Polygon layer and initial analysis of the IDF survey announced today (August 27, 2025) of "open spaces" in southern Gaza available for refugee habitation

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This afternoon, August 27, 2025, The Israeli army (IDF) spokesman denounced as false any rumours being spread about lack of open space for the close to a million people the IDF intends to relocated from Gaza City in the next phase of the war. According to an IDF survey of the southern part of the Gaza Strip, he said, "vast areas" could be used as a haven from the impending (re) occupation of northern Gaza.

Figure 1: IDF announcement on X of open space in southern Gaza

Translation of the IDF announcement

Urgent - Important statement to the residents of the Gaza Strip, specifically in Gaza City and northern Gaza Strip

"Regarding the false rumors being spread that there is no empty space in the southern Strip for residents to relocate to before transitioning to the next phase of the war, I would like to confirm that there are vast empty areas in the southern Strip, as is the case in the central camps and in Mawasi. These areas are free of tents.

The Defense Forces have surveyed these areas and they are presented below to assist evacuating residents as much as possible.

Evacuation from Gaza City is inevitable, and therefore every family that moves to the south will receive the most abundant humanitarian aid that is currently being worked on these days, where the Defense Forces have begun working on bringing in tents and preparing areas to establish humanitarian aid distribution complexes, extending water lines, and others."

The open areas identified by the IDF survey were presented to the public in the included map (Figure 1above and Figure 2 below) "to assist evacuating residents as much as possible."

Figure 2: map of open spaces (blue) in IDF announcement. Map entitled "Empty and additional areas in southern Gaza Strip for the benefit of those coming from Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip area"

These maps are in the same massively deficient format and style discussed in a series of data postings and analysis over the course of the war.[1] Thus, in order to be intelligible, the map needed to be georectified to the standard orientation of maps in which the top is north, then hand traced to a vector layer as the tracing on the image is ambiguous and pixelized, and then overlaid onto a more legible base map (in this case recent PLANET satellite imagery). This current dataset and description contains the results of this process.

As in previous data releases, my mapping was conducted rapidly (the same day) in order to assist humanitarian organisations and others (media, analysts) understand the unfolding situation in real time.

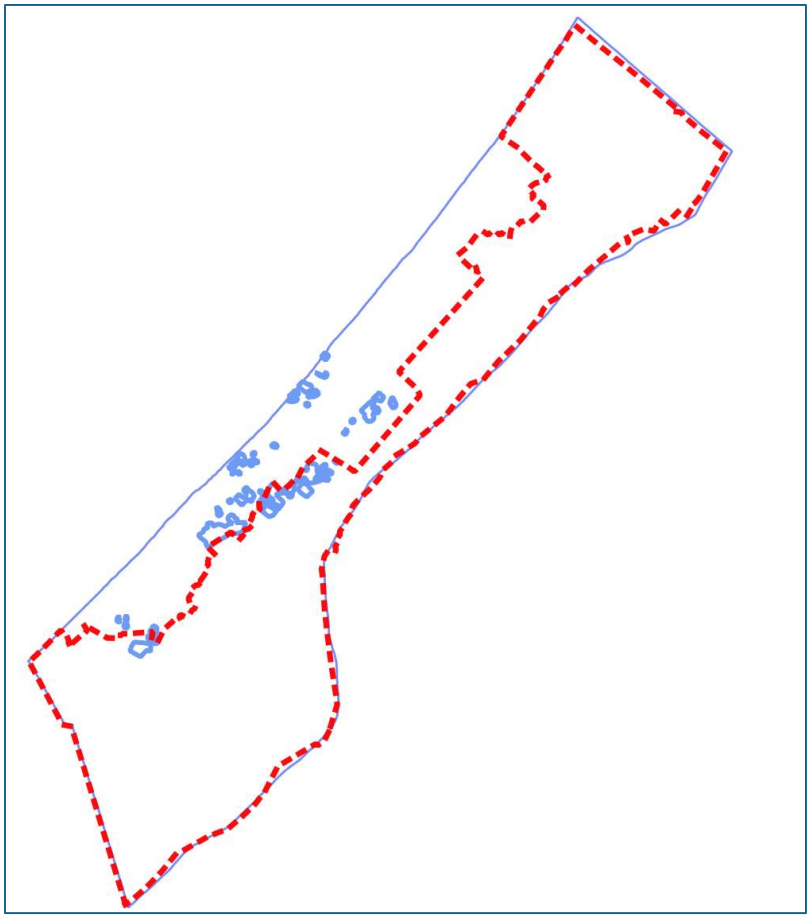

Figure 3: the location of IDF "open spaces" (blue) overlaid on properly oriented map, and with IDF "no go" areas (red)

