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Hamza Yusuf

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## British-Israeli Soldiers in the War-Crimes Zone

U.K. nationals are fighting on the frontline in Gaza, helping Israel’s military enforce its “total siege” over millions of Palestinians, writes Hamza Yusuf.



Israel forces operating in the eastern neighborhood of Rafah in Gaza, May 8 May 2024. (IDF, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

British nationals are serving in some of Israel’s “craziest” combat units in Gaza where they view Palestinian fighters as “rats” and “animals”.

The soldiers have pledged to “kill these sons of whores” and “start pummelling them again.”

*Declassified* has gathered names and photographs of 15 Britons who have recently fought for Israel, and has partially identified another 10.

They are among at least 80 U.K. nationals who the Foreign Office knows to have enlisted in the IDF but is doing nothing to stop.

One of the soldiers, master sergeant Sam Sank, filmed himself fighting in Gaza between December 2023 and January 2024.

*Declassified* showed the footage to open source intelligence analyst Alysia Alexandra who located the neighbourhood where it was taken.

The tape puts Sank in the Gazan border settlement of Khuza'a while it was being flattened by the IDF during his two-month tour.

Israel's top human rights group, B'Tselem, has described the IDF's operation to create a buffer zone in Khuza'a throughout that period as a "war crime".

"The military demolished the entire town, including residential buildings and mosques," B'Tselem said, warning that the level of destruction was disproportionate and "violates a basic principle of international humanitarian law."

Sank filmed a neighbourhood being demolished in Khuza'a while his unit laughed and cheered.

The Londoner told a journalist: "Israeli soldiers were killed at that specific spot, so after weeks of fighting, we were able to locate the tunnel entrances."

Sank said his men felt "a sense of achievement" watching the demolition, "knowing that we had killed Hamas terrorists that were still hiding underneath."

### **'Death Zone'**

However footage taken by other soldiers from the same location shows vast controlled explosions occurred in that area on two or three more occasions.

In those videos, traced by Bellingcat, soldiers smoke shisha, light a cigarette and pose for the camera during the demolitions.

"We've become addicted to explosions," a captain involved in the clearances wrote on Facebook.

His post indicates the operation in Khuza'a was a punitive campaign designed to annex territory and "destroy the village of the murderers."

Sam Sank filmed a demolition in Khuza'a (top left), a town that was repeatedly blown up.

Khuza'a is opposite the Israeli kibbutz of Nir Oz where around 20 residents were killed on Oct. 7.

The IDF's retaliation has destroyed nearly 200 homes in Khuza'a, according to *The New York Times*.

Satellite images analysed by the Associated Press show "significant destruction" to six square kilometres of Khuza'a.

After leaving Gaza in late January, Sank told *The Times* of London: "I don't feel guilty about anything I did. There wasn't anything I did that was immoral".

Sank scorned the six day ceasefire in November 2023, writing on his blog: "We cannot trust these animals and it's time to start pummelling them again."

Describing his time in Gaza, he said humanitarian aid was "compromised" and "only extends the time that these rats can stay hidden underground."

Although Sank claims not to have killed people, he admitted "anyone caught in our sights was neutralised in what is effectively a death zone."

*[The PBS NewsHour got ratioed in 181 replies by X users for its report on Sank's video diaries, calling it a "rare glimpse" into the war in Gaza.]*

Sank, born and raised in Stanmore, north west London, did not respond to a request for comment from *Declassified*.

Last month he retweeted a post that said he was "involved in the genocide against Palestine."

Sank moved to Israel in 2009 aged 18 and joined a paratrooper unit.

As an IDF reservist, he was among "hundreds of dual-nationality Britons" that Israel called up to fight Hamas after October 7.

Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson met Sank and eight other British-Israeli fighters last November at the Lone Soldier Center in Jerusalem, where he praised them.



Johnson with Israel President Isaac Herzog in London, November 2021. (Andrew Parsons / No 10 Downing Street, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

### **Lone Soldiers**

While the rest of that group remain unidentified, social media posts by the Lone Soldier Center shed light on other British expats fighting for Israel.

This April, its Instagram account celebrated a young woman from Manchester, Hani Volker, fulfilling “her dream” of joining the IDF.

The post claimed she is a combat engineering instructor, having emigrated to Israel last July.

The term “lone soldier” refers to IDF members without family in Israel, often because they have volunteered from abroad.

They include Daniel Menczer from England who underwent “gruelling patrol training”.

Menczer appeared on TikTok in November 2023 wearing an IDF uniform and talking about his service in the Golani brigade:

“All my friends are now in Gaza and train all day and haven’t seen home for a month and a half, but still we are strong, we are Golanchiks, we are the craziest there is.”

He added: “And although we’ve lost a lot of people, our morale is high and we’re really strong together.”

Another organisation promoting foreign enlistment in the IDF is Garin Tzabar, which is part-funded by Israel’s government.

