social solidarity, and helps to accelerate economic growth (Kochavi, 2021). This line of defense is fundamentally mistaken.

First, conscription contradicts the liberal values of society in that it confiscates the freedom of many citizens. This confiscation is justified only for the purpose of defending the lives of others and their freedom. The army can fulfill supplementary roles (such as its deployment in the fight against COVID-19), and positive social impacts can be attributed to it. However, these roles cannot justify conscription, even if we accept the validity of the Chief of Staff's arguments. If recruits want to enlist and if their parents want to encourage them, having been convinced that the army provides training for "21<sup>st</sup> century skills," in the words of the Chief of Staff, they will enlist. But the state does not have the authority to impose education or training on its young

people that involves the loss of freedom, which is merely supplementary to the army's main role. Certainly, the state cannot impose recruitment because it ostensibly contributes to social solidarity.

Second, the Chief of Staff's claims regarding the social roles of the army are tenuous, at best. There are few established research findings that point to the army's positive social contribution. The images of reality have eclipsed the interpretation of reality, and they are backed by subjective and selective statements in which discharged soldiers and their parents express appreciation for their service. For example, the proportion of Mizrahis among all officers was about a quarter in the 1970s and a third in the 1980s and 1990s, including junior officers (Lerer, 2021, p. 11). At the same time, a social survey from 1991 shows that the proportion of Mizrahis in the four leading professional sectors that can correspond to military rankings (that include managers, educated people, and small-scale employers) stood at about 20 percent (Yaish, 2004). Some of the civilian employees in the 1990s were probably discharged officers who were recruited in the 1970s and 1980s. The conclusion is that mobility within the military does not break the civilian professional hierarchy, as would perhaps be expected from a provider of skills for the labor market. Perhaps even the opposite is the case, that is, talented people from lower class groups advance in the labor market even without the army's assistance, while the army wastes the time of talented people.

A study conducted in the US indeed presents the "disruption hypothesis," according to which military service diverts academically ambitious males from their plans for higher education, thus disrupting their educational trajectories (MacLean, 2005). Reinforcement of this claim can come from two findings from different directions: the graduates of technological high schools (who are generally not from affluent families) are stationed in technical positions in the army that do not match their

skills, and the result is that military service creates a break in the continuity of professional training and harms post-service professional mobility (Hayman Zehavi, 2020). In contrast, an educational revolution is underway among haredi women, who do not enlist: 42 percent of haredi female students in Bachelor's degree programs are under age 21, compared to only 12 percent among non-haredi Jewish female students, and hence haredi women leverage their exemption from service for the purpose of mobility (Cahaner & Malach, 2021, p. 33).

Similar doubts arise regarding the claim that the army contributes to the hi-tech economy in that it provides unique skills to soldiers who enlist in technological units. Without the ability to examine how the graduates of technological units would have developed their human capital had they not enlisted in the army and acquired their education and entered the labor market earlier, it is difficult to isolate the contribution of their service. However, the extent that hi-tech industry also mobilizes employees who did not serve in technological positions (Manela, 2019) and expands opportunities to haredis and Arabs weakens its dependence on the military technology sector.

If we are to offer another illustration based on well-known studies, the inter-ethnic encounter in the army, the first of its kind for some of soldiers, strengthened prior stereotypes for some or tendencies toward seclusion based on ethnic background, and only for others had the opposite, integrative impact (Schwarzwald & Amir, 1994). By creating a unique interaction between different groups, ethnic identity is not blurred (unlike Kochavi's assertion "there are no ethnic groups") but is rather displayed extremely and even exaggerated (Grosswirth Kachtan, 2017). Military service can reduce stereotypes only when intergroup encounters create interdependence among group members, mainly relevant to combat units (Ben-Shalom, 2012). Thus, this contribution is limited. This finding is consistent with the theory about the limited contribution of military service

to intergroup integration (Krebs, 2004), and hence also to social solidarity. Also, a study that examined integration between religious and secular conscripts found that even when the military facilitates intergroup interaction, "the military is not a melting pot and does not cause veterans to become completely open to redrawing social boundaries" (Rosman, 2020, p. 360).

Even more significantly, the army was the arena that exacerbated the conflict between secular people and religious people from the nationalist haredi stream, centered on the conflict between secular women and religious male soldiers, which intensified the more the interaction between the members of different groups in the army intensified. Consequently, there is no basis for the Chief of Staff's statement about the army's contribution to blurring social boundaries. On the contrary, joint service under combat conditions encourages groups from the lower class to fight for their rights (Kier & Krebs, 2010), similar to the impacts of the Yom Kippur War and the First Lebanon War on the Mizrahi protest movement. This is a positive phenomenon, but not what the Chief of Staff intended. The controversy that developed following the Elor Azaria incident, which highlighted claims regarding social differences in the army, certainly does not enhance the argument of the army's contribution to solidarity. One way or another, the army's contribution is no longer exclusive in a modern labor market that enables interaction between different groups, including interaction that is more prolonged than in the army. Kochavi's description of how 12 people from different social groups sit in a small room in Unit 8200 is a common sight in many workplaces and is not unique to the army.

