



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 16, 2009

Military to Accept Temporary Immigrants

According to reports about the program, not all immigrants will be eligible. For example, only people who have been in the United States for over two years without having left for more than 90 days can join. For the first year of the program, there will be a thousand enlistees from fields such as medical care, language interpretation, and intelligence analysis. Citing the expectations of recruiters, the *New York Times* wrote, "The temporary immigrants will have more education, foreign language skills and professional expertise than many Americans who enlist, helping the military to fill shortages."



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In the article, entitled "U.S. Military Will Offer Path to Citizenship," Pentagon officials are said to be anticipating that the Army could eventually receive almost 15,000 of these recruits per year, or one in six of the overall total. "The American Army finds itself in a lot of different countries where cultural awareness is critical," said Lt. Gen. Benjamin C. Freakley, the chief recruiting officer for the Army. "There will be some very talented folks in this group.... The army will gain in its strength in human capital, and the immigrants will gain their citizenship and get on a ramp to the American dream."

Specifically, the military is looking for people who speak one or more of 35 languages. Among them are languages such as Arab, Chinese, Tamil, Pashto, Hindi, Kurdish, and even one spoken in parts of Nigeria called Igbo. They will have to agree to serve four years of active duty. The pilot program, which is set to begin in a few days, is also seeking about 300 volunteers in the medical field. To be eligible, they will either have to serve three years of active duty or six years in the reserves, according to the *Times*. In addition to these specific skills the recruits must pass an English test. If selected they can apply for citizenship on their first day of service.

Though recruiters say their work has become easier since the downturn in the economy, extensive and growing U.S. military commitments around the globe require more people. Barack Obama has pledged to increase the size of the Army and the Marines by tens of thousands, along with an increased presence in Afghanistan — 30,000 more troops. But despite the purported need, the plan to accept temporary immigrants has not avoided criticism from officers, veterans, and others. According to the *Times*, "A preliminary Pentagon announcement of the program last year drew a stream of angry comments" on a website frequented by people affiliated with the military. Some argue that the military could be infiltrated by terrorists, though the executive director of the American Legion said it would be alright as long as recruits passed a background check and that their allegiance to America took precedence over ties to their native country.

Permanent residents with green cards have been allowed to serve in the military for many years, but under the new program illegal immigrants will still not be eligible to enlist. According to the Pentagon,



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there are about 29,000 foreign-born people serving who are not U.S. citizens, and about 8,000 green-card holders are recruited annually. The *Times* story, which has been picked up by the press worldwide, finishes off by quoting a Dominican-born sergeant who said having native-speakers as translators while in Iraq helped “accomplish the mission with more accuracy.” The recruiting of about 550 temporary immigrants will start in New York City as soon as the Department of Homeland Security gives the final go-ahead. As long as they serve their whole term honorably, the immigrants won’t even have to pay the normal \$675 naturalization fee to become full-fledged U.S. citizens.

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