The group, which has an office in Finchley, publicised the recruitment of Londoner Gabriel Knopf in a Facebook post two years ago.

Knopf, who studied at the Jewish Free School (JFS) in Harrow, told *The Jewish Chronicle*: “I moved to Israel with five words of Hebrew and I got an award for being an excellent soldier.”

He served in the navy’s “hornet squadron” on “adrenaline-fuelled” patrols around Gaza, implementing Israel’s illegal blockade.

Knopf left the IDF sometime in October, according to his LinkedIn account, making it unclear whether he took part in the latest assault on Gaza.

This March, Garin Tzabar posted on Instagram about the drafting of another Londoner, believed to be Noam Shelley, into the Israeli special forces unit Sayeret Nahal.

It said he had “proudly followed in his father’s footsteps.” Footage from Gaza shows the unit stripping Palestinian captives.

### **‘Graveyard for Children’**



U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres on Dec. 8, 2023, as the Security Council met on a letter he had written invoking Article 99 of the U.N. Charter, asking the council to act on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. (UN Photo/Loey Felipe)

British nationals who fought in Gaza over the last eight months could be accused of complicity in war crimes.

Beyond Sank's specific deployment to Khuza'a, the IDF is enforcing a siege of Gaza, severely limiting the supply of essential humanitarian aid to its civilian population.

As early as November, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned "Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children. Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed or injured every day."

The International Court of Justice began investigating Israel for genocide in January and last month the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor demanded arrest warrants for prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and defence minister Yoav Gallant.

ICC prosecutor Karim Khan said:

"Israel has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival.

This occurred through the imposition of a total siege over Gaza...arbitrarily restricting the transfer of essential supplies – including food and medicine.

This took place alongside other attacks on civilians, including those queuing for food; obstruction of aid delivery by humanitarian agencies; and attacks on and killing of aid workers, which forced many agencies to cease or limit their operations in Gaza.

These acts were committed as part of a common plan to use starvation as a method of war...[to] collectively punish the civilian population of Gaza".



International Criminal Court, The Hague in The Netherlands, 2017. (jbdodane, Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0)

IDF troops are integral to enforcing the cordon inside Gaza, arguably making them complicit in the siege.

Paul Heron, legal director at the Public Interest Law Centre, commented:

“What this report by *Declassified UK* clearly highlights is that units and battalions of the Israeli Defence Forces have been involved in war crimes, breaches of international human rights and international humanitarian law.

It is disturbing to note that many British nationals have not only volunteered for the IDF, but have been actively serving in Gaza and are clearly suspected of being involved in combat operations that have led to war crimes being committed. It is not right. They cannot act with impunity.

Any UK nationals credibly involved in war crimes in Gaza should be held to account and should face prosecution. Alongside our partners we will be looking closely at this report, and other information with a view to take legal action.”

*[Do you have information to share about British nationals serving in the IDF? Contact by email: [Tips@DeclassifiedUK.org](mailto:Tips@DeclassifiedUK.org) or on Signal – username *Declassified\_editor.41*]*

### **‘Sons of Whores’**

Certain soldiers may find themselves of particular interest to prosecutors. This March a video surfaced of Oren Anish wearing combat fatigues.

On the tape, the young IDF soldier said he was from England and had been in Gaza for 74 days. Anish unambiguously vowed to “kill these sons of whores.”

His parents are originally from Cambridgeshire and appear to have moved the family to Israel when he was a child.

Other expats in the IDF have already returned to Britain after fighting in Gaza late last year.



They include Levi Simon, whose Instagram posts were found by *Middle East Eye* and showed him “rummaging through the underwear drawers of Palestinian women forced to flee their homes.”

In another post, Levi said he was “Inside of Gaza, waving an Israeli flag, in one of those schools where they teach terrorism, so it’s time to teach something about Israel.”

He added: “We’re here, here to stay. Not going anywhere, not going to take your terror, and we’re going to start teaching Hebrew here soon.”

Simon was invited to speak as a “special star guest” at a Jewish children’s charity in London this January, but pulled out amid protests.

Another returning soldier to face public scrutiny is Rabbi Zecharia Deutsch, a chaplain at Leeds University.



Leeds University’s Ziff Building, which houses student services as of 2008. (Chemical Engineer, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)

He left Yorkshire for Israel last autumn to serve as a reservist in the IDF. One video shared on Whatsapp showed him dancing with other soldiers.

Deutsch has since resumed work at the university, where lecturers complained his “presence on campus is untenable.”

### **Friends in High Places**

However several Britons serving in the IDF have received uncritical media coverage and even backing from senior politicians.

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar, a former Conservative justice minister, told Parliament in October that his son, believed to be Sam Wolfson, “has now made his life in Israel” and was serving in the IDF.

A LinkedIn profile matching his description states he left Haberdashers' Boys' School in London three years ago.