[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. 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. Garb, Yaakov, 2025, "Today's (May 15) IDF Rimal neighborhood IDF attack announcement: dataset, maps, and critique", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WUZNXO.

Leaving aside the larger issues (the extreme difficulties posed by the relocation, once again, of large populations to barren areas with no support infrastructure, whose location is crudely sketched in a social media tweet), an initial assessment of the mapped areas raises some pointed questions.

- **How might the population use these maps in understanding where to relocate?** The cartographic quality of the map provided is too low to provide any means to orient within the landscape. Were their some apparent logic to which areas were chosen, then people could use common sense to fine tune which areas were included and which not. But, as is visible below, there is not visible rationale for sites to be included or not. This ambiguity is even more disturbing given the fact (see Figure 3) that a significant portion of the "open spaces" to the eastern part of the Strip fall within the areas (marked with a red dashed line) that the IDF has designated as a "no go" zone, where entry is forbidden and dangerous.
- **Some of the areas designated as "open" are not habitable**. For example, in the area shown in Figure 5, from two weeks before today's announcement), and the detailed image of Figure 6, from August 24, one can see that all available area in the area the IDF designates as "open" is either already densely filled with tents or there seems to be a glaring reason that they are not filled: people are avoiding these remaining areas as they consist of the mounds of elevated unstabilised sand dunes.
- The above difficulties point to an underlying further question. **What is the logic of the IDF-designated areas and how does this mesh—or not—with the needs and constraints of those who are assumed to inhabit these?** Uninhabitable areas are included in the map, while adjacent areas of apparent superior habitability are not. For example, in Figure 5Figure 5 where the dunes are included whereas the open fields to the west are not. What guides these choices by the IDF surveyor, on the one hand, and by Gazans and the organisations that serve them, on the other, who have avoided certain areas, despite desperate pressures to find places to survive?

In short, there remains some mismatch between the mapping of "open spaces" displayed in the IDF's survey released today, and the physical reality on the ground as well as the needs of the population the map was ostensibly designed to assist. Leaving aside the audacity of (re)displacing such large populations in the first place, planning for housing the fleeing dislocated populations demands more than simply directing them to some apparent "empty spaces" sketched on a crude map.

