



Forensic intelligence for those who act.

READER EDITION

October 30, 2025

MITZPE DOSSIER

From Deferment to Duty

◇ URIEL ZEHAVER

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

DISTRIBUTION

Open · Free to share with attribution

IN THIS EDITION

Field Dossier: From Deferment to Duty	3
Universal service as Jewish law and state law—no monopolies, no theatrics, just headcount. Equality with kippot.	3
Equality and Conscience: Israel’s Draft Reckoning	3
From Deferment to Equality Mandate	4
Ideology Under Fire: Torah Study and National Duty	5
Public Mandate vs Coalition Arithmetic	6
Manpower Reality	7
Building a Law That Endures	8
Scenarios of Collapse or Cohesion	9
Scenario One: Backlash and Non-Compliance	9
Scenario Two: Bureaucratic Drift	10
Scenario Three: Judicial Crossfire	10
Scenario Four: Normalization	10
Scenario Five: Political Reversal	10
Metrics of Reality	11

Field Dossier: From Deferment to Duty

By Uriel Zehavi · October 30, 2025

Universal service as Jewish law and state law—no monopolies, no theatrics, just headcount. Equality with kippot.

Today Jerusalem's main arteries will be clogged with banners, black coats, and blue uniforms—each side sure the other is desecrating something sacred. One yells equality. The other yells Torah. Both believe they're defending Israel's soul. They're right, but only halfway.

This fight was never about the draft alone. It's about a monopoly on virtue. For too long, one sector claimed the mantle of holiness while others carried the stretcher. That bargain worked when Israel was young and small. It collapses when the country bleeds on three fronts and its tax base buckles under stipends and slogans.

What's needed now is a clean covenant: every capable citizen serves, every true scholar learns, and neither lives off the other's piety. Service is *avodat kodesh*. Torah is *avodat kodesh*. Neither excuses the absence of the other.

The law outlined below is a serious framework that treats both as sacred obligations, not bargaining chips. It restores order, not punishment. And it replaces a generation of political blackmail with a simple moral math: contribution equals legitimacy.

Equality and Conscience: Israel's Draft Reckoning

Israel is out of runway. The court erased the blanket deferment and restored the plain meaning of the law: equal duty for all. The army, after a bruising war, needs bodies in specific places and soon. The political system must now close the gap between legality and reality without breaking either community or force design. That requires a settlement with disciplined architecture.

The settlement starts with a universal obligation. Every 18-year-old serves. The tracks differ, the duty does not. One path is the IDF. The other is a civilian national service with real jobs, real hours, and the same benefits. No second-class track. No games or "optics."

Religious freedom is not a courtesy here—though it is a design constraint. In uniform, no one must be compelled to violate Shabbat, kashrut, modesty, or other community norms. Haredi cohorts should be able to train, live, and work in male-only frameworks where required. Schedules need to protect prayer and set daily time for Torah study. In civilian service, roles should be local and halachically safe by default.

Exemption narrows to its original intent. *Torato Omanuto* (closely: the Torah is his profession) becomes a capped, verified route for a small elite of demonstrable scholars. Entry is earned, time-bound, and reviewed. Attendance audited. Abuse ends. Torah greatness is honored without gutting national duty.

The beit midrash keeps its best and everyone serves according to his capacity.

There is a constitutional answer to a moral problem with operational stakes. We can honor equality before the law and freedom of observance in the same statute. And we can and must give the Haredi public a path to contribute without surrendering who they are.

A settlement would release the coalition from permanent crisis and replace improvisation with a durable framework. The country gets stronger. The rhetoric gets quieter. That would be new.

From Deferment to Equality Mandate

In 1948, Ben-Gurion granted 400 yeshiva scholars a special deferment as a post-Holocaust salvage mission. This stopgap became a structure. Through the 1970s the quota vanished, the exemption culture hardened, and by the 1990s mass deferment was the norm. Politics kept feeding it while demographics magnified it.

In 1998, *Rubinstein v. Minister of Defense* said a minister cannot invent mass exemptions; the Knesset must legislate. The Tal Committee followed and produced the 2002 Tal Law. Its offer: a “year of decision” at 23 and shortened military or civilian service at 24. Its flaw: no teeth. The law preserved *Torato Omanuto* as a blanket shelter while hoping voluntary choice would do the work.

The Court waited. In 2006 it gave the experiment more time. By February 2012 it ended the indulgence and struck the Tal Law. The finding was blunt: the burden fell on everyone else while real Haredi participation barely moved. Extension denied. Back to the legislature.

