

## 50,000 With Foreign Passports: Who Is Fighting in Gaza With the Israeli Army?



On February 14, 2026, Western capitals aligned with Tel Aviv awoke to what was described as the largest information scandal in the history of Israel’s military establishment one that pulled back the curtain on what critics have called a hidden Western army operating within the ranks of the Israeli occupation forces.

According to data obtained by the Israeli rights group Hatzlacha (“Success”) following what it described as a “legal battle” to compel the army to release the information, figures published by the Hebrew-language daily Yedioth Ahronoth, along with the British outlets Declassified UK and AOA, revealed the scale of foreign nationals serving in the Israeli military.

This report examines the nationalities involved, the motivations behind their enlistment, their roles in the most recent assault on the Gaza Strip, and the legal frameworks governing foreign military service—as well as the extent to which their home countries have shielded them from accountability.

### How Widespread Are Dual Nationals in the Israeli Army?

According to data published by Yedioth Ahronoth, 50,632 soldiers serving in the Israeli army hold at least one foreign nationality in addition to Israeli citizenship.

The newspaper reported that 4,440 of them possess two foreign nationalities, while 162 hold three.

American passport holders constitute the largest contingent, followed by French, Russian, German, and Ukrainian nationals. More than a thousand others hold British, Romanian, Polish, Ethiopian, and Canadian citizenships, among others.

An accompanying infographic documents in detail the distribution of foreign nationalities among Israeli soldiers, as well as the number of dual and multiple nationals serving in its ranks.

### What Motivates Them to Join?

The motivations vary, but the outcome is the same: reinforcing Israel's military apparatus with fighters carrying foreign passports.

#### 1. Mandatory Israeli Conscription

Under Israel's Security Service Law, every "citizen"—including those residing abroad—is required to serve upon reaching the age of 18. The Israeli Embassy in London has stated that citizens living overseas must apply to clarify their military status at 16 years and four months of age. This means that individuals holding foreign passports who are registered as Israeli citizens are liable for service even if they live in New York or Paris.

#### 2. Ideological Settlement Immigration

Many young Jews, particularly from the United States, Latin America, and Europe, immigrate to Israel for ideological or religious reasons in a process known as aliyah. They often regard military service as integral to their Zionist identity. An opinion article in The Guardian noted that tens of thousands of Americans serve in the Israeli military as part of what it described as an "ideological system invested in occupation."

#### 3. Recruitment and Enlistment Programs

Programs such as Mahal and Tzofim Garin Tzabar enable young Jews from abroad to serve in the Israeli army for 18 months without acquiring Israeli citizenship. These tracks appeal to those who do not wish to settle permanently but want to take part in military service.

#### 4. Economic and Political Incentives

Republican lawmakers in the United States have advanced proposed legislation granting Americans who serve in the Israeli military the same benefits afforded to U.S. veterans. The proposal includes protections against property seizure and reduced loan interest rates, offering tangible incentives for participation.

#### 5. The "Lone Soldier" Phenomenon

The term refers to soldiers without immediate family in Israel. According to the Lone Soldier Center, more than 7,000 soldiers fall into this category, 45 percent of whom are new immigrants from Jewish communities worldwide. For many, the army provides a source of social belonging and financial stability.

What Has Been the Nature of Their Participation in Gaza?

Most dual nationals are assigned to ground combat units such as the Givati Brigade and the 401st Armored Brigade, taking part in raids on refugee camps and the destruction of residential neighborhoods. During the war on Gaza between 2023 and 2025, thousands of dual nationals were involved in documented violations:



British soldier Sam Sank filmed himself fighting in Gaza

British Units:

Declassified UK reported that 1,686 British nationals holding Israeli citizenship, along with 383 holding a third nationality, fought in the Israeli army during the assault. The outlet documented how some British soldiers were serving in what it described as “the craziest units” operating in Gaza.

Another report stated that British soldier Sam Sank filmed himself fighting in Gaza between December 2023 and January 2024. Another soldier, identified as Levy Simon, appeared in footage searching through the drawers of Palestinian women.

American Soldiers:

Reports indicate that 23,380 Americans serve in the Israeli military. The

Washington Post, cited by other reports, described American families expressing pride in their children's participation in the war, characterizing them as "more Israeli than Israelis."

#### French Soldiers:

French lawmaker Thomas Portes revealed that approximately 4,185 French or French-Israeli nationals are fighting in the Israeli army and called on the justice minister to open investigations and prosecute them for alleged war crimes. This group represents the second-largest foreign contingent after Americans.

#### How Have Their Other Countries Provided Cover?

##### United States:

Joining a foreign military is not criminalized under U.S. law unless it involves hostilities against Washington or is undertaken with the intent of renouncing American citizenship.

##### United Kingdom:

The Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 criminalizes service in the armed forces of a state at war with a country friendly to the United Kingdom. Some argue this could apply in the context of Palestinian statehood recognition. However, the law is rarely enforced and widely considered outdated.

##### France:

There is no explicit prohibition on foreign military service. Authorities generally rely on the principle of dual loyalty. Nevertheless, soldiers may face prosecution if evidence emerges that they committed war crimes.

##### Other Countries:

Some European states, including Belgium and the Netherlands, allow dual nationals to serve in the armed forces of their other country of citizenship, though they stipulate prosecution in cases involving war crimes.

#### Why Have They Not Been Held Accountable?

##### 1. Political Complicity

Israel enjoys sustained political and military backing from the United States, France, and Germany, making governments reluctant to pursue measures that could strain ties with a strategic ally. Even when evidence of foreign nationals' involvement in alleged war crimes surfaces, official responses have largely been limited to rhetorical condemnation.

##### 2. Legal Ambiguity

Certain laws, such as Britain's Foreign Enlistment Act, are antiquated and rarely applied, requiring complex procedures to enforce. In France, the absence of a

clear statutory ban allows prosecutors to avoid initiating cases.

### 3. Dual Loyalty

Western governments often view dual nationals as belonging to two states simultaneously, complicating questions of jurisdiction. Critics argue that this rationale has been used to avoid investigations, despite those countries' obligations under the Genocide Convention.

### 4. Pro-Israel Right-Wing Currents

In the United States, influential political currents strongly support Israel and have sought to legislate benefits for Americans serving in its military. These groups exert pressure on the Justice Department to refrain from prosecutions, portraying such individuals as “heroes fighting terrorism.”

### Conclusion

Taken together, the data suggest what amounts to an internationalized war effort: more than 50,000 soldiers holding foreign passports within the Israeli army implies that the campaign in Gaza has involved citizens of multiple nations, operating in full view of their governments. Critics contend that this widening circle of participation and silence extends responsibility beyond Israel itself to every capital that has provided political or legal cover.