The Israeli/American/GHF "aid distribution" compounds in Gaza:

Dataset and initial analysis of location, context, and internal structure

Yaakov Garb, June 1, 2025

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ABSTRACT

This report provides maps, location data, and an initial brief analysis of the Israeli/American/GHF aid distribution compounds rapidly constructed and beginning to operate in Gaza in May of 2025. The overall geographic relation of these compounds to Gazan populations and to the infrastructures of Israeli military control of Gaza, and, also, their consistent internal architecture, all suggest their design is predominantly responsive to Israeli military strategy and tactics rather than aimed at a broad humanitarian relief intervention. As with prior reports in this series, it is rapidly written to provide real-time inputs to unfolding events. Additional data layers available upon request.

BACKGROUND: THE EMERGENCE OF THE AID DISTRIBUTION COMPOUNDS

In mid-April of 2025, about a month after the massive Israeli attacks marking the March 18 end of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, distinct earthworks activity was visible in satellite imagery in southern Gaza, including the clearing of several large compounds in an area south of the emerging Morag corridor. Maps and a brief report posted on this repository on May 7[1] described these earthworks, whose purpose was not yet clear, as part of a broader apparent large-scale reworking of Gaza's landscapes and population geography. This included the rapid reconstruction/extension/fortification of the Morag road within a broad defended corridor, the expansion of the IDF's "buffer zone" and "no-go" areas, and the systematic leveling of already partially destroyed neighborhoods and structures.

[1] Garb, Yaakov, 2025, "The massive reworking of southern Gaza's population and landscapes-1: the new Tel Sultan compound", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DCGC33, Harvard Dataverse, V1

With respect to the first large compound to emerge, the report ventured that "[t]he rapid progress and the high level of clearance and leveling, the new access road, and the strategic positioning of this compound all suggest it is intended to take on a significant role in the intended next phase, possibly related to aid distribution and population sorting and separation."

Indeed, in the month since those compounds were noted, a hodgepodge of official and semi-official Israeli reports, as well as a mass of converging media reporting and evidence has pointed to these compounds as being at the center of Israel's solution to the food and aid crisis that had deepened in the weeks since aid shipments were discontinued on March 2. With the terrible civilian consequences of the resumption of military action and the denial of food and other supplies to Gazan populations, the right-wing Israeli government was caught between the crescendo of international pressure regarding its prevention of aid access, on the one hand, and political pressures within the government coalition and public sentiment to retain the aid blockade. The voices against aid provision ranged from those claiming that it was being diverted to Hamas ends, bolstering their governance in Gaza, to those frankly calling for use of hunger and civilian suffering as a necessary tactic in war.

By early May, with mounting reports of food stocks running out, and the IPC warning that one in five people in Gaza faced famine, the governments navigated the tension between international and internal pressure and its own political aims by approving an even larger-scale military expansion campaign ("Gideon's Chariot"), bundled with its plan for resolving the aid supplies dilemma. The latter would consist of new "humanitarian aid" distribution locations and modalities, which would bypass the usual means, locations, and organizations. These facilities would be in Israeli-controlled areas, constructed by Israel, and operated by private American security companies. They would be manned by security personnel with combat experience hired by these companies, under close-by Israeli army protection. A non-profit, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), recently registered in Switzerland and the United States, emerged as a murky organizational glue for this effort. Details emerged of how the aid was to be given in a controlled manner and in regular small allocations directly to vetted recipients.

Israel said it would be prepared to resume aid under this new constellation, which, in fact, it had cultivated, while the U.N. and most other relief agencies said that it would not cooperate with this. Israel argued this new modality for aid supplies would ensure that aid did not reach Hamas, thereby depriving it of resources and driving a wedge between Hamas and civilians. On the other hand, almost all humanitarian agencies and NGOs claimed the setup contravened the

long-standing basic principles of humanitarian aid: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

These aid facilities began operating haltingly towards the end of May, a few days ago, amidst competing reports on their efficacy. Israel and the GHF claim a breakthrough in food delivery, heralding a new phase of resumed humanitarian aid. At the same time, the first days of operation saw repeated reports of chaos and ensuing military fire against civilians leading to casualties and injuries. Israeli officials and the GHF have dismissed these incidents as non-existent, fleeting, or a result of Hamas attempts to sabotage a process that undermines their rule. The humanitarian/aid sector regards these incidents as indicating the kind of outcome they warned against if aid were to be delivered via these new, non-neutral, and inexperienced actors, in a configuration that does not adhere to humanitarian aid distribution principles.