The third argument is that not only does the army not necessarily contribute to society; it also spurs negative results. First and foremost, military service defines the boundaries of preferred citizenship in Israeli society (citizenship in the symbolic, not official, sense)

in that it draws the boundaries of “standard Israeliness” according to the identity of the Jewish males, and until the 1990s and 2000s, specifically the secular Ashkenazi males. The de facto exclusion from military service caused the socioeconomic inferiority of Arab citizens (Shafir & Peled, 2002, pp. 110-136), just as the army relegates women (Sasson-Levy, 2018) and haredis (Levy, 2014) to an inferior status in the social hierarchy, that is, in accordance with the boundaries of the recruitment map. As mentioned above, the military played a key role in reproducing social inequality.

Indeed, tracking has a role in deepening social gaps. The current mechanisms were preceded by the tracking mechanisms of the 1950s to 1970s, which obstructed the mobility of Mizrahis in the army due to the ethnic biases of the military selection system (Lerer, 2021). It is likely that as tracking in the army became established along with increasing wage gaps in the labor market, the army’s contribution to inequality only grew. It will continue to grow in the future as the expense per soldier rises with the increased use of technology and the inevitable reduction in recruitment numbers. As a comparative study reveals, hi-tech armies require relatively highly educated soldiers to use the increasingly sophisticated weaponry. This demand limits the opportunities for undereducated soldiers. And because these armies need fewer soldiers than in the past, the military can no longer offer undereducated soldiers a pathway of upward mobility, and hence exacerbates income inequality (Kentor et al., 2012).

Furthermore, different minority groups do not necessarily feel that the republican arrangement benefits them or strengthens their sense of solidarity. Regarding Druze soldiers, their demand for special treatment and for compensation from the state for their military service in comparison with those who do not serve has over time become a central motif in their charges of deprivation and discrimination (Amrani, 2010, pp. 142-155). Recruits of Ethiopian

origin report that their military service brought them limited symbolic benefit in contrast with their high expectations, and they experience humiliation after their service. Haredis, in contrast, report that their service advanced them economically and strengthened their social capital thanks to service with non-haredi soldiers (Malchi, 2021). However, we don’t know if a similar effect wouldn’t also be achieved if haredis left the yeshiva to work in civilian jobs and not only military ones.

On the other hand, the army contributes to women’s sense that their service equips them with resources, such as recognition, or breakup of a patriarchal structure (Lomsky-Feder & Sasson-Levy, 2018). Even if this should not be taken lightly, it is doubtful how much this is a unique contribution of the army, as we do not have a control group, that is, women who are not recruited but have a similar social background. Furthermore, as Lomsky-Feder & Sasson-Levy emphasize (p. 33), some women from lower class families have remained in their status after their service despite the beneficial military experience. It is also doubtful how justified it is that a society takes pride in the fact that the army empowers women or men thanks to one-time experiences, including with external markers, for example a female soldier who takes pride that when walking in uniform through a neighborhood in a peripheral town, people want to approach her due to her uniform (pp. 32-33).

And finally, military service also causes personal damages. For example, failures during preliminary selection processes to elite units cause psychological harm to thousands of young people in a wide range of ages (Aviram, 2020). In addition, alongside the contribution (of combat service) to the development of emotional maturity and character if experienced as successful service (Mayselless, 2002), and its moderate contribution to maturation as reflected in the perspectives of discharged soldiers (Dar & Kimhi, 2000), military service as a whole contributes to delay the developmental

task of young people's emotional, instrumental, and economic separation from their parents and formation of their professional and value-based identity (Mayseless, 2002). Kochavi seems to have pulled the rug out from under his arguments in his recognition of "the lost decade," that is, the period between discharge from the army and age 28-29 in which, in his words, discharged soldiers "go out to find themselves and many of them do not enter the track of work and employment."

The fourth and final argument is that irrespective (for a moment) of normative judgment, not only does a voluntary army continue to fulfill social functions; it sometimes even does so more than a conscript military. Therefore, the social contribution of the army is not necessarily relevant to the imperative to maintain the conscription model, and perhaps the opposite is true. First, a volunteer army is more sensitive than a conscripted army to its social diversity, because it needs to strengthen its legitimacy in society as a means of more effective utilization of human resources reservoirs, given the decline in recruitment rates among affluent groups. It is for this reason that the transition to voluntary enlistment has expanded opportunities for women, albeit within the framework of a more conservative organization (Sasson-Levy, 2011). In addition, thanks to the abolition of conscription, the United States military became a "social laboratory" that expands opportunities for the integration of Afro-Americans (Segal et al., 1994). Hence, the potential for strengthening integration between groups (at least weakening negative stereotypes) increases in a volunteer army.

