Geospatial dataset (polygon) of extensive IDF Gaza evacuation order of March 18, 2025

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This is an updated version of the initial version of the extent of the extensive evacuation area around the Gaza Strip periphery delineated in the IDF order of March 18, 2025. The initial release was made rapidly, on the same day as this order, and this update presents more detail of the newly designated area and its context, and drawing on additional inputs from colleagues in Israel, Gaza, and international organisations.

The IDF prepared the release of the polygon designating this area the day before its massive surprise strikes in the early hours of March 18, 2025, marking the end of the ceasefire and prisoner/hostage exchanges that, despite violations on both sides, had more or less prevailed since coming into effect on January 19. The area appeared on the IDF web site that had been in operation since December 1, 2023, containing a series of numbered blocks, which were referred to in subsequent intermittent evacuation orders calling on Gaza residents to flee designated areas in advance of IDF bombardment. The origins and use of and problems with this map has been discussed extensively in allied data releases.[1]

As with many aspects of the IDF spatial designations and evacuation announcements, the status of this newly designated broad peripheral area of March 18 was and remains ambiguous. Social media announcements appearing on the 18'th in parallel with the updated web site gave orders for evacuation from

[1] Garb, Yaakov, 2023, "Geospatial dataset of Gaza targeting polygons publicized by the IDF on December 1, 2023", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/0HUXOJ, Harvard Dataverse, V2

Garb, Yaakov, 2024, "Geospatial dataset and analysis of usability for emergency communications of the official maps of Gaza "Humanitarian Area" and evacuation blocks", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/9CRVCJ, Harvard Dataverse, V2

Garb, Yaakov, 2024, "Geospatial dataset of northern Gaza evacuation scheme "superblocks" announced by Israeli army on October 6, 2024", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/AHOYNG, Harvard Dataverse, V1

specific areas, mentioned by name and designated by slightly darker red areas and yellow flight direction arrows, superimposed on a new very extensive buffer designated in a less dark shade of red, as shown below.

The text in social media release (shown above) was as follows (translation).

> URGENT WARNING!
> To all those present in Beit Hanoun, Khuza'a area, Abasan Al-Kabira and Al-Jadida: The Israeli Defense Forces have begun a strong attack against terrorist organizations.
> These areas are considered dangerous combat zones!
> For your own safety, we urge you to evacuate immediately to the known shelters in western Gaza City and those located in Khan Yunis city.
> Continuing to stay in these designated areas puts your lives and the lives of your family members at risk.
> The Israeli Defense Forces

It was accompanied by a QR code labeled "Scan QR code to discover evacuation map", linking to the standard IDF block map web site. Though it carries a fixed date of first appearance (December 1, 2023) at the top, this web site is continually updated with new designations, and now carried the broader circumferential buffer zone, as shown below.

The accompanying text read as follows (translation):

> Dear Gaza residents!
> Please pay attention and carefully review this map. Anyone who sees the block number in which they live or are located near it must follow and comply with IDF instructions via various media outlets.
> Gaza residents!
> This is a safe way to protect your safety, your lives, and the lives of your families.

Someone using the QR code and seeing these red areas and their numbering would reasonably infer that these areas were dangerous and to be evacuated. However, this newly designated area is very extensive: an area of 136 km^2 around the perimeter of the Gaza Strip, constituting just over 1/3 of the entire Gaza Strip,

including extensive inhabited areas. Clearly this potential though ambiguously declared evacuation of such a large area calls for clarification and concern.

This peripheral buffer area must be seen in light of prior lesser buffer areas that had been in place, in similarly less-than-clear implementations over the years. As detailed in a 2024 report by GISHA[2], an Access Restricted Area had been enforced prior to the most recent (October 7, 2023) round of conflict. This had begun in the early 2000s, with an area of around 150 meters from the perimeter fence, which was gradually expanded after Hamas came to power in 2007 to approximately 300 meters to up to 1 km. A Gisha Freedom of Information application in 2015 forced greater clarity into the extent and instructions of this buffer, though daily practice was far from clear, with instances of closer access to farmers and army violence beyond the designated area.

