Today's (May 15) IDF Rimal neighborhood IDF attack announcement: dataset, maps, and critique

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Use of these maps, datasets and description should reference their source: Garb, Yaakov, 2025, "Today's (May 15) IDF Rimal neighborhood IDF attack announcement: dataset, maps, and critique", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WUZNXO

NOTE:

This is one in a series of rapidly-released geospatial datasets and descriptions related to Israeli military activity in the Gaza Strip providing up-to-date spatial inputs requested by international humanitarian NGOs, Gazan residents, and the media.[1] Since the goals is to release these for use as rapidly as possible, ideally one the same day in the case of attack warnings, the style and format are not as polished as formal publications.

At 18:28 on the evening of May 14, the IDF Spokesman's Facebook page released a map showing an evacuation warning.2

[1] Others in the series can be found here:

- 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
- 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
- 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, V2
- 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, DRAFT VERSION

[2] https://www.facebook.com/100044448488923/posts/1250239229801015/

URGENT To the residents of Gaza Strip in blocks: 633, 706, 785, 786, 787 in the South Al-Rimal neighborhood area

Due to Hamas terrorist group's exploitation of civilian areas for terrorist activities as shown in the attached image, the Defense Army will attack the area with severe force.

For your safety, you must evacuate the area.

The terrorist organizations, primarily Hamas, bear full responsibility for the suffering and displacement of residents.

For your safety, evacuate the area immediately.

The text of the notification was in the usual format used for most of the duration of the war, with the familiar block numbering scheme to convey areas to be targeted/evacuated.[3] But the map style of the May 14/14 notifications were novel. These did not show the targeted areas using the polygons of the block numbers. And it showed a faded high resolution PLANET satellite image, with (presumably) targeted areas outlined in six white polygons. This included 4 schools (Al-Karmel, Al-Furquan, Al-Shati, and Mustafa Hafez), Islamic University campus, and the Al-Shifa hospital. The adjacent explanations (white text in red blocks) described the kind of use of each of these areas by Hamas.

People in Gaza City, lacking internet through which to access these maps, especially data-intensive sites such as Facebook, so were mostly unaware of this warning initially. But, as rumors began filtering in, people began to evacuate from the hospital (including patients on stretchers) and from the schools, which we fully occupied with displaced people from around Gaza. Workers in humanitarian organisations reported that this attack notice was retracted the following morning (May 15), but, a few hours later, at 11 AM, reissued on Twitter and three minutes later of Facebook. [4]

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[3] On this scheme see 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

[4] https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1922925018708689276

This renewed evacuation notice contained the original map with a new overlay of red explosion icons marked designating areas “mined with explosive devices," and was also accompanied by a poster with the faces, names, and organizational positions of members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad claimed to be operating in the Gaza City area.

The following is the map as it appeared in full resolution.

Beyond their limited ability to receive this notification, several things about the map itself are unclear to its potential "users":

What and where is targeted? Is the evacuation from these zones in their entirety, or only from the marked targeted compounds? While five entire blocks were mentioned, only one block (706) partly intersected with one of the targeted compounds. Indeed, another (633) lay about 2 km outside of the entire area of the map (see Figure 1). Since most people do not know or remember the block number in which they reside, and the block outlines were not mapped, as usual, they might not realise whether they were included, adding to the tendency to assume the evacuation referred only to the compounds, which were referred to by place name.

What do the bomb icon signify? And what are its implications for movement or behaviour? Were these placed by the IDF or by Hamas? Are they additional targets for attack or barriers on potential evacuation routes? Are they literal locations (can one move between the icons) or schematic, and, if so, how should one navigate them?

Orientation using the map. As described in my reports on previous evacuation notices, the entire IDF map was considerably rotated (about 60 degrees) in a clockwise direction. This makes them easier to fit on social media images, but undermines the cartographic convention in which up represents north (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). This made identification of roads impossible, especially given that the base map was a faded satellite image of low resolution, with the only orienting feature

being the port and a fragment of the coastline. Since the roads in Gaza City mostly run perpendicular to the coast, they are horizontally oriented within the frame of the IDF image, whereas in conventional maps (such as street maps or Google) they run towards the south-east. To begin to locate the IDF map features properly, in a way that allows identification and orientation in space, it must be georeferenced with respect to maps that contain orienting information (see Figure 3.)

For the first time in last year and a half, the new map style now includes a north symbol for orientation. Inexplicably, however, it still seems to be still misaligned about 20% from north (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: the standard targeting blocks, with the listed ones infilled in orange. The black frame is the extent of the IDF map.

