The quiet disappearance of the "Humanitarian Area" in IDF maps of Gaza

Yaakov Garb, April 20, 2025

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The appearance, shifting boundaries, and problematics of the "humanitarian area" are described in the description of this dataset, posted in July 2024[1]. While announced with much fanfare by the IDF on May 6, 2024, its disappearance from use was not announced, but simple a lapse in use since the Israel-Hamas Ceasefire agreement in mid-January, 2025. This description documents this falling away of the designation.

The designation of "Humanitarian Zone" ("المنطقة الإنسانية" -- al-mintaqa al-insāniyya) was used (in various versions and with some modification and contraventions) continuously by the IDF as the suggested destination or ostensible safe haven for Gazans in light of a series of evacuation orders. After months of halting ceasefire negotiations over the latter part of 2024, under pressure from the outgoing President Biden and the President-Elect Trump, a version of the discussed agreement was accepted by Israel and Hamas on January 15, signed by negotiators on January 17, and came into effect on January 19.

The last explicit map of the Humanitarian Area (HA) was on January 12, as follows[2]:

***TRANSLATION**: "URGENT to residents of Gaza Strip in Block 662 (Al-Nuseirat area): This is an advance warning before an attack! Terrorist organizations are again launching rocket fire from this specific area that has been warned several times in the past. For your safety, move immediately to the humanitarian zone."*

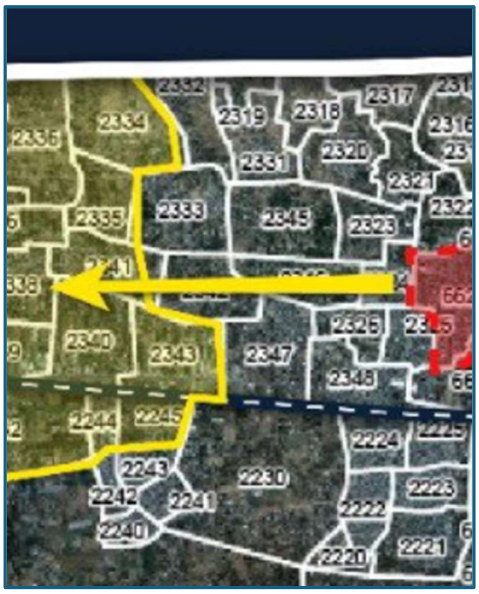
[1] Garb, Yaakov, 2024, "Geospatial dataset and analysis of usability for emergency communications of the official maps of Gaza "Humanitarian Area" and evacuation blocks", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/9CRVCJ, Harvard Dataverse, V2. https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/9CRVCJ

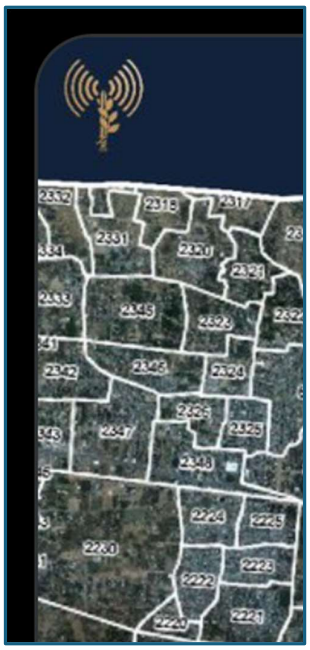
[2] https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1878314053887520887.

The evacuation map of the afternoon of January 15[3], the day on which the ceasefire was agreed to by both parties, focuses on norther Gaza, but one can already see, in the detailed inset comparing these two maps below, that the zone is absent.

***TRANSLATION**: "Urgent to residents of Gaza Strip present in area D5 (Jabalia village) this is an advance warning before the attack! Terrorist organizations are once again launching rocket shells from this specific area that has been warned several times in the past. For your safety, move immediately to shelters in Gaza City center."*

[3] https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1879497240701800714





The January 12, 2025, evacuation alert, with the Humanitarian Zone marked (left) versus the January 15 evacuation order with no marking(right). Compare, for example, block 2343, included in the Zone, but not marked as such on the January 15 map.

Thus, the January 12, 2025, tweet on X (twitter) was the last time the area appeared in maps, or the phrase used in the media account of the Arabic language IDF spokesman account (Avichay Adraeee). It has not been used since the day the ceasefire was approved.

For example, a few days later, with the January 18 announcement[4] of the ceasefire buffer zone and Netzarim Corridor zones as part of the ceasefire arrangements about to come into force[5], the Humanitarian Area no longer appears.

This is one of several examples of an IDF policy shift whose low public visibility and ambiguity seems less than what one might expect given its consequences. Though offering only partial safety during its existence, the absence of a designated Humanitarian Zone takes on more gravity with the March 18 collapse of the ceasefire agreement.

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4 https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1880650059508797480

5 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. https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/5KJV6Z

TRANSLATION

URGENT: Statement to Gaza residents regarding the ceasefire agreement taking effect tomorrow at 08:30

I would like to clarify the following matters to avoid friction and misunderstandings. We in the Defense Forces intend to ensure the implementation of all details of the agreement. According to the agreement, Defense Forces troops will remain deployed in specific areas in the Gaza Strip. You must not approach the Defense Forces in the area until further notice. Approaching the forces puts you at risk.

Movement from southern to northern Gaza Strip or toward Netzarim Road remains dangerous due to Defense Forces activities in the area. When such movement becomes permissible, a statement and instructions on safe transit routes will be issued.

We warn residents against approaching Defense Forces in general and in the Netzarim corridor area in particular. In the southern Gaza area, it is dangerous to approach the Rafah crossing area, the Philadelphia corridor area, and all areas where forces are stationed.

In the maritime area along the Strip, there is a great danger in practicing fishing, swimming, and diving, and we warn against entering the sea in the coming days. It is forbidden to approach Israeli territory and the buffer zone. Approaching the buffer zone is extremely dangerous.