

JIMS Study:

Israel Needs a Professional Army

“The draft and idea of a citizens’ army have become impediments preventing Israel’s army from fulfilling its mission,” stated the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies in a Position Paper issued November 9, 2010 in Jerusalem.

According to Boaz Arad, JIMS analyst and author of the paper, the army long ago ceased being a citizens’ army. The pretense of it still being so hurts military preparedness and causes a loss of NIS 9 billion annually to the Israeli economy. It also increases tensions between different sectors of the Israeli population..

According to statistics published by JIMS, approximately 23% of draft age individuals do not serve at all. 40% of draft-age women are exempted. Another 18% of those drafted do not complete their service. Only 20% of the males who serve, do so in combat roles. 20% serve in administrative roles. About 10 different programs are used to allow terms of service to be shortened; when all is considered, less than a third of each year’s draftees completes a full term of service.

One major but usually overlooked problem made worse by the enforced drafting of so many people unsuited for service is suicide. The single highest cause of death of Israeli soldiers outside of combat is suicide; on average, at least one soldier commits suicide every two weeks.

JIMS’ analysis shows that paying soldiers a real salary rather than current low enlistee wages would go a long way to encouraging the army to use its manpower more efficiently, and to encouraging draft-age youth to choose to enlist. This would be a more worthwhile reform than the current highly talked about and controversial intent to extend the draft to specific sectors of the population who do not want to serve, such as Haredim.

JIMS commissioned a national poll to discover the public's attitude toward changing to a professional army. The results, as analyzed by JIMS, are that 47% support replacing reservists in non-combat roles with outsourcing, while close to 39% oppose this. Nearly 56% support the outsourcing of military support services such as catering, laundry, auto repair and cleaning, while 29% oppose this. Yet only 18.% support moving to a professional army, while 74% oppose it. At the same time, 50% support the idea that employers should not hire those who do not serve, while 46% oppose it. JIMS concludes that the public agrees with the need to streamline the army and make it more efficient, but it stops short of recognizing the benefits of a professional army because it is not willing to forego the idea of a citizens' army.