

IDF Protects More Than Its Own

Through years of experience, the IDF has developed the role of the population liaison officer to best serve its purpose—managing the dialogue between the IDF's combat units and the local civilian population. Today, population liaison officers undergo the necessary training to join combat units, in order to meet the civilian population, even on the front line.

“Part of the job of the population liaison officer is to explain to the commanders the significance of dealing with civilians, and in fact after (Operation) Cast Lead it became very apparent,” said Lt. Col. Guy Shtulz, head of the Civilian Component of Warfare Branch within COGAT. “During Operation Pillar of Defense, when the option of a ground invasion was a possibility, we hoped to integrate the lessons of Cast Lead.”

The population liaison officers advocate for and protect the civilian population, locate humanitarian channels, coordinate emergency aid and evacuation of casualties, tend to international organizations, and protect the local population's facilities and sensitive sites such as schools, mosques and hospitals

“The job of the population liaison officer is first of all to assist our combat forces and to enable them to carry out their missions in the best way,” said Maj. David Yaso, the population liaison officer of the Paratroopers Brigade. “It is understood by the infantry soldiers and commanders that the work of the population liaison officers is necessary, and so they cooperate with them.”

The population liaison officer's role includes documenting what happens in the field. Lt. Col. Shtulz explained that some

of the officers are equipped with cameras and part of their work includes making records.

“If there is use of the civilian population as human shields—we document it,” he said.

Maj. Yaso said that during Operation Pillar of Defense, population liaison officers were well prepared to be embedded with combat forces.

“We didn’t wait for a combat situation; the population liaison officers were already prepared beforehand. Our unit has been trained for years,” Maj. Yaso said. “The population liaison officers are combat soldiers in every respect, but they have a relative advantage which is the understanding and speaking of the Arabic language.”

Training for these officers is extensive, and they must be highly skilled to take such as position.

“The population liaison officer’s task is to manage the dialogue between the sides,” Deputy Head of the Operations Directorate for DCL Gaza Maj. Eyal Dror told the IDF website. “They need to deal with responses from citizens, with the Arabic and with the dilemmas that require finding a balance between the military need and the humanitarian one.”