Questions on this afternoon's (Sept. 10, 2025) release of maps and pictures of "vacant spaces in the humanitarian zone available for setting up tents"

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ABSTRACT

On the late afternoon of September 10, 2025, the COGAT released maps and photographs demonstrating , in their words, "vacant places in the humanitarian zone for setting up and establishing tents," contrary to a false Hamas campaign to the contrary. These maps and the accompanying texts issued by COGAT/IDF are attached to this document, and compared with recent high resolution satellite imagery. Though hard to decipher because of their low resolution and cartographic quality, several questions arise regarding these maps and photos.

Specifically, the maps do not adhere to the block boundaries the IDF has urged as the basis for spatial orientation by Gazans, so, in the absence of any other orienting features, the extent of these vacant zones in unclear. This would be especially worrisome in the case of the southernmost part of one vacant zone designated for establishment of tents, which extends considerably beyond the humanitarian zone into a zone the IDF has designated as a dangerous "no go" area. In other cases, the area designated as vacant is already dense with destroyed or occupied buildings, with any remaining space already crammed full with dense refugee tents. At least one of the phots illustrating the vacant nature of these designated zones appears to have been taken outside the area designated, and at a time before the space photographed was completely filled with refugee tents.

Despite their declared use to illustrate "the wide spaces in the humanitarian zone designated to accommodate all residents of the Strip," these COGAT maps and photographs provide little such assurance, nor do they inspire confidence in the IDF's planning and preparation for a new wave of hundreds of thousands of Gazan civilians to these areas.

Background

On the late afternoon of September 10, 2025, the COGAT (Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories) released the following notice on their Facebook page on their Facebook and X (Twitter) accounts.[1]

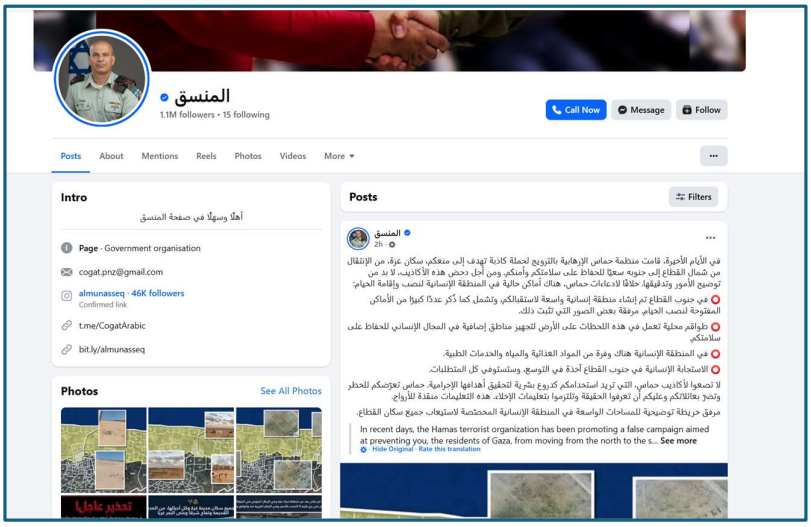

Figure 1: COGAT Facebook post of Sept. 10, 2025

This text (in translation from the Arabic on Facebook) read as follows:

> In recent days, the terrorist organization Hamas has been promoting a false campaign aimed at preventing you, residents of Gaza, from moving from the northern part of the Strip to the south in order to preserve your safety and security. In order to refute these lies, it is necessary to clarify and verify matters. Contrary to Hamas's claims, there are vacant places

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/COGAT.ARABIC and https://x.com/cogatonline/status/1965762955330347344?s=48&t=qQsO3KSWiCS8b04BtxDgrg. The X tweet was worded directly in English in a somewhat terser and more colloquial manner:

COGAT, @cogatonline
In recent days, Hamas has been conducting a false campaign aimed at preventing Gaza residents from moving from the northern part of the Strip to the south for their safety.