The right-wing press has gained access to other British IDF members, giving them favourable coverage.

*The Times* spoke to a 30-year-old man from north west London, who asked to be identified only as 'Joe'.

The Chelsea season-ticket holder is a reservist paratrooper who was deployed along the border with Lebanon in October.

He is a veteran of Israel's bombardment of Gaza in 2014, which killed thousands of Palestinians.

*The Daily Mail* published a glowing profile of 'Tamara', a 20-year-old tank commander from Hendon, calling her one of the 'Lionesses of the Desert'.

Tamara has been in the Israeli army for approximately two years and said fighting in Gaza was a "dream come true"

She is part of the all female Caracal Battalion, which was reportedly called up for a "special classified operation" inside Gaza after the ceasefire ended.



Caracal winter training in 2007. (IDF, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0)

### **'This Is My Country'**

In the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7, at least 100 IDF veterans in Britain rushed back to Israel, according to its embassy in London.

Although not all were U.K. nationals, some certainly were. Father of three, Alex Moeller, told Sky News on Oct. 10 that he was returning to Israel to fight.

Moriah Menczer, 21, was another British-Israeli veteran who volunteered for action, having recently completed her compulsory army duty.



Menczer joined an IDF surveillance unit, telling *The Daily Mail*: “as much as I feel British, I feel Israeli and this is my country.”

Some British expats have lost their lives fighting for Israel. Nathaniel Young, a 20-year-old Londoner and a former JFS pupil, was serving in the IDF’s 13th Battalion near Gaza when he was killed in action by Hamas on Oct. 7.

Similarly, 19-year-old sergeant Binyamin Needham, from the 601st Battalion of the Combat Engineering Corps, was killed in Gaza in December. He had moved from London to Israel with his parents when he was aged 8.

Others have been embroiled in controversy. Corporal Lian Harush was a 22-year-old lone soldier when she was allegedly attacked by a 17-year-old Palestinian boy, Attallah Mohammad Harb Rayan in 2021.

Harush claims Rayan approached her with a knife while she guarded a junction near an Israeli settlement in the illegally occupied West Bank.

Rayan was subsequently shot dead by Harush’s commander, earning the pair praise from Israel’s then president.

Harush’s parents said they were “endlessly proud” of their daughter, calling her a “role model” who had “not given up on Zionism.”

A human rights group, Defense for Children International, expressed concern at the circumstances of Rayan’s death, saying: “Israeli forces frequently resort to lethal force in circumstances not justified by international law.”

Despite British IDF members often finding themselves in lethal situations, there appears to be no shortage of volunteers.

Charlotte Feld-Davidovici, from Willesden Green, was celebrated in 2018 as one of Israel’s first ever tank commanders. A former pupil at JFS, she moved to Israel aged 18.

A *Jewish Chronicle* article also identifies her brother Greg, who served for two years as a paratrooper in the Israeli military.

Greg said their grandfather’s “passionate Zionism” had inspired them to join the IDF.

“He loved Israel...He always put it first, in any way he could, and that’s the values he passed on to my sister and me.”

**‘Legitimate Right’**



Anne-Marie Trevelyan, while secretary of state for international development, in 2020. (Pippa Fowles / No 10 Downing Street)

The scale of involvement by British nationals in besieging Gaza seems not to concern the U.K. government. In fact, it has effectively greenlit their service.

Conservative Anne-Marie Trevelyan, minister of state for Indo-Pacific, told Parliament:

“The U.K. recognises the right of British nationals with additional nationalities to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of the country of their other nationalities.

The Israel Defence Force is a recognised armed force and British nationals are both able to volunteer into the Israel Defence Force and eligible for national service.”

She added: “For Israel, one does not have to be Israeli to serve in the Israel Defence Force.”

In 2021, the U.K. embassy in Israel said “it was a pleasure to welcome British Lone Soldiers” from the IDF onboard a Royal Navy frigate that was visiting the country.

However, former Conservative party chairwoman, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, has called for British citizens to be prosecuted if they join the IDF.

Warsi believes Britain is guilty of double standards by criminalising Muslims who become foreign fighters, while allowing British Jews to join the IDF.

“Belonging to Britain for Muslims is a thing we talk about a lot,” she told *Middle East Eye*.

“We don’t talk about it in relation to other communities. We accept that other communities hold multiple identities. Let’s just shut down this loophole. If you don’t fight for Britain, you do not fight.”

**Hamza Yusuf is a British-Palestinian writer and journalist whose work focuses on Palestine. He has reported on daily life under occupation for Palestinians including home demolitions and forced expulsion and the conditions for Palestinians in Israeli prisons. He has also extensively covered the British political establishment’s legislation and policies towards Palestine. He has also contributed to *Tribune Magazine*, *Jacobin*, *+972 Magazine* and *New Internationalist*.**

*This article is from Declassified UK.*

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**By Hamza**

**Yusuf**

*Declassified UK*