

ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF)

Formed out of the ashes of the Holocaust when more than six million Jews were murdered, the State of Israel dedicated itself to the ideal of Jewish defense and security for the future. The [Israel Defense Forces](#) (IDF), or *Tzahal* in Hebrew, is the actualization of this ideal.

The IDF is comprised of the [Army](#), [Air Force](#), and [Navy](#) and today ranks among the world's most battle-tested and well-trained armed forces. Since its founding in 1948, the IDF has fought in ten wars or extended conflicts and has taken part in some of the most daring missions in the history of modern warfare.

The IDF mission statement is, "To defend the existence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the State of Israel."

History & Founding

Before the official establishment of Israel in 1948, there were a number of Jewish armed organizations that [operated in defense of the land](#).

The main organizations were the [Haganah](#) and its commando-strike forces called the [Palmach](#), which answered to the elected leadership of the [Yishuv](#). Other armed defense groups, namely the [Lehi](#) ("Fighters for the Freedom of Israel", also known as the Stern Gang) and the [IZL](#) (Etzel or "National Military Organization") operated independently. These organizations were often at odds with the political leadership of the Yishuv and their actions, sometimes described as terrorism, were regularly condemned by [David Ben-Gurion](#) and other leaders.

It was only natural that when Israel's independence was declared the new government would establish a single, unified armed force. Thus, on May 28, 1948, the Provisional Government of Israel issued [Defense Army of Israel Ordinance No. 4](#) signed by Prime Minister [Ben-Gurion](#), established the Israel Defense Forces.

The IDF was comprised of the Haganah (in particular, its operational branch, the Palmach) and former elements of the [Jewish Brigade](#) that fought under the [British](#) flag during [World War II](#).

After the establishment of the IDF, the two Jewish underground organizations, the Etzel and Lehi, joined the defense forces in a loose confederation, but were allowed to operate independently in some sectors until the end of the [War of Independence](#), after which the organizations were disbanded and their members integrated on an individual basis into the IDF.

Principles, Ethical & Moral Codes

The [Spirit of the IDF](#) is the code of the values of the [IDF](#) and stand as the foundation of all of the activities of every IDF soldier.

These guidelines of operation are the ethical code of the IDF and the expression of the identity, values and norms of the IDF. They are applied by every soldier, officer, unit and corps to shape their mode of action.

The Spirit of the IDF is based on three fundamental values: **Defense of the State, its Citizens and Residents; Patriotism and Loyalty to the State;** and, **Human Dignity**. Soldiers are therefore obligated to protect human life and dignity, valuing every individual regardless of origin, religion, nationality, gender, status or position while also protecting Israel from any and all threats to its existence.

Under this [Ethical Code](#), it is Israel's policy to only use force of arms for the purpose of subduing the enemy to the necessary extent. In times of both war and peace, servicemen exercise purity of arms and use force for the purpose of achieving their mission, without inflicting unnecessary injury to human life or limb; dignity or property, of both soldiers and civilians, with special consideration for the defenseless.

National Military Service

All Jewish, Israeli citizens are conscripted for service into the IDF at the age of 18, men serving for a minimum of three years and women for 21 months. Special deferments to this law may be granted to outstanding students, citizens from the [Haredi](#) (ultra-Orthodox) community, those with medical deficiencies or those with heightened professional skills such as musical talent or sports ability. New [immigrants](#) may also be deferred from service or serve for shorter periods of time depending on their age and personal status on entering the country.

The percentage of draftees requesting to join combat units in the [ground and infantry forces](#) has risen dramatically over the last decade after a falloff during the extended period of the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon during the 1980's and 1990's.

Following their regular service, men may be called for reserve service of up to one month annually, until the age of 43-45 (reservists may volunteer after this age), and may be called at any time of crisis for emergency active duty. In most cases, reserve duty is carried out in the same unit one served with in active duty.

[Druze](#) Arabs and [Circassians](#), like Israeli Jews, are required to serve in the IDF. In recent years, some Druze officers have reached positions in the IDF as high as Major General and many have received orders of distinction. Unlike the United States Army, homosexuals are allowed to openly serve in the military.