Let's set the record straight:

Contrary to Hamas' claims, there is available space in the humanitarian area for the placement of tents:

> ➡️ In the southern part of Gaza, a large-scale humanitarian area has been established, which includes a significant number of available areas for setting up tents.
>
> ➡️Local teams are currently operating on the ground to prepare additional areas in the humanitarian area.
>
> ➡️The humanitarian area has ample food, water, and medical services.
>
> ➡️Humanitarian assistance in the south continues to expand and will remain sufficient.

Hamas seeks to use civilians as human shields for its murderous objectives. Hamas endangers the population.

in the humanitarian zone for setting up and establishing tents:

In the southern part of the Strip, a wide humanitarian zone has been established to receive you, and it includes, as mentioned, a large number of open spaces for setting up tents. Some photos are attached that prove this.

- Local teams are working at this moment on the ground to prepare additional areas in the humanitarian field to preserve your safety.
- In the humanitarian zone there is an abundance of food, water, and medical services.
- The humanitarian response in the southern part of the Strip is expanding and will meet all requirements.
- Do not listen to Hamas's lies, which wants to use you as human shields to achieve its criminal objectives. Hamas puts you in danger and harms your families, and you must know the truth and comply with evacuation instructions. These instructions are life-saving.

Attached is an illustrative map of the wide spaces in the humanitarian zone designated to accommodate all residents of the Strip.[2]

The following three maps were attached to the notification:

Figure 2: claimed vacant areas of blocks 107 and 108

[2]

في الأيام الأخيرة، قامت منظمة حماس الإرهابية بالترويج لحملة كاذبة تهدف إلى منعكم، سكان غزة، من الإنتقال من شمال القطاع إلى جنوبه سعيًا للحفاظ على سلامتكم وأمنكم. ومن أجل دحض هذه الأكاذيب، لا بد من توضيح الأمور وتدقيقها. خلافًا لادعاءات حماس، هناك أماكن خالية في المنطقة الإنسانية لنصب وإقامة الخيام:
في جنوب القطاع تم إنشاء منطقة إنسانية واسعة لاستقبالكم، وتشمل كما ذُكر عددًا كبيرًا من الأماكن المفتوحة لنصب الخيام. مرفقة بعض الصور التي تثبت ذلك.
طواقم محلية تعمل في هذه اللحظات على الأرض لتجهيز مناطق إضافية في المجال الإنساني للحفاظ على سلامتكم.
في المنطقة الإنسانية هناك وفرة من المواد الغذائية والمياه والخدمات الطبية.
الاستجابة الإنسانية في جنوب القطاع آخذة في التوسع، وستستوفي كل المتطلبات.
لا تصغوا لأكاذيب حماس، التي تريد استخدامكم كدروع بشرية لتحقيق أهدافها الإجرامية. حماس تعرّضكم للخطر وتضرّ بعائلاتكم وعليكم أن تعرفوا الحقيقة وتلتزموا بتعليمات الإخلاء. هذه التعليمات منقذة للأرواح.
مرفق خريطة توضيحية للمساحات الواسعة في المنطقة الإنسانية المخصّصة لاستيعاب جميع سكان القطاع.

Figure 3: claimed vacant areas coextensive with block 36

Figure 4: claimed vacant areas in the south and north of the "humanitarian area" and in an area to the right (northeast) of block 36.

Questions arising from the IDF maps and photographs

This September 10 notification has the same the low graphic and cartographic quality as all the prior COGAT releases over the course of the war, leaving several ambiguities and questions. These are listed below.

What are the borders of these vacant areas?

While the cadastral blocks used as a semblance of spatial orientation since the first day of the war and for evacuation and other alters are dominant in the graphics, the vacant spaces do not adhere to these. For example, in Figure 3, the entirety of Block 36 appears to be designated as open space though this is

already quite full of partly destroyed multistory buildings. In Figure 4, however, Block 36 is not designated as open, but an zone area to the right of it, (which would be to the north-east in a conventionally oriented map) is designated as vacant. This is actually a small subsection of the large block 89 to the west (Figure 5), and the inset photograph is centered there.[3] Exactly how much of this area (cutting across Block 89) is included in the "vacant" designation is unclear in the absence of any other usable orienting features.

Figure 5: area and photo of a vacant area that subdivides block 89

Are the vacant sites safe?