Against this background, we can examine the spatial characteristics of the aid distribution compounds and what their location and design indicate. These have just begun operation, and no doubt the coming days and weeks will yield on-the-ground accounts of their functioning. **The emphasis of this analysis, therefore, is sheerly spatial/cartographic: what does the location and layout of the compounds tell us about their intentions and functions**.

MAIN OBERVATIONS

- There are potentially five compounds. Four have now been widely reported in the media and seem ready for operation: three in the Morag/Tel-Sultan area, and another south of the Netzarim corridor in central Gaza. Potentially the fifth (numbered #5) is being formed on the coast, just to the west of an existing Tel Sultan compound (see Figure 1 and Figure 3). Though larger than the others, and less than 100 meters from compound 2, so far its construction features are identical to the prior four. Based on the typical progress of these, its function should be clearer in the latter part of June.
- The four completed compounds follow the identical design model. They are clearly guided by a single designer and execution template, embodying the same operational/architectural logic (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). All are in close proximity to fortified IDF military positions.
- The majority of Gaza's population in Gaza are in the Gaza City area, and cannot access any of the aid compounds, as they are separated from the south of Gaza by the massive depopulated and dangerous Netzarim road and corridor (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

- Those in the other populations clusters can, in principle, access the aid compounds, but will be hampered by the lack of motorized transport or proper roads. They must traverse several kilometers, at least (see Figure 2), of barren rubble field, most likely on foot, and return with their bulky boxes of food (whose content is estimated to be at least 15 kg) in the same manner.
- All five clusters lie in the Israeli-declared "buffer area," entry to which is barred and liable to attack. Thus, in principle, they can only obtain aid by entering an area into which Israel has formally barred their entry (Figure 1 and Figure 3).
- The physical layout of the compounds and the overall conception and process of aid distribution within these seems to prioritize fortification and control, maximising protection of the armed operating personnel and supplies, and their ability to strict surveil and control all those approaching the facility (Figure 4). There are no indications of any attention to the principles evolved by humanitarian organisations over time for the planning and operation of food distribution in disaster and conflict contexts. These principles prioritise beneficiary dignity and access through mechanisms that build community ownership and de-escalation rather than crowd-control through force.

THE MAPS

Figure 1: location of aid compounds within Gazan context

Figure 1.[2] The red circles denote five aid compounds. The grey blotches are very approximate indications of the three enclaves of Gazan populations, with IDF estimates of the number of people withn each. The black lines indicate some of newer military roads and dirt paths in northern Gaza, and the Netzarim and Morag corridors. One can see that the Gaza City population cannot access any of the aid compounds without (a) a long walk across a barren rubble field, (b) crossing the hazardous Netzarim road/corridor, and (c) entering the red-coloured buffer zone from which they are prohibited. In short, Gaza City inhabitants cannot access aid in the existing compounds.

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[2] The Israeli military infrastructure was traced from PLANET satellite imagery. The buffer zone was derived from the IDF web site, as described in previous data releases in this series. The place locations are from OCHA maps. The population estimates in the enclaves are from IDF sources reported in the media, for example https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-aims-to-capture-75-of-gaza-strip-in-2-months-in-new-offensive-against-hamas/ and https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-05-25/ty-article/.premium/idf-75-of-gaza-to-be-seized-in-two-months-2-million-civilians-to-be-put-in-three-zones/00000197-0875-dc94-ab97-0e7dc5f00000?lts=1750782515459. These estimates are within the designated population concentrations, and do not necessarily sum to the entire Gazan population.