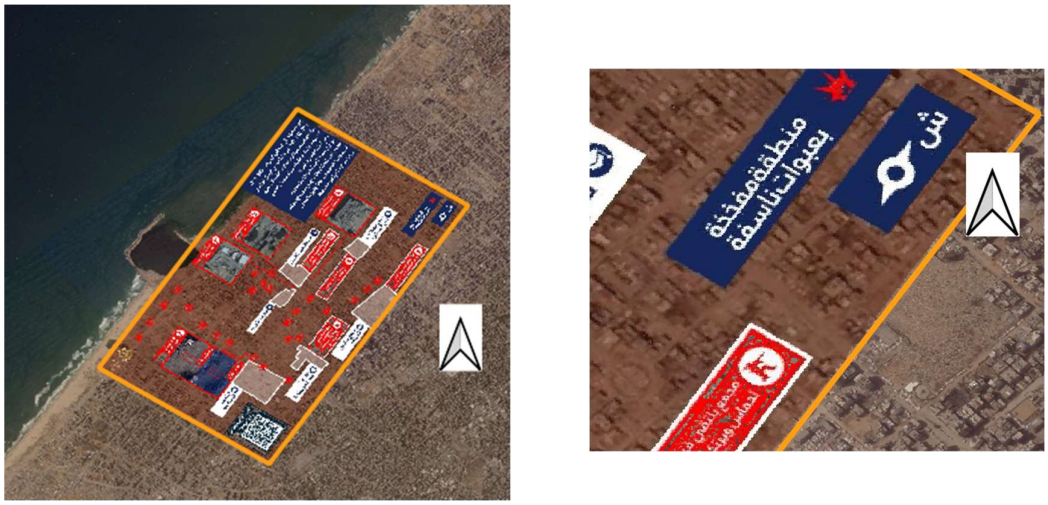

Figure 2: the coastline is oriented 60 degrees with respect to the horizontal on the conventional map, hence the major distortion caused in the IDF maps that are oriented to make the coastline horizontal (left). Even within its own frame of reference, the north arrow seems to be misaligned from north by 20 degrees (right)

Figure 3: The IDF map overlaid onto a PLANET satellite imagery with the standard orientation through georeferencing with careful ground control points and a linear (first degree polynomial) transformation to correct for the scaling/rotation done to fit the map into a social media image

The degraded usability of these maps for their declared audience makes one wonder about their purpose. Their suitability as urgent humanitarian warnings to inform and guide civilians in escaping targeted areas in advance of impending danger has great room for improvement. Yet, despite the considerable resources and technical expertise within the IDF, little if any improvement has been made in the cartographic tools and communication techniques for what would seem to be a vital end over the 18 months since they began to be used.

Perhaps their design is shaped more as a gesture towards adherence to International Humanitarian Law regarding advance warning. The performance of this seems perfunctory at best, disdainful at worst.

The new format of the May 14 and 15 warnings, designate specific areas of Hamas activities and the presence of specific Hamas and Islamic Jihad members in the targeted areas signals more emphasis on another role, as a form of psychological warfare. While low on the kinds of information needed to effectively to orient the targeted population's flight from danger, these notifications are loaded with other kinds of information: a way to alienate he

targeted population from the activities and actors whose continued activities and presence is the reason and justification for the impending destruction.

In any event, the data deposit on this Dataverse site contains maps (Figure 4 and Figure 5) and downloadable data layers of the targeted areas and areas mined with explosive devices that may allow residents of Gaza city, humanitarian organizations and others to better decipher this morning's targeting notification.

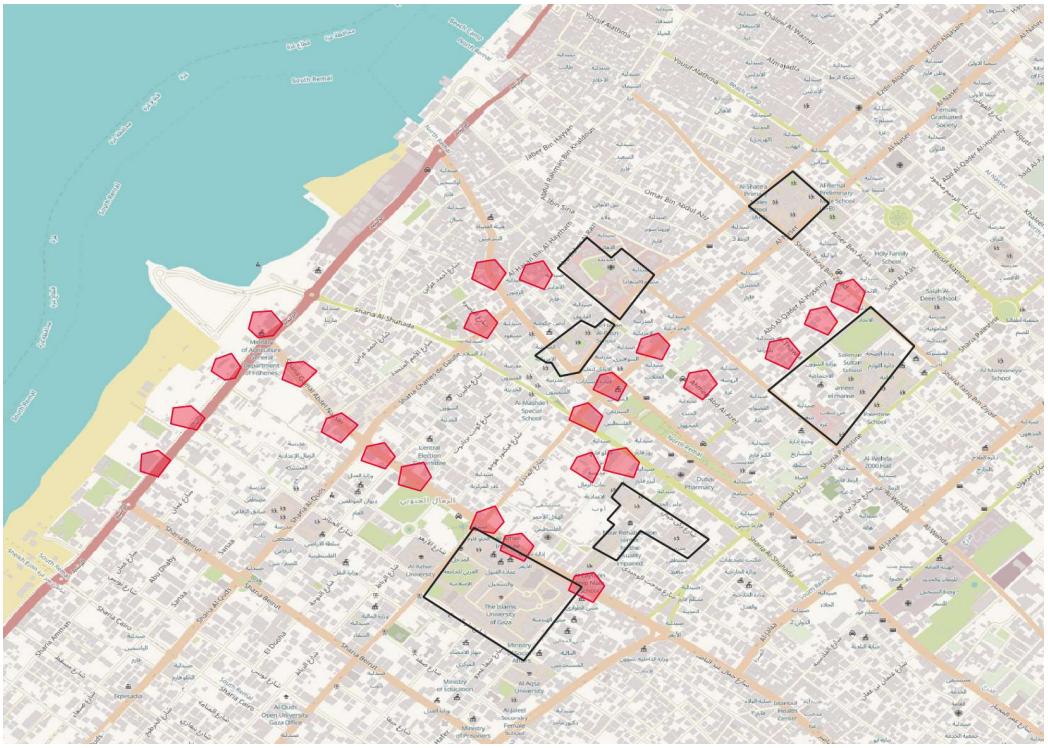

Figure 4: the features of the IDF map overlaid onto an OSM (Open Street Map) humanitarian map with street names. The outlined areas are the targeted school/hospital compounds, and the red icons are the "explosive mines".

Figure 5: the features of the IDF map overlaid onto a high resolution recent PLANET satellite image. The outlined areas are the targeted school/hospital compounds, and the red icons are the "explosive mines".