In a different area the IDF "vacant area" designation does apply precisely to the extent of a block and this is worrying, as the this particular block (2371) extends beyond the IDF-designated humanitarian zone (in yellow) and into the "no go" area that the IDF has designated as dangerous (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

[3] At coordinates: 31.3784718,34.3225019

Figure 6: designated vacant area of block 2371 extending beyond "humanitarian" zone

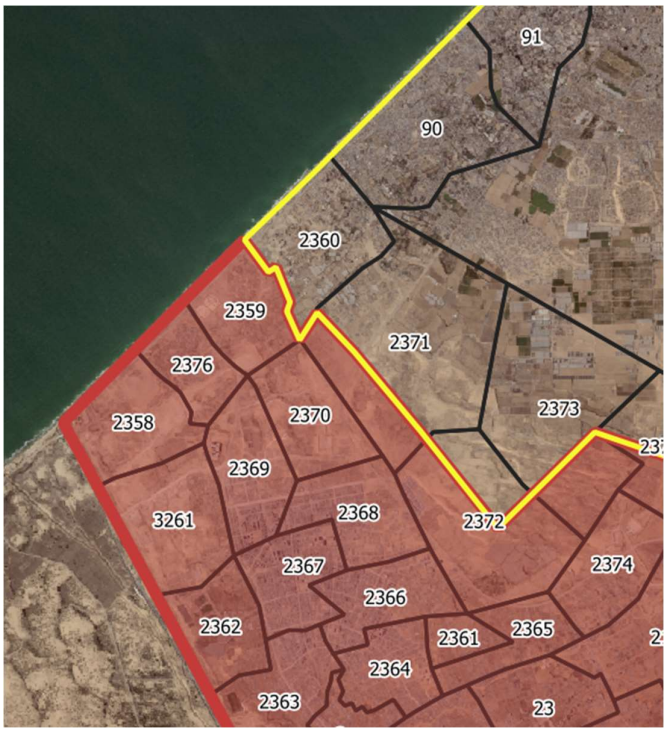

Figure 7: extension of "vacant" area available for tents into the "no go" zone

In fact, the area of block 2371 that extends into what has become one of the most notoriously dangerous parts of the “no go” zone in recent months, due to its proximity to the Tel Sultan aid distribution site (see Figure 8).