In the months after October 7, 2023, there was no formal declaration regarding the buffer zone, but satellite imagery and reports from the ground showed a systematic destruction of buildings with a 1 kilometer zone. This prefigured the area that was formally declared as an integral component of the Cease Fire agreement that came into force on January 19, 2025. That agreement stipulated a first phase that included withdrawal of Israeli forces eastwards from densely populated areas along the borders of the Gaza strip, including Wadi Gaza (Netzarim axis and Kuwait roundabout), as well as redeployment of Israeli forces to a perimeter of (700) meters with an exception at 5 localised points to be increased no more than (400) additional meters that the Israeli side will determine, south and west of the border, and based on the maps agreed upon by both sides which would accompany the agreement.

This ceasefire buffer (red shading) is show below, together with the extent of the "Humanitarian Area" (blue shading) Israel had declared earlier in the conflict, and the Netzarim corridor (black line) that had been forged bisecting the north and south of Gaza. Shortly after the declaration of the buffer zone, which appeared on the official IDF web site, an additional "entry coordination" red line was broadcast by COGAT to international humanitarian organizations, as shown by the red dashed line below.[3] The new expanded buffer of March 18, marked by the solid red line, mostly extends beyond this coordination line, with the exception of the southern part of the Strip.

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[2] "The Ever-expanding Gaza Buffer Zone," https://gisha.org/en/the-ever-expanding-gaza-buffer-zone/

[3] Garb, Yaakov, 2025, "Geospatial dataset of Gaza ceasefire "buffer zone" and COGAT entry coordination "red line" of January-February 2025", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/5KJV6Z, Harvard Dataverse, V1

The new March 18 buffer, announced with the collapse of the ceasefire covers over twice the area of the ceasefire "buffer zone" announced in late February. Thus, it adds an additional 74 km^2 beyond the buffer zone's 62 km^2. It is this expanded buffer whose total area constitutes 37% of the Gaza Strip.

The status of this buffer area is unclear, but one can begin to infer its fate. The ceasefire buffer zone had been physically cleared, months before its declaration. Very few buildings remained by the time it was announced. When the IDF held this area during the ceasefire area, it projected an "advance coordination required" zone a similar distance beyond this buffer, as protection from enemy threats. Functionally, this "advance coordination" zone became very difficult for habitation, and considerably riskier, with many people leaving.

It seems that the March 18 buffer zone is a refinement of this initial "coordination-required" zone, extending beyond it in some locations, while withdrawing inwards from it in the southern part of the strip. Conceivably, if the repeated warnings by Israeli government officials that Israel was going to

establish a long term occupation or even annex parts of Gaza as a tactic to pressure Hamas to release hostages, it would materialize in this already cleared cease-fire buffer zone adjacent to Israel.

Read in this light, the March 18 buffer may be the buffer-to-the-buffer. That is, it would seem to mark the limited access and eventually depopulated zone that the IDF feels would be needed in order to ensure safer prolonged occupation of the former (ceasefire) buffer zone.

Those on the front lines of humanitarian work point out that the designation of a "coordination needed" area, in which any uncoordinated vehicular movement is deemed suspicious by the IDF, will soon lead to de-facto depopulation, whether because of the risk and friction of living there, on the one hand, or the slow abandonment by aid organizations for these same reasons, on the other.

It is important in this context to point out that in addition to the already large (1/3 of Gaza) area of this new buffer-to-the-buffer area described here, there is a further large area that has again become inaccessible with the return of Israeli forces to the Netzarim corridor, and the imposition of a broad "No-go area" around this, as well as along the coast of northern Gaza.

As with previous spatial data releases in this series (of the evacuation block system, the humanitarian area, the buffer zone and coordination red line), this current data release of the March 18 buffer-buffer, is being done to allow international humanitarian organisations, the media, and individuals to access, utilize and analyse the maps released by the IDF in a user-unfriendly format.

As before there are ambiguities and mistakes in the IDF spatial data. For example, the designated expanded buffer zone cuts through blocks (i.e. the same block might straddle in and out of this zone), and it is topologically malformed, barring certain geometric operations in GIS software unless repaired. I am releasing the data in its precise original spatial form, including these lapses.

Further information, citation, and technical information on the derivation of these features is available from the author. Use of this spatial information and the analysis given here is welcome, as long as the data repository source from which it is taken are cited, as follows: Garb, Yaakov, 2025, "Geospatial dataset (polygon) of extensive IDF Gaza evacuation order of March 18, 2025", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/F4EBGM, Harvard Dataverse