

# Religious Zionism under ugly attack

written by David M. Weinberg | 14.02.2026

Anybody reading the secular or haredi press in recent months knows that the Religious Zionist sector is under attack from opposing sides of the political spectrum. Anybody reading the religious and right-wing press in recent months knows that the Religious Zionist sector is tearing itself apart too.

The issue at hand is the draft exemption law for the haredi world being debated in Knesset. Obviously, the broad Religious Zionist public and political and rabbinic figures associated with it are broadly supportive of efforts to draw haredi men into national and military service.

The debate is over how demanding to be in drafting haredi men – how fierce a draft law to pass (or how weak a draft exemption law to pass) – and whether to risk the current and future nationalist-haredi coalition governments over this matter.

I have a strong opinion in this regard – in favor of forcing real societal change through tough sanctions on the haredi world which refuses to participate in the privilege of national security service – although I understand those who fear the shattering of the political right wing if haredi leaders are pushed harder.

What I cannot tolerate is the demonizing of the Religious Zionist public in this debate – especially the savaging of brave Religious Zionist women, wives and mothers of courageous soldiers – who have led campaigns for the passage of an effective and enforceable haredi draft law.

UNDERSTAND: No sector in Israeli society has “carried the burden” of the past two years of war with more devoted military service, and alas with more casualties, than the Religious Zionist sector.

This assessment was borne-out in a first-of-its kind detailed academic study published last month. Writing in *The Israel Journal of Society, Military, and National Security* (published by the *Maarachot* thinktank of the Ministry of Defense together with The Association of Civil-Military Studies in Israel), Dr. Roe

Naon and Prof. Uzi Ben-Shalom assert that the Religious Zionist sector suffered four times the losses of any other sector in Israel.

The authors studied the conscript and reserve units serving in “Swords of Iron” as well as the injured and fallen soldier rolls. They found that 257 fallen soldiers, equaling 34% of all soldiers killed in the war, were religious Israelis; way beyond the less-than-ten percent of the overall public that identifies as “dati” (religious or Religious Zionist). Again, the losses among the religious soldiers are four times larger than the size of this community within the broad Israeli public, and 2.5 times larger than the size of this community in relation to men of draft age.

Among reserve soldiers, religious men are a whopping 45 percent of the casualties in this war. They are 29 percent of the casualties among soldiers in the standing army, and 27 percent of the casualties in the professional army ranks.

Among junior officers in the military, religious soldiers are 43 percent of the fallen. Among NCOs, religious soldiers are 41 percent of the fallen. Among noncommissioned foot soldiers, religious soldiers are 30 percent of the fallen.

In the corps most implicated in frontline, heavy combat – engineering, armored, and infantry corps – more than one-third of the fallen are religious soldiers. And a preponderance of all these fallen religious soldiers hail from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and peripheral towns in Israel – where many religious Jews live – and they also come from the lower socioeconomic strata of Israeli society.

In summary, the authors of the study note the high degree of ideological, communal, familial, and national commitment of the Religious Zionist sector to military defense of Israel, and the great emphasis on “national unity” and the “privilege” of serving the country that marks this sector. All of which leads to a disproportionate share of the fallen and wounded soldiers borne by this sector of Israeli society.

What Naon and Ben-Shalom have not yet studied is the large families that these religious soldiers often have, especially the families of reservists, and the deep, disrupting, and traumatizing impact that long military service, injury, and death has had on many, many, many religious families.

THIS HEROIC yet bone-chilling reality makes the current attacks on Religious Zionists all the more ugly.

It is bad enough that some radical secular leftists accuse Religious Zionists of uber-nationalism (calling them “messianist” or “bloodthirsty”), while the defeatist policies of the Left ever since Oslo have led Israel to disaster. And it is bad enough that haredi leaders accuse Religious Zionists of “abandoning Torah values,” while haredi indifference to the suffering and national burden of all other Israelis is the very opposite of Torah values.

But it is outrageous and infuriating to witness the savage attacks on brave women like Noa Mevorah and Shvut Raanan of *Shutafim LaSheirut* – Partners in Service: Religious Women in Favor of IDF Service. They are being called “traitors” and “useful idiots of the Left” for their outspoken, principled advocacy of strong haredi draft legislation.

These are women whose husbands and sons have collectively served thousands of days of tough military duty, and they have every right to demand a sea change in the “contract” between the serving Israeli public and the mostly non-serving haredi public. And they are right to do so.

They are now facing an avalanche of delegitimizing ads and digital posts across a broad swath of right-wing and religious newspapers (like *BaSheva*), magazines circulated in synagogues (like *Olam Katan* and dozens of haredi zines), and broadcast platforms like Channel 14.

The attacks have broadened to include assaults on all religious women who do “only” national service and on religious men who do “only” *hesder* service (truncated army combat duty combined with yeshiva study, but very long and intensive years of frontline reserve duty).

Alas, the unifying theme behind these attacks seems to be slavish devotion to the principle “thou shalt not harm Netanyahu’s coalition,” while downplaying the overarching moral demand for equalizing military service responsibilities at the historic inflexion point now before Israeli society.

Unfortunately, a *hardali* coalition of 40 rabbis (community rabbis and yeshiva deans within Religious Zionism that tend toward haredi ideology and religious practice) this week joined the fracas against *Shutafim LaSheirut* and in support of Religious Zionist Party Leader Betzael Smotrich – who is leaning toward adoption of the current draft evasion law concocted by Knesset Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee chairman Boaz Bismuth.

They bury the real ideological and political questions of the day under a blanket of smarmy niceties about “brotherly love” for the haredi public. They glibly term opposition to draft-evasion legislation as a “trap” caused by “troublemakers” meant to bring down the current right-wing government.

They furthermore make the nonsense assertion that the proposed legislation will indeed help to draft many haredi soldiers – “three times as many haredi soldiers.” (Three times what? The current number of near-zero?!)

And in a further insult to our intelligence, these rabbis aver that the Bismuth bill will “ease the burden on reservists,” including, supposedly, the many Religious Zionist reservists whose communities they helm. Except that even the most ardent advocates of the bill do not make this ridiculous claim. (It will take decades of effective haredi draft until a mass of combat soldiers is sufficiently absorbed and trained leading a to real easing of the reservist burden.)

As a deeply believing Religious Zionist myself, even an unabashed “messianist,” I too seek brotherly love and unity, but not at the expense of ideological distortions, false narratives, and malicious defamation.

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