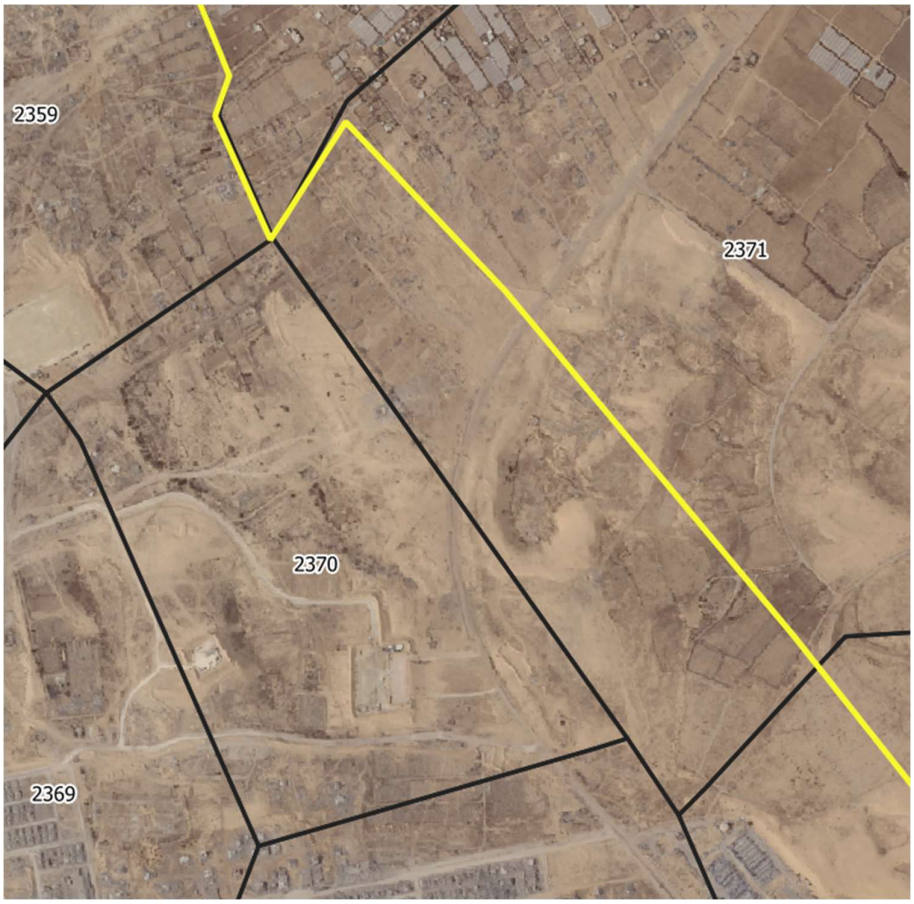

Figure 8: adjacency of the bottom of Block 2371 into "no go" zone adjacent to GHF site

Are the vacant sites vacant?

It is unclear what the basis for determination of being vacant. For example, it is difficult to see any place for additional people in blocks 107 and 108. As can be seen in the overview () and zoom in () of these blocks, there seems to be no area anywhere in these blocks that is not occupied by buildings (likely to be either occupied or uninhabitable) or the rubble piles of destroyed buildings, or else already crammed with refugee tents around these.

Figure 9: overview of blocks 107 and 108

Figure 10: zoom in to blocks 107 and 108 illustrating density of refugee tents between buildings

The photographs inset as pull boxes in the maps are intended to indicate that the spaces referred to are open, but this appears to be a partial or misleading impression. Take, for example, these three photos around the densely full blocks, 107 and 108.

Figure 11: photographs indicating open space in blocks 107 and 108, probably taken in corridor between water reservoir and built up area of these blocks

It is hard to identify where within these densely built up blocks (107/108) these open areas might be (see Figure 11). And, in fact, the presence of the water reservoir[4] in the leftmost photo seems to indicate that the photographs were taken outside these full "vacant" blocks, in block 111, in an area between the reservoir and the dense urban blocks of 107/108. This area seems to have been vacant at the time of the photograph possibly the 2024 date of the readily

[4] The image quality in the IDF announcement is too low to be sure, but this appears to be the reservoir at coordinates 31.3567720,34.2885670.

available Google Satellite coverage of the area (Figure 12), but is now (August/September 2025) full with refugee tents (Figure 13).

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Figure 12: open corridor east of water reservoir against basemap of 2024 Google Satellite

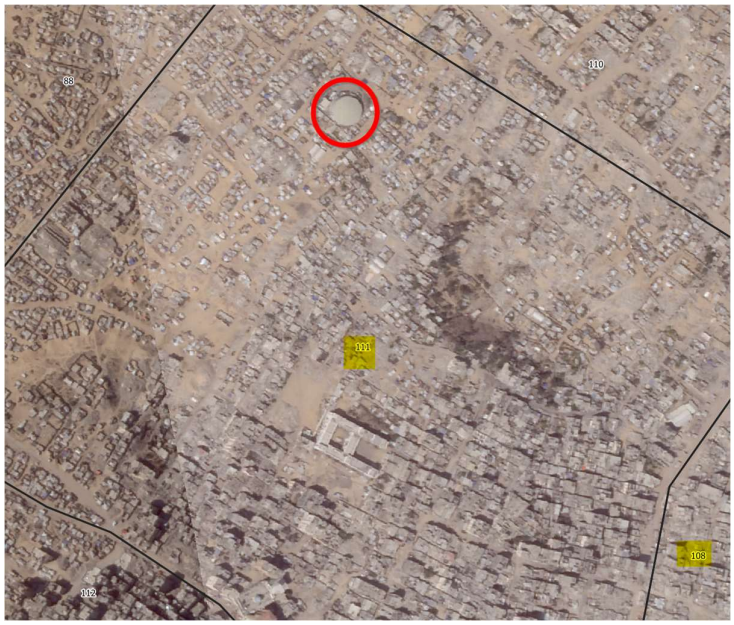

Figure 13: area east of water reservoir now full of refugee tents (August/September 2025)