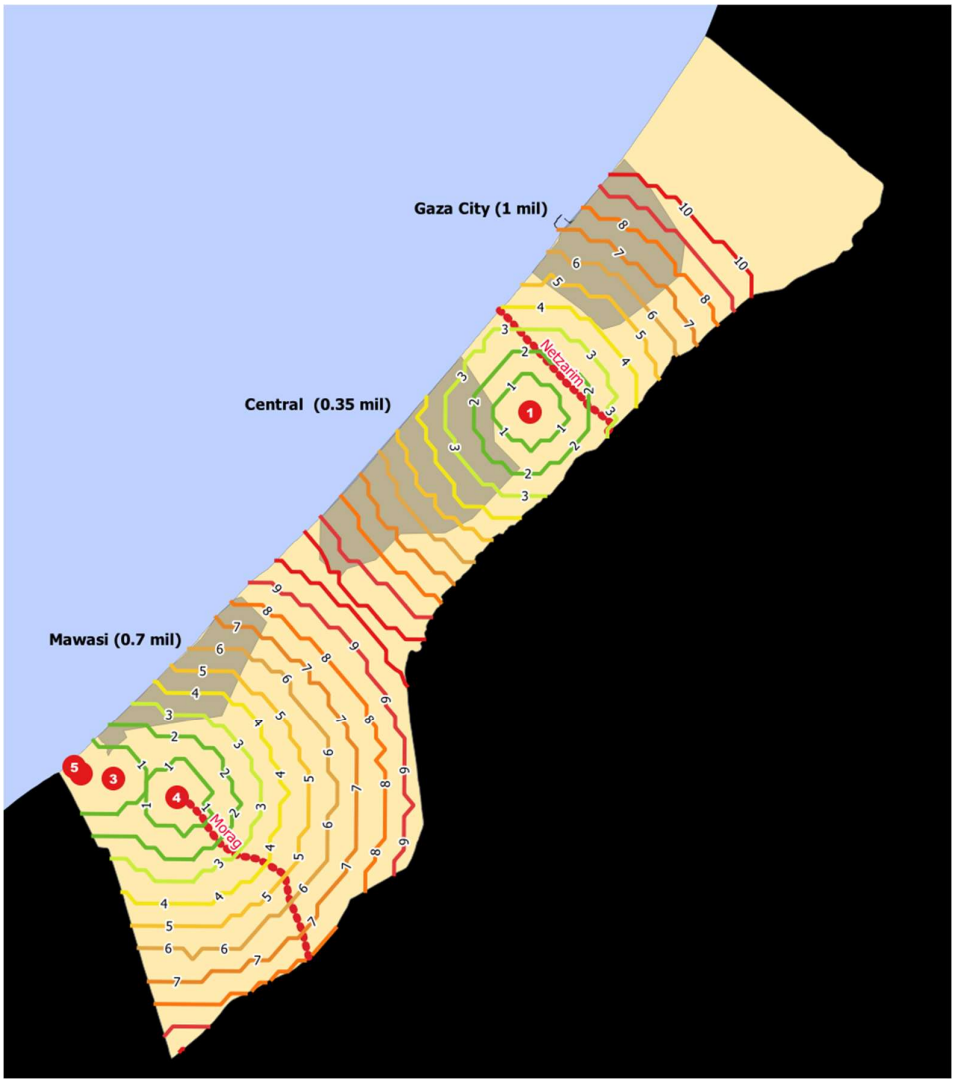

Figure 2: straight-line distance to closest aid compound

Figure 2 shows the straight-line distance to the closest hub for all the areas in Gaza overlaid with the rough assessments of the location and amounts of people that now reside in three enclaves of remaining habitable area. Travel can be assumed to be overwhelmingly on foot. Thus, the feasible catchment area of the compounds and the per-household disbursement mechanism excludes a significant portion of the population

Figure 3: southern aid distribution compounds

Figure 3 shows the four southern compounds. Compound number 4 is at the current western end-point of the Morag road. Compound 2 is the first completed, described in a previous report. What is likely to become compound 5 is now (June 1) under clearance operations, with similar patterns of progress to the other four. The red line demarcates the buffer zone south of which entry is barred. The barren nature of the surrounding terrain is evident.

