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## **New Rewards for IDF “Spearhead Fighters” in Mandatory Military Service**

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In the IDF, "the "spearhead fighters" are soldiers in elite units and other fighters in units known as "maneuvering units" - among them, armored corps, combat engineering, and artillery - that maneuver across enemy lines. According to IDF statistics, there has been a slow but steady decline among new soldiers inducted for mandatory service in their willingness to serve in "maneuvering units."

Among the reasons for the decline are the increased interest by recruits to serve in other units and the army's consideration of the recruits' own wishes, as well as a “head-hunting” system that gives preference to other units. For example, many recruits prefer technology and intelligence units, which offer an advantage in employment after mandatory military service. There is also a preference for jobs as operators of rearguard advanced weapon systems (cyber, Iron Dome, and drones). In addition, many recruits have the option of serving in units considered less demanding than “spearhead” combat units, such as routine security units, air defense, and the home front command. At the same time, there is a high demand for challenging service in elite units, which carefully select their recruits. All these affect the ability to recruit suitable personnel for maneuvering units.

In an effort to address the problem, the IDF decided to offer greater compensation to the “spearhead fighters.” Under a new plan, these soldiers will receive benefits that include an increase in allowance (a fixed monthly payment for personal use) in the third year of service to about NIS 2,000, compared to the current NIS 1,600; a credit card voucher for NIS 1,000, for entertainment and sportswear; a voucher for a psychometric exam preparation course (for admission to universities) and more. The estimated cost of the plan will be tens of millions of NIS each year. In addition, there is now a special track for soldiers in elite units, including (in addition to mandatory service) three-year service in the army and two years of study. As a result of the additional service, fewer soldiers will

be recruited to these units in each cycle, which could also contribute to enlarging the recruitment pool for the maneuvering units.

In recent years the welfare of the conscripts has improved, largely thanks to the increase in the allowance, which has risen by 50 percent since the start of 2016; the allowance for fighters rose from NIS 1,077 to NIS 1,616 a month, for combat support soldiers from NIS 784 to NIS 1,176, and for others from NIS 540 to NIS 810. The annual cost of this move is estimated at NIS 600 million. The increase in the allowance eases conditions for serving soldiers and their families that support them. After discharge from compulsory service, soldiers are also entitled to a grant and a deferred bonus to be collected in the years following the military service. A fighter receives a grant of NIS 19,646 and a deferred bonus of NIS 28,414 (based on 36 months of service); a combat support soldier receives a grant of NIS 16,802 and a deferred bonus of NIS 24,317; and the rest receive a grant of NIS 13,578 and a deferred bonus of NIS 19,671. Clearly, the main motive for combat service is national values-based and is not financial. In addition, starting with recruits of June 2015, IDF service for men has been reduced from 36 to 32 months, which reduces the military service burden.

According to Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, the new plan is a values-based statement about the importance of the fighters to the IDF, and particularly the "spearhead fighters." However, words alone are not enough, and therefore "we have taken steps to convey the IDF's appreciation of its fighters." The Chief of Staff added that technology and intelligence are very important, but "the fighters are the most important element for carrying out IDF missions and achieving the objectives."

A list of definitions and grades for IDF soldiers was issued to explain the benefits schedule. This is likely a significant indication of how personnel are sorted for recruitment, training, and force building needs.

- a. "Spearhead fighter": a soldier trained to operate in "the contact operations space," to strike the enemy through maneuvers, while risking his life.
- b. Fighter: a soldier trained to operate using weaponry in "the contact operations space" to strike the enemy, either directly or as part of a team, while risking his life.
- c. Operational combat support soldiers: a soldier trained to operate in "the contact operations space," while risking his life, in auxiliary roles of command and control, intelligence, and administration.
- d. Combat support soldiers: soldiers in all jobs who do not risk their lives as defined above.
- e. Rear soldier: a soldier in a unit that is not intended for action in the "operations space"; sometimes, for defined periods of time, they are required to operate in the "contact operations space," which involves risking their lives.

This list shows that the traditional division into three categories – fighters, combat support, and other (rear) is insufficient. The new list has five categories, with two of the traditional categories split. The "fighters" category distinguishes between "spearhead fighters" and other fighters. The "spearhead fighters" are the forces intended to cross the contact line and maneuver within enemy territory, as distinct from other fighters who are mainly intended to operate against the enemy in other ways, such as routine security. The traditional category of combat support has also been split into operational combat support and other combat support.

The most striking criterion in this list is risking one's life in combat. This is an essential criterion for defining a combat soldier. Cyber and technology soldiers in the rear can make a huge contribution to victory, but their tasks do not involve high risk to their own lives. However, the wording shows that the army has not dismissed the possible risk to life from any level, including rear soldiers.

Referring to the new plan, Maj. Gen. (res.) Orna Barbivai, formerly head of the Manpower Directorate, said in an interview that the decisions were essential, in view of the competition and even struggle between the ethos of combat and the ethos of technology. However, as she saw it, in this process there are two main risks. One is the risk of damaging other important units by re-grading, including the risk that soldiers in routine security tasks will feel discriminated compared to "spearhead fighters." For example, a fighter from the Karakal Regiment might storm armed terrorists while risking her life, while some "spearhead fighters" will go through their whole mandatory service without experiencing battle maneuvers. The most significant risk, as Barbivai sees it, is of "losing the value (of the mandatory military service) while improving benefits, because any norm accepted today will be the basis for the next increment, until people start asking, so why not a minimum wage...When you give these benefits and extras, you must show that the value of the mission is not affected; after all, in the past fighters did not go into battle because they got another shekel (NIS) and a half. We must be careful not to stumble here; we must not let the narrative be economic." Contrasting opinions suggested that there is no such risk here, and the state should increase the living allowance during mandatory service to the minimum wage.

Thus, erosion of the status of fighters in maneuvering forces and the decrease in motivation to enlist in these units led the IDF to increase the material rewards, due to the need to reinforce the maneuvering forces and show appreciation to "spearhead fighters" who risk their lives most; and in view of the understanding that in Israeli society today, appreciation cannot be expressed in statements only. In this framework, the army has re-graded the roles of conscript soldiers, where the motif of risking one's life in warfare has

become the chief distinguishing element. As such, the army is also distinguishing between soldiers who operate weapons from the rear, including cyber weapons, and combat soldiers who risk their lives, and above all the "spearhead fighters." Rewards for soldiers are also important in view of the large gaps in the burden of military service and the nature of the service, including the delegitimization of the IDF by some sections of the population. Yet the importance of the rewards is not enough in order to improve significantly the recruitment for the maneuvering units due to the preference for other units, which in turn reduces the pool of suitable recruits for the combat units.

Therefore, the following is recommended:

- a. Continue the trend of improving the material rewards for mandatory military service soldiers, with the emphasis on combat soldiers. "Values" should not be an obstacle to increased material rewards for combat soldiers.
- b. Set up a framework for exceptions on the subject of soldiers' status, for example to respond to a gap that may emerge between the definition of a job and its actual demands in terms of danger level.
- c. Review the priorities in the process of sorting recruits in the army, so that locating suitable soldiers for combat units is not greatly affected by other systems that have early application mechanisms.
- d. Improve the image of the maneuvering units, with the emphasis on units that have a relatively poor image in the eyes of recruits.