

# With Hardly Any Internet Access and Confusing IDF Tweets, Gazans Don't Know Where to Go

Thursday 7 December 2023, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2023).

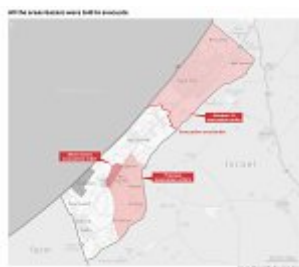
**The IDF's Arabic-language spokesman released a barely comprehensible map with garbled place names that Gazans were to use to make life-or-death decisions; human rights groups report that the places of sanctuary on the maps are already collapsing under the crush of people and lack of necessities**

*Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip, on Monday. Credit: John Macdougall / AFP*

Since Friday, the Israel Defense Forces' Arabic-language spokesman, Lt. Col. Avichay Adraee, has touted a map on his social media accounts of the Gaza Strip.

The declared aim of the map is to assist residents of areas of the Strip that the Israel Air Force will be bombing to escape to safe areas. The map is divided into numbered blocs that are a legacy of designations [from the British Mandate era](#). Adraee said the map was published "in keeping with the morality and values of the Israel Defense Forces."

In his daily tweet on Monday, Adraee again noted, in his instructional tone, that "we published the 'map of blocs,' which divides the land of the Strip into areas and neighborhoods that you are familiar with in an effort to assist you in the coming stages of the war to understand and absorb the directives and, if necessary, passage from precisely defined area – to protect your safety and well-being."



In other words, residents of the Strip are expected to demonstrate knowledge of the bureaucratic divisions of their neighborhoods into blocs even if they were only [displaced to these locations](#) three weeks earlier after fleeing their homes.

And if they have no idea about such designations, they are invited to scan an attached barcode to verify the number of the neighborhood where they are situated – all while they are threatened by an aerial bombardment in their vicinity, and before they grab their ID cards and cash and flee.



For most of the day, most Gazans have no internet connection, whether because Israel cut the electricity supply, the communications facilities lack fuel, the people's inability to recharge their cellphones – or due to intentional disruptions by Israeli fighter planes. For instance, the U.K. firm NetBlocks, which monitors disruptions to internet service around the world, reported Monday about disruptions of service throughout the Gaza Strip.

In addition to the map, since this past weekend the IDF has been issuing warnings through printed leaflets and text messages not only to those who have remained in northern Gaza to quickly move south but also to residents south of the Gaza River – which bisects the Strip. Until last week's temporary truce, the Gaza River was the demarcation line between the area that was purportedly dangerous and the one that was safe, but in practice Israeli bombardments on residential areas were continuing all the time in the entire Strip, including the south.

*Gaza resident carries the body of his relative who was killed in Israeli bombing in Rafah, on Monday. Credit: Hatem Ali / AP*

The villages of Qarara and Bani Suheila and Khuza'a and Abasan were put on the list on Friday as places to be evacuated. Residents were notified through leaflets dropped from the air. "You must quickly evacuate and go to refuge shelters in the Rafah area," the leaflets stated. "The city of Khan Yunis is a [dangerous combat zone](#)."

On Saturday, neighborhoods in the eastern part of Khan Yunis were added to the list and included bloc numbers for specific residential areas. This was also noted, for example, in a text message in English to international aid organizations sent by an officer at Israel's Coordination and Liaison Office for Gaza.

On Sunday morning, those fortunate enough to connect to the internet and to obtain Adraee's tweet to know where to flee to couldn't miss the map that he attached. The IDF insignia appears on the top right with the symbol of the spokesman's office on the left. The Arabic caption between them reads: "To residents of the neighborhoods of Al-Mahta, Al-Katiba, Hamad, As-Stur, Bani Suheila and Ma'an in Khan Yunis; and to those in Blocs 36, 47-54, 219-221."

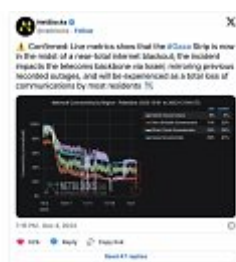
Under the caption, there is a map of the southern Gaza Strip with an orange rectangle designating the area of Khan Yunis that is to be bombarded and that should be evacuated. There are three orange arrows from the rectangle pointing to the safe zones: the village of Al-Fukhari, the Tel as-Sultan refugee neighborhood and the Shaabura refugee camp in Rafah. Instead of wasting time reading the text, a quick glance at the map says it all. Or, that is the intention.