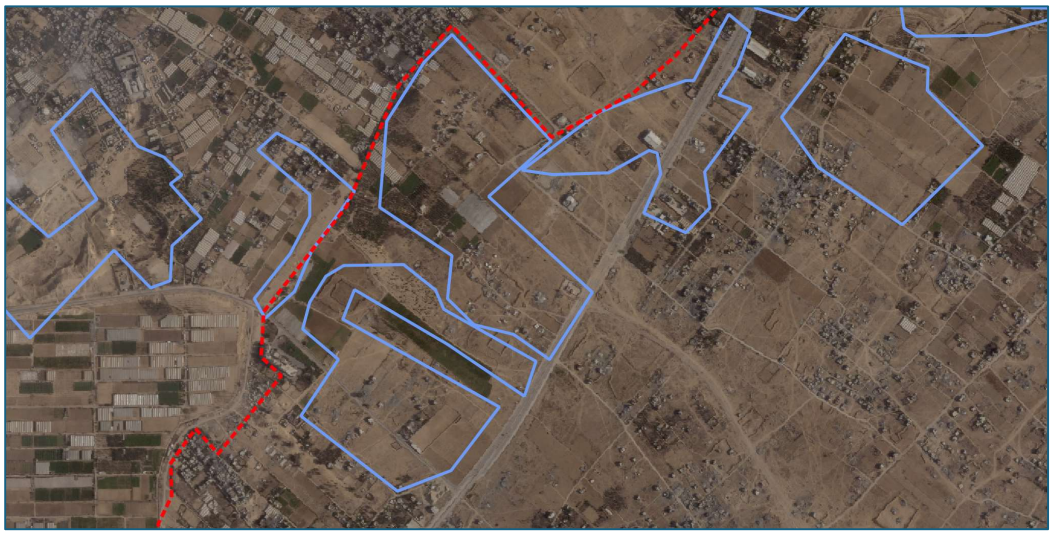

Figure 4:IDF-designated "open areas" (blue) east of the IDF-designated "no-go zone" (red). PLANET imagery

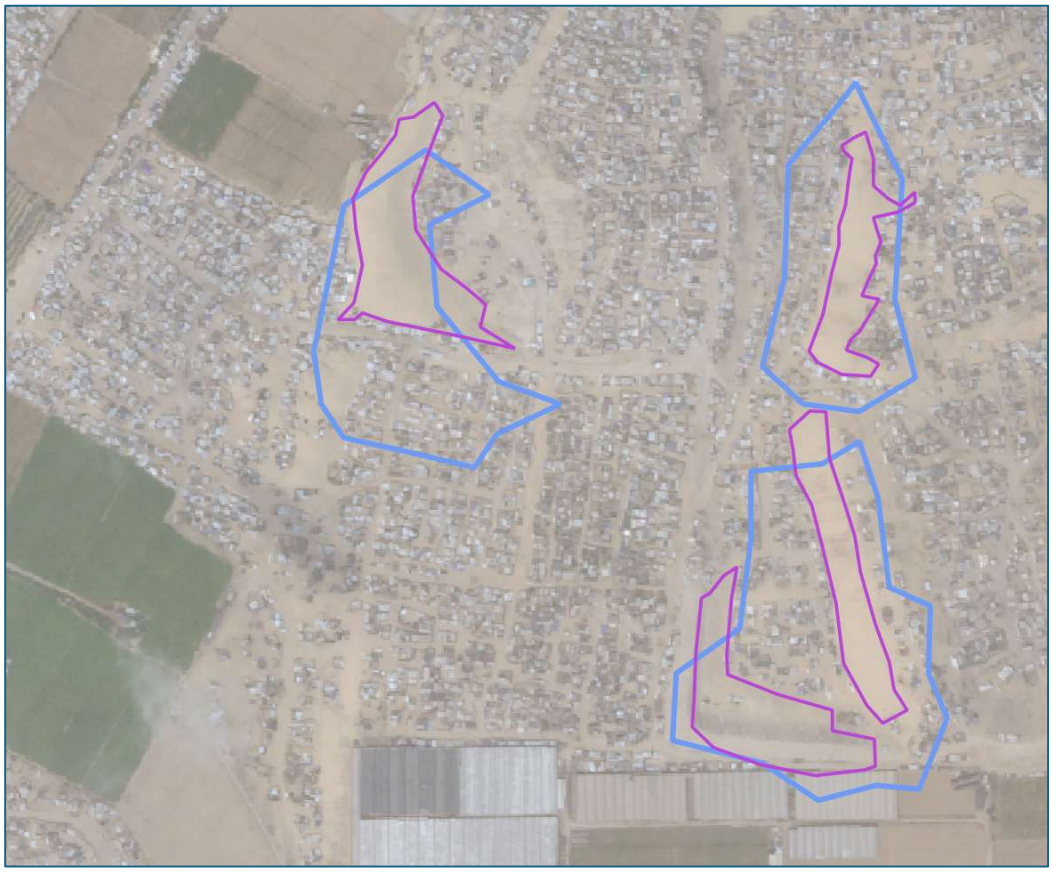

Figure 5: designated open areas (blue) that are either already filled with tents or else avoided because they are unstabilised dune sand (purple)—PLANET, August 12, 2025.

Figure 6: zoom in to area of previous image. August 24, 2025. Imagery courtesy of PLANET