Second, precisely due to the distancing of affluent groups from a voluntary army, the army deepens its activity to recruit groups from the lower class. For example, in the United States over the past two decades, the activity of military high schools has expanded in poor communities, offering better learning conditions than those offered by public schools (Galaviz

et al., 2011). Therefore, for example, there is no reason why Havat Hashomer (the IDF's Center for promoting special populations, designed to give a second chance to soldiers who are part of populations at risk) wouldn't continue to train soldiers with social adjustment difficulties, for the simple reason that the voluntary army will need them.

Third, if the conscription model is converted to a voluntary one, the increase in employment costs will encourage the army to recruit human resources from the periphery while packaging the recruitment as contributing to society (even if the army sincerely believes in the social mission) and mobilizing adequate resources accordingly. An example of this is the Atidim project, including technological training projects in the periphery such as the Lehavim program, which benefit from philanthropic capital, or moving the intelligence bases to southern Israel. At the same time, the army will continue to provide employment experience. The promise of such experience can encourage the recruitment of highly skilled individuals who have alternatives in the civilian labor market.

At the end of the day, the claims regarding the army's contribution to society do not bolster the legitimacy of conscription, especially when they are not grounded in research findings and ignore negative contributions of military service, which are established in research findings, and the army's abilities to contribute even if conscription is abolished.

### **Conclusion and Alternative Proposal: Transition to Overt Selective Recruitment**

The recruitment policy is collapsing under the weight of contradictions. It is a legitimacy crisis rather than a motivation crisis or a policy failure. In its actions, the army contributes to amplification of the contradictions that erode the legitimacy of conscription. Therefore, when the problem is related to legitimacy, it should be dealt with using tools that will strengthen legitimacy.



A legitimization crisis can be resolved by reconstituting the social bases of the institution or by investing more heavily in coercive applications (Reus-Smit, 2007). The Israeli policy turned to coercion—slight enforcement and the threat of sanctions on haredis, monitoring and sanctions on women who demand a religious exemption on false grounds, and increasing barriers to mental health exemption. To a large extent, even the idea of requiring everyone to perform civilian service, of whom the army will select those needed for its missions, is a kind of increased enforcement. But while enforcement provides a short-term solution, recalibrating the legitimacy basis can prolong the validity of the solution.

The legitimacy of recruitment will only be fully re-established if recruitment moves from the state's coercion (conscription) to regulation by means of the market (voluntary enlistment). While this appears to be an inevitable development in the not-too-distant future, I believe (and based on a normative assumption that rejects militarism) that Israel should strive to delay the implementation of this solution as long as possible, and extend the lifespan of conscription by re-establishing its system of legitimacy.

The alternative of transitioning to voluntary enlistment is not morally or politically correct. Morally, in voluntary enlistment, it is not the state that determines the level of risk that the individual will be exposed to, but rather the market. It is not as if conscription is mandatory while voluntary enlistment is not mandatory; in both there is coercion, whether by the state or by market forces. The result is to undermine fairness, such that inequality defines risk, as naturally military service will attract those whose opportunities in the labor market are more limited. Thus, in return for relatively low rewards, the state acquires the "bodies" of young people by exploiting their distress—a process that is not different in essence from prostitution or sale of human organs, practices that are morally wrong (Sandel, 2012).

Politically, this is a change in power relations in society that alters the contract between the citizen and the state such that it turns recruits from people to whom the state and the civilian community are committed into people who supposedly enlisted out of free choice as employees, and therefore the obligation toward them is weakened. Such a change would also weaken the exposure of affluent groups to the risks inherent in recruitment and therefore decrease their interest in military policy, and thus weaken civilian supervision of the army (Levy, 2011).

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**Evident is a legitimacy crisis rather than a motivation crisis or a policy failure. Therefore, when the problem is related to legitimacy, it should be dealt with using tools that will strengthen legitimacy.**

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Also, the alternative of civil service is not appropriate for all. The idea is to heal the inequality in recruitment by imposing conscription for civil service on all young people, such that it is the army that chooses who goes to military or civil service (Piron & Harush Gity, 2020). A researchers' workshop that convened at the Open University in 2013 went through the scenario of this option and rejected it unanimously (Levy, 2015c). Without getting into normative issues related to individual freedoms and the difficulty of enforcing such service (Malchi et al., 2021, pp. 8-9), inter alia the researchers raised the following arguments: (1) Social services would become dependent on the existence of civilian service, and in the future would delay reforms to recruitment policies. (2) The expansion of civilian service would develop an institutional alternative to compulsory military service alongside internal competition between the tracks, and the result over the years could actually be an acceleration of the decline in the status of mandatory service and outflow from it to civilian service. (3) Conflicts would be created between the state's institutions and

Arab and haredi citizens. (4) The flow of tens of thousands of service volunteers into the labor market would undermine the market's balance. Salaried workers in various workplaces and especially in non-professional or semi-professional positions would be pushed out of the market, and the quality of services could decline if they are staffed by unskilled workers.