The Knesset zigzagged. A 2014 package added quotas and even criminal sanctions, but only after a long runway. In 2015 a new coalition rolled much of it back and dulled the quotas. In 2017 the Court invalidated the softened framework for re-entrenching inequality and granted one last year to legislate a lawful scheme. The year passed. No durable law.

Deadlines turned to dust. By July 1, 2023, all temporary provisions had expired. On paper, Haredi 18-year-olds were equally draftable. The government answered with an administrative freeze: a cabinet decision ordered no Haredi enlistment enforcement until at least March 31, 2024. No statute. No authority. A pause button posing as policy. Then, October 7th happened and the crisis exploded.

The Court ended the charade. A unanimous panel ruled the deferral edict illegal. Only the Knesset can set a national draft regime. Absent a law, the IDF must apply the induction rules equally. The justices tied money to legality as well. With no valid framework, state stipends for draft-age yeshiva students had no basis and had to stop as of April 1, 2024. One message, two fronts: enforce equality and cut unlawful funding.

In wartime, the Court called the disparity “discrimination regarding the most precious thing — life itself.” The meaning is not subtle. Special treatment without measurable service is out. Open-ended deferrals are out. Administrative work-arounds are out.

The Court imposed a constitutional floor: equality as default, narrow deviation only by statute and only with justification. The system now requires a law that converts ideals into headcount.

Ideology Under Fire: Torah Study and National Duty

In the Haredi view, sustained Torah study is not a lifestyle. It is service. They view full time study as guarding Israel spiritually while the IDF guards it physically. The yeshiva is their post. The beit midrash is their watchtower. Drafting that cohort *en masse* is read as an assault on purpose itself.

Then the lived fears. Standard IDF life collides with Haredi norms. Co-ed settings. Orders that may land on Shabbat. Food that is kosher but is it kosher enough to their standard? Barracks that ignore modesty boundaries. Marriage and fatherhood delayed by years. Then, the army is widely viewed as a secularizing machine. Senior rabbis put it plainly. Rabbi Meir Tzvi Bergman warned that one who enters does not leave as Haredi. Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstein said better to flee the country, even by violating the Sabbath, than be drafted. They are drawing a red line on identity, not nibbling at policy.

The mainstream Israeli public views the same picture through a different lens. The people’s army is the national covenant. Exempting a whole sector violates the sense of fairness. War hardened that instinct and fractured the patience. After the 2023 massacre and these many long months that followed, reservists abandoned jobs and families to fight. Diaspora Israelis flew home to serve. Many watched tens of thousands of Haredi peers remain in yeshiva. Anger grew immeasurably. Polling moved with it. Support for drafting Haredim surged past four fifths of the public. Among secular Israelis it is near universal. Religious Zionist voters shifted sharply into the pro-draft column. The civic story here is simple. Everyone serves. No one may opt out.

There is a bridge if we choose to build it. Frame service itself as *avodat kodesh*. Saving life is *pikuach nefesh*. A Haredi medic in Bnei Brak or a cyber analyst defending hospitals is performing mitzvah work. That does not diminish Torah. It puts national duty in religious terms that already exist. History offers precedents. In 1948, rabbinic leadership, including the Edah HaChareidis, backed religious units and weapons training for yeshiva students under existential threat. In 1967, thousands of Haredim served quietly. Survival softened rigid lines when the guns were loud. It can do so again if the frameworks are clean.

Signals are mixed but real. Prime Minister Netanyahu has said Israel needs both soldiers and Torah students. During this war, some thousands of Haredi men contacted the IDF to volunteer. The Haredi establishment noticed and doubled down against it. Still, the fact of those calls matters. It marks a younger

edge that is ready to serve on terms that protect observance. Meet that edge with credible structures and some of the stigma will crack.

The causal chain is not mystical. Identity drives behavior. Behavior drives politics. Politics sets the law. If service is framed as holy work with halachic guardrails, more Haredim can say yes without feeling they betrayed their families, their teachers, and most importantly their values. If the rest of Israel hears and sees that contribution, the anger cools. The alternative is a spiral of coercion and defiance that satisfies no one and weakens the state.

Public Mandate vs Coalition Arithmetic

Before the war, a solid majority backed drafting Haredim. After October 7 and the months of mobilization, support coalesced into an immutable fact of life. The median Israeli expects action, not process. That expectation now defines the political field.