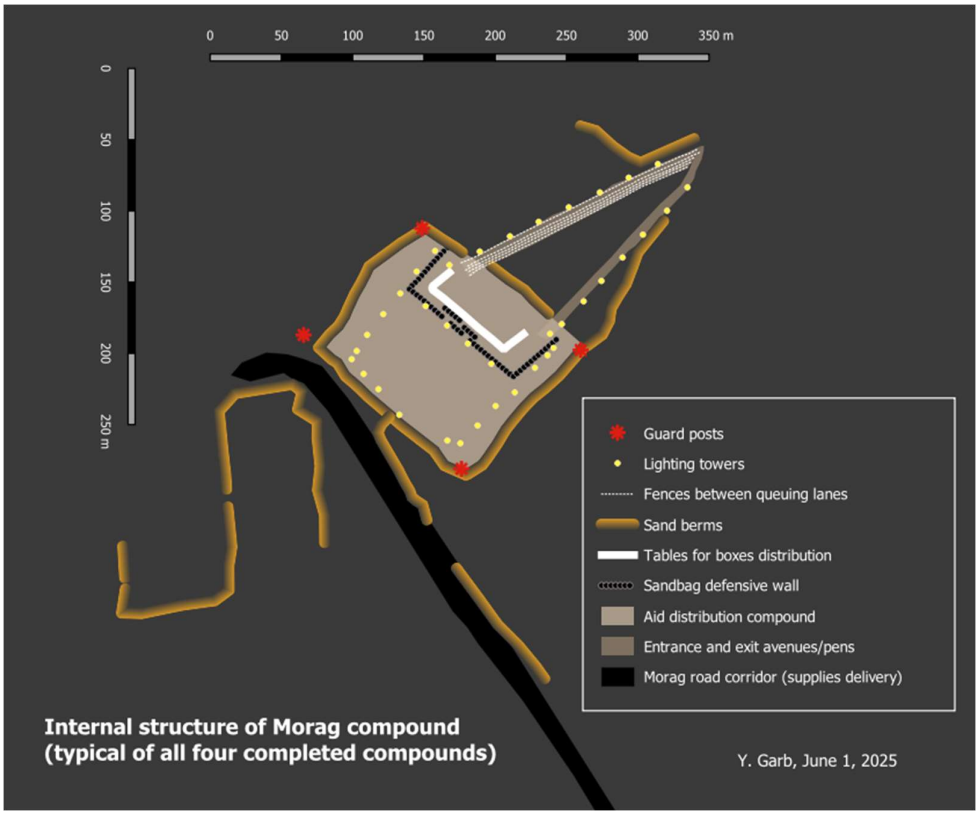

Figure 4: internal structure of typical compound

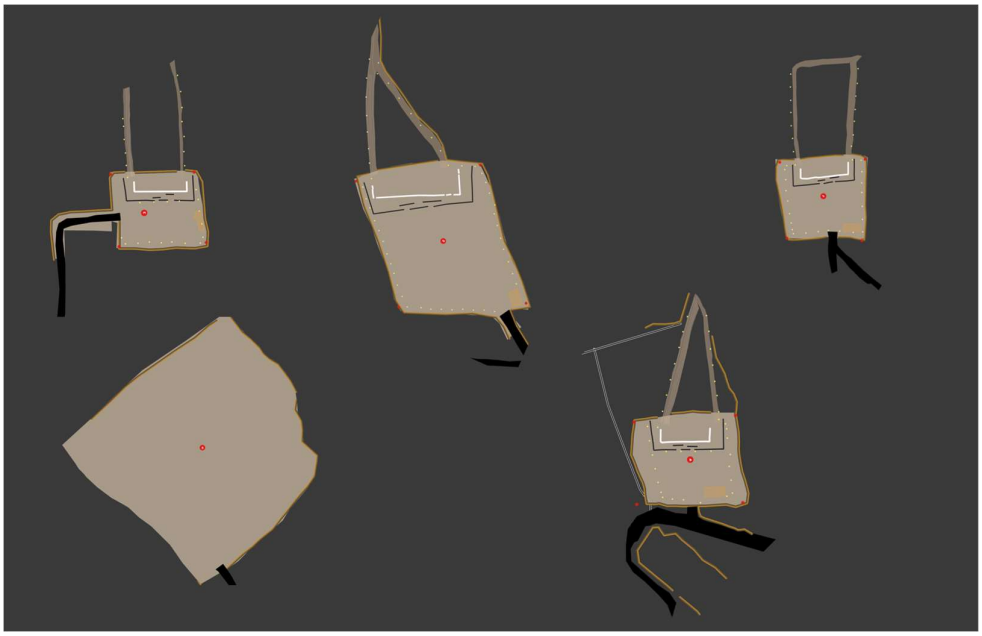

Figure 5: all five compounds on same scale and rotated to uniform orientation of the entrance

Figures 4 and 5 are based on careful examination of PLANET satellite imagery, and show the consistent internal structure of all the current aid compounds. These are designed from a military standpoint: barren of any facilities for the recipients, and containing only

the layout needed to observe, surveil, and defend the armed providers of aid. The compounds are all adjacent to Israeli military installations. The interaction is kept to minimal contact, under the assumption of hostility, with crowd movement controlled by the hardware (fenced aisles), lookout surveillance, and the threat of violence. Though the landscape is barren in a hot climate far from the closest habitation there are no toilet facilities or sources of water, and no shade. The facilities are manned by armed security company combat veterans backed by Israeli soldiers.