Against the backdrop of these reservations, in the framework of the Israel Democracy Institute I presented a detailed plan for instituting an official selective recruitment model (Levy, 2021), that is, turning the selective model that is used in practice from unofficial to official, similar to the process that the reserve system went through. At its base are the following principles: (1) The state will recruit a certain percentage of the population. (2) It will decide whom to recruit according to criteria determined by the army with the approval of the Knesset. (3) The duration of service will be gradually shortened to two years according to the original plan proposed by the Ben-Bassat Commission. Combat soldiers will serve in shortened mandatory service that will be supplemented with an additional mandatory period of service up to three years of service, under conditions of professional (career) service. (4) The length of service for females and males will be equalized and an egalitarian system of selection, placement, and advancement will be instituted for the two genders (as recommended by the Commission for Shaping the Service of Women in the IDF—Looking Towards the Coming Decade, 2007, known as the Segev Commission). (5) The criteria for exemptions from recruitment will be official and transparent. They will apply the principle of equality, but “equality among the qualified,” and not equality that is blind to inter-group and inter-personal differences. The criteria will be based on personal fitness for military service (education, integrity, mental and physical health), based on conscientious suitability (which would exempt conscientious objectors in a reliable process) and based on cultural-group fitness. The cultural criterion

will exempt from service groups whose way of life and culture are in substantial contradiction with the demands and nature of military service—Arabs, haredis, and women from the national religious sector. (6) The criterion for exemption will be a haredi way of life (similar to the principle of exemption for religious women) and not *Torato Umanuto* (“Torah study is his work”), such that yeshivas will no longer be a refuge for those seeking to be released from service and haredis who are not serving in the army will not be prevented from working. (7) The subsistence allowance for soldiers will not increase significantly, but discharge grants will provide significant compensation to recruits for the years during which they did not advance in the field of employment and education compared with those who did not serve. (8) Civil service will only be on a voluntary basis for those who have received an exemption from service, in exchange for a subsistence allowance. It will not be possible to exchange military service for civil service. Those found unsuitable for military service according to the criteria set will be exempted from service.

In conclusion, in the first stage, the recruitment rate will not decline significantly from its current rate, but the selectiveness practiced today will become official.

A transition to an official selective model has clear advantages over the current situation and over alternative models:

1. The proposed model preserves the principle of conscription and gives it staying power.
2. It “legalizes” the existing reality, which is currently carried out through grey and unofficial arrangements with tenuous legitimacy—unequal recruitment under an egalitarian ethos. In this way it reduces the legitimacy-undermining contradictions inherent in the current model.
3. It does not require forced recruitment for civilian service and the forced recruitment of haredis, and potentially also of Arabs.
4. The army will stop “playing” with recruitment figures in order to present an

image of egalitarian recruitment. These games lead it to recruit those whom it shouldn't, to keep in service those who are not suitable, and to carry out numerical manipulations. In this way the army will also acquire the ability to cope with the surplus human resources that is expected in the coming years.

5. This model nearly guarantees the advantages of other models—those who in any case would come to the army in a voluntary model calling out to them (need for income, patriotism, expectation of social mobility). However, many of those who potentially would not respond to a voluntary model would come to the army as part of conscription due to internalizing the norm inherent in it.

The time has come to discuss the recruitment model as a whole; this article has attempted to offer a modest contribution to this.

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## Notes

- 1 Ongoing mapping work conducted by the author. See also Levy, 2007, pp. 117-128.
- 2 Ben-Gurion presents the Defense Service Law 1949 to the Knesset (Knesset Plenary Records 2, 1338, 1949).
- 3 In March 2016, Elor Azaria, an Israeli conscript soldier, was filmed shooting and killing an immobilized Palestinian attacker (Abd al-Fattah Yusri al-Sharif) in the West Bank city of Hebron. The decision by the IDF to try Azaria for manslaughter provoked unprecedented protests by right wing groups, which accused the IDF command of abandoning a soldier who, they claimed, had acted in self-defense.
- 4 Order 3.0521, Subsistence allowance for soldiers in mandatory service (updated in August 2018). <https://bit.ly/3JdgeQA> [in Hebrew].