Inside the Haredi street the shift is smaller. A minority signals openness to some service. Most understandably prefer the status quo. Many reject the fairness argument even while the State is under fire. That split sets the ceiling for what their politicians can sign and survive.

The governing coalition rests on UTJ and Shas. Their price was always a protective law for yeshiva students. Coalition agreements promised it. Delivery stalled while the government was distracted with other urgent issues. Haredi leaders drew red lines: no criminal sanctions, no hard quotas that bite, and if possible a constitutional shield for Torah study. The Basic Law gambit never matured. Public backlash and intra-Likud resistance froze it.

By mid-2025 the pressure blew the gaskets. UTJ's rabbinic leadership ordered a walkout from government roles. Shas followed. They stayed in the coalition but abandoned governing posts. A strike, not a schism. The message to the Prime Minister was simple: pass a law we can live with or govern without us. Paralysis has followed. Protests—on either end of the debate—multiplied and grew louder.

Enter the minimalist offers. The Defense Committee advanced outlines built on soft targets, a high exemption age, and delayed penalties. One version aimed for 50 percent conscription of each Haredi cohort within five years while keeping age 26 as a formal off-ramp. Yeshiva budgets would only face trims if targets were missed for a year. Personal penalties would wait even longer and would remain narrow. No loss of driver's licenses. Travel limits and routine status holds only. It reads like a glide path: half serve by 2030 and no confrontations in the streets.

The optics, though are toxic poison. The public sees this as a legal way to entrench avoidance during a war that stretched everyone to the breaking point. The opposition calls it a sham. Even most of the coalition knows it will not pass the smell test, let alone survive the scrutiny of the High Court.

The Prime Minister still tries to balance, precariously, on two nearly incompatible fronts. Promise quotas to the public. Promise protection to the Haredim.

This is now a credibility contest, underscored by urgency as Israel approaches a new election cycle. The public wants measurable Haredi service with real timelines. Haredi leaders want guarantees that no one is forced to sin and that the yeshiva world stays intact. Any statute that is mostly theatrical will trigger anger on the streets and new petitions. Any statute that looks like coercion will trigger mass non-compliance and collapse of the coalition.

The country has issued a mandate and the Court has set a floor. A law that does not produce visible Haredi participation—likewise one that tramples their observance—will die, either in the streets or in the courtroom.

Manpower Reality

Set aside the slogans and divisive rhetoric. The IDF needs people and it needs them yesterday. Since October 7, the army pulled deep on reserves and exposed thin spots across the force.

Air defense is the first pressure point. Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow require crews on alert 24/7. Batteries ran hot for months. Fresh, trained teams expand coverage and buy endurance.

Borders are next. Gaza will demand a standing presence for years. The northern front with Hezbollah is increasingly volatile. Judea and Samaria ties down battalions with continuous counterterror work.

More soldiers mean rotations that restore training time and rest, which is what keeps units effective.

Technology is no luxury. Signals, cyber, drones, and data exploitation win hours and save lives. The private sector is poaching talent. A segment of Haredi youth can be trained for these roles. Place them in male-only office environments that meet strict kashrut and with schedules that respect prayer. Shabbat work stays limited to life and death. Most cyber defense is not that. Wartime exceptions can be handled inside halacha.

The home front is a combat zone of a different kind. Months of mass displacement and sirens frayed the systems: shelters, logistics, food distribution, clinic surge, special-needs support. Home Front Command needs hands. Civilian national service can supply them. Build local civil defense cadres from Bnei Brak and Beit Shemesh that organize drills, staff command posts, and move people when alarms sound.

Hospitals and ambulances need help every week, not only on bad days. Magen David Adom and emergency rooms ran at a sprint—and haven't slowed much. United Hatzalah already proved what Haredi EMTs can do. Count that kind of work as national service.

Education and welfare are not soft extras. Understaffed classrooms in the periphery, special-ed aides, elder care, and social work are part of national resilience. Tutoring boys who fell behind, visiting the sick, running after-school programs. It aligns with values the community already honors and returns measurable benefit to cities that carry the tax and reserve load.

Integration must be designed, not wished into being. Netzah Yehuda proved that Haredim can fight and also showed where the seams tear when culture is ignored. Lessons learned are clear. Expand Haredi basic training for non-combat tracks. Stand up observant batteries or sub-units in air defense and intelligence. Do not throw conscripts into co-ed units where failure is scripted. The IDF leadership has already said it can adapt conditions to preserve Haredi life—let them show they mean it.