Service is not mandatory for all other Israeli minorities (notably [Israeli Arabs](#) but also [Black Hebrews](#) and others). However, a large number of [Bedouin](#), as well as some Christian Arabs and even a few Muslim Arabs, volunteer. Six Israeli Arabs have received orders of distinction as a part of their military service.

Women in the IDF

As opposed to every other nation around the world, in Israel women are conscripted into military service alongside the men.

Except for their service in the [War of Independence](#) (when all able bodied individuals were needed to fight), however, were not allowed to serve in combat units in the IDF until 1994. That year, under appeal by a female immigrant from South Africa, the High Court ruled that some combat roles be open to female soldiers. In 2000, the Equality amendment to the Military Service law stated that the right of women to serve in any role in the IDF is equal to the right of men.

Since then the number of women serving in all sorts of combat roles, from the artillery and infantry corps to naval and air forces, has skyrocketed.

Today 90% of all military positions in the IDF are available to women . Some specialized units, such as Karakal, a unisex combat unit, and the elite canine unit, Oketz, are open to women. Various positions in the artillery and armored divisions are also tasked by women. Women also serve in the Sachlav unit of the Military Police, the Samag unit of the Border Police, and the Yasam special patrol unit of the Israeli police.

In 2001, the [Air Force](#) graduated its [first ever female combat fighter pilot](#), Lt. Roni Zuckerman. Four years later, in 2005, a [second female passed the intensive fighter pilot course](#) and two other female soldiers graduated to serve as transport pilots. During the [Second Lebanon War](#) in 2006, female helicopter pilots took part in field missions alongside their male counterparts.

In October 2011, 27 female combat soldiers completed the IDF Ground Forces Officers Training Course along with 369 male soldiers and were promoted to the rank of second lieutenant. The new female officers serve in a wide range of combat units from artillery to Caracal and tanks.

In December 2011, the 163rd graduation ceremony of the [Israeli Air Force](#) Flight Academy saw five female pilots complete the arduous and elite program.

Technological Prowess

The [IDF](#) is one of the most high-tech armies in the world, possessing top-of-the-line weapons and computer systems. The development of a sophisticated defense industry has also led to a great deal of exports, which today account for a majority of Israel's revenues and allows the country's defense industry to compete against some of the largest companies in the world.

The [Israeli security industry](#) maintains a very high reputation for its guns, armored fighting vehicles (tanks, tank-converted APCs, armoured bulldozers etc) and rocketry (missiles and rockets). The Air Force is considered one of the world's best, with American-made [F-15 Eagles](#), F-16 Fighting Falcons, and [Apache helicopters](#). Israel also designs and in some cases manufactures, aircraft (Kfir, Lavi) and naval systems (patrol and missile ships). Much of the IDF's electronic systems (intelligence, communication, command and control, navigation etc.) are also Israeli-developed.



The Israeli government-owned [defense industries](#) include world-renowned companies such as Israel Military Industries (IMI), Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), and the Rafael Arms Development Authority. Rafael has become a world leader in such varied categories as passive armor, naval decoys, observation balloon systems, acoustic torpedo countermeasures, ceramic armor, air-breathing propulsion, and air-to-air, air-to-surface and surface-to-surface missiles.

Currently, Israel is the only country in the world with an anti-ballistic missile defense system (the [Arrow](#)) and the only country to have operational success with anti-missile systems (the [Iron Dome](#)). Israel is also working with the United States on developing a tactical high energy laser system against medium range rockets (called Nautilus THEL).

Israel can launch reconnaissance satellites into orbit, a capability shared only by [Russia](#), the United States, the [United Kingdom](#), [France](#), [China](#), [India](#), and [Japan](#). Both the satellites ([Ofeq](#)) and the launchers (Shavit) were developed by the Israeli security industries.

Israel is also thought to have a [nuclear capability](#), although the Israeli government has never confirmed this. The Federation of American Scientists estimates that Israel probably has 100-200 nuclear warheads, which can be delivered by airplanes or ballistic missiles. The Jericho II missile is reported to have a range between 1,500 and 4,000 km, and therefore can target sites as far away as central Russia, [Iran](#) and [Libya](#).