The design shapes linear flow through fenced entry conduits, along distribution tables, and out the exit conduit. This layout is consistent with design aimed at achieving the military objective of maximum control with minimum personnel by concentrating vulnerability. Specifically, it creates what military tacticians call a 'chokepoint' or what is colloquially known in tactical training as a 'fatal funnel' - a predictable movement path from a single entry to a single exit with minimal lateral movement and no cover or concealment. The overlapping fields of observation from guard posts enable concentrated surveillance and potential fire from multiple directions.

From the visitor perspective, such designs are documented to be stress-inducing, elevating fight-or-flight responses -- the opposite of crowd safety measures that emphasize multiple exit points and freedom of movement. This setup would be particularly distressing for an already traumatized population, especially given the compound's proximity to the Israeli army forces that have been sources of violence they have experienced for almost a year and a half. The arrangement, therefore, seems both prone to the escalation of disruption and panic, as well as supportive of a highly effective violent response to this.

This layout is so far removed from the design principles and established guidelines for planning emergency camps and distribution sites that a comparison is almost pointless. Humanitarian design principles aim to integrate choice and dignity, reduce physical barriers, rely on community mobilizers and trained de-escalation facilitators rather than armed guards, and offer facilities such as shading, toilets and water, as well as first aid posts, and dedicated lanes for vulnerable groups.

(INTERIM) CONCLUSIONS

These aid compounds have only operated for a few days, and time will tell how they function over time. But, based sheerly on their spatial configuration and internal layout, it would be surprising if problems did not arise, and if these compounds were able to offer more than a partial and temporary alleviation of the aid supply crisis.

These compounds do not bring food to needy populations, but rather entice, under conditions of severe duress, some portions of these populations into remote and highly militarized settings. The majority of Gaza's population cannot currently access these centers, and those who can do so have to cross arduous,

unprotected terrain in a zone that has been declared out-of-bounds by the Israeli military. The fact that four of the five compounds lie south of the Morag corridor--repeatedly indicated by Israeli officials as the intended destination for concentration of Palestinians to be displaced from the remainder of Gaza in an impending intensification of the military attacks—is not reassuring.

The internal layout of these compounds seems to bear the deep imprint of their military context and mindset. Their architecture is the inverse of well accepted and tested principles of food distribution in conflict or disaster areas, and liable to cause recurrent episodes of chaos and violence. Those operating the compounds might protest that such spartan facilities and fortified layout are an unfortunate necessity when confronting a hostile enemy population. This, however, is the point. The Israeli military has an obligation, as the occupying power in Gaza, to supply the population with humanitarian relief, and a separate obligation to facilitate relief supplies. By deciding, however, to cripple the longstanding community-based operations of experienced humanitarian organizations in favour of a rapidly-assembled securitized alternative, it is placing itself in a situation of being unable to fulfil this obligation.

The current location and operating principle of the aid compounds seems likely to be an engine for continuous friction and mishap. Allocations are carefully calibrated to allocate aid in the form of single boxes intended to feed exactly 5.5 people over 3.5 days, requiring the continual regular coercive flow of civilians into dangerous militarized zones, and then passage through crowded compounds designed to maximise their vulnerability. This setup seems likely to generate a cycle of security incidents that are then claimed to justify soldiers shooting and killing aid-seekers.

Overall, these aid compounds seem to reflect a logic of control, not assistance, and it would be a misnomer to call them “humanitarian aid distribution hubs.” They do not adhere to humanitarian principles, and much of their design and operation is guided by other objectives, which undermine their declared purpose. As with the “advance warning” evacuation notices described in earlier reports[3], the ostensibly humanitarian measures seem to be less about adhering to international humanitarian law and practice, and more about making a show of doing so, while using them to advance the IDF’s tactical and strategic efforts in the war. If an attacker cannot adequately and neutrally feed a starving population in the wake of a disaster it is ongoingly creating, it is obligated to allow other humanitarian agencies to do so.

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[3] 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