There are limits. Certain courses, ships, and mixed infantry battalions are poor fits. Plan around them. There are enough male-only brigades, combat support units, and tech shops to absorb real numbers if the bureaucracy builds the lanes.

This is also about strategic depth in manpower. Multi-front war comes when the enemy chooses, not when procurement is ready. If even a third of a Haredi cohort does military service and another third does civilian defense and care, Israel gains thousands of trained hands to move people, run shelters, staff hotlines, and man consoles. The spiritual support does not hurt either. Prayer at a bedside is not a defense budget line, but it changes a hospital ward.

The claim that “the army does not want them” was always lazy and is [now] false. Commanders ask for bodies and complain that legal tools are thin. Critics answer that the IDF has dragged its feet. Good. Put both impulses to work. Write the law, open the slots, and publish the intake and completion numbers regularly. If the pipelines clog, grab a plunger. If they flow, expand them.

Building a Law That Endures

The civilian national service track becomes a genuine parallel institution, not a loophole. The service authority recruits, trains, uniforms, and pays its volunteers like soldiers. Its presence must be visible and its product measurable. The word “volunteer” disappears; these are national servicemen.

Both tracks are bound by halachic guardrails written into statute, not left to goodwill. In the IDF, no Shabbat duty except true pikuach nefesh. Kosher kitchens to whatever standard required. Male-only environments where requested. Space and time for prayer and Torah study. A rabbi in every Haredi unit. The same goes for the civilian track—Shabbat observed, work gender-segregated when needed, religious dress untouched. That is the price of inclusion.

Exemption shrinks to its original scale. Torato Omanuto becomes a narrow and verified category—reserved for a few hundred elite scholars, not tens of thousands of names on a spreadsheet. They are tested, certified, and revaluated periodically. Their learning becomes a public covenant, not a bureaucratic dodge. Everyone else serves—whether on the border, in an ambulance, or in a classroom.

Flexibility by design keeps the system humane. Haredi recruits can defer until 21 or 22 to allow marriage and early family life, then serve shorter rotations or man local posts. Married soldiers and civilian servers receive increased stipends, daycare, and housing points identical to those earned by other veterans. Service should never punish parenthood.

Equality before the Court requires targets and transparency. When targets are missed, trigger reviews and proportional funding adjustments. Tie yeshiva budgets to verified attendance and service participation rates. No collective punishment, but no blank checks either.

Parallel to sticks come carrots. Equal pay and full veterans' benefits for both IDF and civilian service graduates. Technical or academic certifications built into service terms for the chance to emerge employable. Assignments inside or near Haredi towns wherever possible, so the service is visible, not theoretical. When a young man in Bnei Brak is seen staffing an ambulance or tutoring local students, the norm starts to shift. Respect replaces resentment.

The law also needs trust architecture. An independent Service Ombudsman's office—staffed by a retired judge, IDF representatives, and Haredi delegates—handles complaints and verifies compliance. A halachic advisory council audits both military and civilian operations. Annual Knesset review keeps the issue public and honest. Ten years in, the framework gets a mandatory reassessment to adapt to demographics and lessons learned.

Every prior law failed because it chose one at the expense of the others. This model forces all three to coexist. Haredim can serve without sin; the army gets manpower; the Court gets equality; and the state gains legitimacy it can defend.

Scenarios of Collapse or Cohesion

No reform of this scale survives wishful thinking. The law that balances equality, halacha, and politics will live or die by its execution. The system must be tested for stress, not just principle. The following are the five possible trajectories once the statute is passed—each defined by who obeys, who enforces, and who blinks first.

Let's start with where we are before the law can be drafted and enacted—and where mismanagement will bring us on this course:

SCENARIO ONE: BACKLASH AND NON-COMPLIANCE

The nightmare starts with public defiance. Hardline rabbis issue decrees of *yehareg ve'al ya'avor*—better to die than comply. Tens of thousands ignore call-ups. The police drag a few draft evaders to court. The cameras roll. Streets fill with black hats, smoke, and fury. Within days the state looks like it is criminalizing Judaism. Moderates recoil. Politicians retreat. The coalition buckles under rabbinic pressure and the next election becomes a referendum on religious war.

The fix is pre-emption, not reaction: build quiet partnerships with mid-level rabbis, start with summons not handcuffs, use bureaucratic levers—passport

suspensions, travel holds, benefit delays—before anyone is in cuffs. The goal is erosion, not confrontation. If even a minority of Haredi youth choose service voluntarily, the extremists are isolated, not canonized.

SCENARIO TWO: BUREAUCRATIC DRIFT

Laws fail in the file room before they fail in the court. The IDF drags its feet, opens two hundred slots instead of two thousand. The new civilian service authority becomes a budget line with no staff. The first wave of willing recruits shows up and finds nothing to do. Word spreads: the state isn't serious. Momentum dies. Fixes must be structural—mandated quotas, earmarked budgets, and a named senior officer responsible for Haredi integration who answers publicly for results. Without internal champions, inertia wins. The first two years decide whether “universal service” is a living institution or a PDF.

SCENARIO THREE: JUDICIAL CROSSFIRE

Petitions will fly from both flanks. Secular litigants will call any exemption unconstitutional. Haredi groups will claim coercion violates religious freedom.

The Court will weigh proportionality—does the law show measurable progress toward equality and real protection for conscience? If yes, it stands. If not, it falls like every predecessor.

The defense is data. The government must show enlistment rates rising and exemptions capped. Failing that, the justices will continue to write the law themselves.

SCENARIO FOUR: NORMALIZATION

The slow success story looks boring at first. The first year yields a few thousand civilian volunteers and a few hundred Haredi soldiers. They come home religious and proud. Families notice and the stigma fades.

A decade later, the “Torah-and-service” generation emerges—men who did their duty, kept their faith, and now have jobs. The rhetoric cools. The IDF gains manpower, the Haredi sector gains skills, and the national temperature drops.

Israel has seen harder cultural mergers; this one only needs time and proof that no one lost their soul in the process.

SCENARIO FIVE: POLITICAL REVERSAL

Coalitions change faster than cultures. A secular government might tighten the quotas; a hard-right one might gut them. Each would restart the cycle of legal challenge and social fatigue.

The only protection is consensus. Pass the law with opposition votes so that dismantling it costs political capital on both sides. International optics help—ending blanket exemptions strengthens Israel's democratic claims abroad and adds one more reason not to reverse course.

METRICS OF REALITY

Track participation rates, completion rates, complaints, satisfaction, and public sentiment. Publish them regularly. Success is in the headcount—how many serve, how many finish, and how many still refuse.

By nightfall the speeches will fade and the buses will return to Bnei Brak, Beit Shemesh, and Tel Aviv. Nothing will have changed—unless someone finally writes a law that ends the two-tier covenant Israel never voted for.

If the coalition wants legitimacy, pass a law that produces visible Haredi participation with halachic integrity.

If the Haredi leadership wants respect, tell your young men to choose a track and show up. The army will make room.

A Jewish state cannot survive by paying one class to pray and another to fight. Nor can it thrive by mocking faith as idleness. The bridge is there if we choose to build it: halachic integrity inside national service, Torah learning open to all who work, and benefits tied to duty, not birthright.

It's the state remembering what it was meant to be—a people that prays, studies, and defends, together.

This is not surrender to secularism. It is Torah values, lived *and* davened.

Protest if you must. Then serve.

The nation—both the State and *Am Yisrael*—will remember who helped when it was tired.

— **Uri Zehavi** · *Intelligence Editor, Israel Brief* With **Modi Zehavi** · *Data + Research Analyst*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Uriel Zehavi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · MITZPE INSTITUTE

Uriel Zehavi is the executive director of Mitzpe Institute, where he writes the daily Israel Brief and co-directs its Institutional Intelligence practice with Modi Zehavi. He is the author of four books from Mitzpe Press and advises Israeli and allied clients on strategic communications for Western audiences.



ABOUT MITZPE INSTITUTE

Mitzpe Institute is an intelligence and strategy organization focused on Israeli security, diaspora threat assessment, and the strategic challenges confronting the Jewish people and the West. We produce daily intelligence, forensic analyses, strategic assessments, and tactical briefings read by policymakers, military leaders, and institutional decision-makers across more than 90 countries and all 50 US states — from the Knesset and the US Congress to allied governments, major policy institutions, and Jewish organizational leadership worldwide.

PASSED ALONG TO YOU?

The daily Israel Brief is free at mitzpe.org. The operational layer — Closed Dossiers, Vantage, and Watchwords — is members-only. Become a member, gift a membership, or book a briefing at mitzpe.org.

Reader Edition · Free to share with attribution to Mitzpe Institute.