*The map tweeted by the IDF spokesman after correcting the names and changing the arrows*

Anyone unfamiliar with the Gaza Strip and anyone who knows that the international convention is that north on every map is on top, with the west on the left, would conclude that the IDF spokesman is advising people to quickly flee west. It can similarly be concluded from the map that the Shaabura refugee camp is directly on the Mediterranean coast and that Tel as-Sultan is to its south, in almost a straight line; and that Al-Fukhari is southwest of Khan Yunis and southeast of the Rafah refugee neighborhoods.

Most dangerous is that anyone relying only on the arrow toward “the west” might flee for their lives toward the town of Hamad, which is essentially a large, new neighborhood northwest of Khan Yunis, built with [funding from Qatar](#). In actuality, however, Hamad is on the list of locations to be bombarded, as stated in the same notice.



Those who are familiar with the Strip – and who had time to think prior to a bombardment about what they were seeing – would have asked themselves whether someone was trying to outsmart them. More likely, they would have mocked the disparity between the pretension to technological accuracy and erudition on one hand, and the basic misleading mistakes reflected on the map on the other.

It turns out that it was the IDF that decided to break with the convention that north is on top on maps. In this case, it was on the right (which should be east) while the south was to the left. What’s more, the maps mistakenly switched the locations of Shaabura and Tel as-Sultan. And the orange rectangle on the map includes numbered blocs that are not mentioned in the instructions to

evacuate, leaving people baffled: should they stay or run for their life.

## **Rafah isn't safe either**

This twisted map is purportedly a trivial matter. All you have to do is rotate your cellphone to get the directions right, and thus the army's goal – as its spokesperson wrote in response to this article – can be met. "Since the beginning of the fighting, the IDF has taken a variety of means to avoid [harming civilians](#) and has been investing major efforts to evacuate [the] population from the areas where there is fighting," the response stated.

In any event, since there is barely any internet access in Gaza, it's clear that most Gazans are relying on the other means that the IDF is known to use, mentioned above, including recorded messages that break into radio broadcasts. Furthermore, the Khan Yunis blocs that appeared in the rectangle, whose numbers were not specified on Sunday's warning, would turn within a day or two, or even just a few hours, into dangerous combat zones themselves.

Without noting the specific errors, Haaretz asked the IDF Spokesman's Office to explain why it released a map that contained errors and was confusing. Several hours later, the spokesman tweeted a clarification and corrected the mix-up involving the location of the two refugee neighborhoods. But the map itself has remained unchanged, with the north on the right and the west at the top. Also, the blocs in the orange rectangle didn't fully match those designated in the wording of the warning.

*Video showing destruction in the city of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza before the resumption of the fighting*

The spokesman's office later told Haaretz that there had indeed been a mix-up in the locations of the two neighborhoods, Shaabura and Tel as-Sultan, a human error that was corrected immediately. The strange shift in the map's orientation apparently didn't attract anyone's attention at the IDF and remained unchanged even in another warning issued on Monday.

The spokesman didn't respond to Haaretz's question about whether the Mediterranean coastal areas near Khan Yunis and Rafah (the Muwasi area) are considered safe zones. In several Israeli reports, the area has been described as a safe area where uprooted residents can gather – and they have already done so – but Israeli warship began shelling Khan Yunis from over their heads [after the truce ended](#).

The erroneous map would also be considered trivial compared to the discrepancy between the declared goal "not to harm civilians" and the fact that there are 53 essential public buildings in the small area designated for evacuation and bombardment: 46 schools that have been converted into shelters for thousands who have fled their homes (and will now be uprooted a second time); two Red Cross buildings; four clinics; and a Red Crescent building.

It's only a matter of time until a new evacuation map will be issued and include the Al-Amal and As-Salam and Nasser hospitals, with their medical staff, injured patients and thousands of evacuees who have taken shelter there ordered to move farther south to Rafah.

*Palestinian children wait in line for food in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, last week. Credit: Hatem Ali / AP*

In ["safe" Rafah](#), as of Monday afternoon, the IDF had bombed 14 homes since Sunday night,

according to a field researcher from the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. He told Haaretz that six neighborhoods were bombed, including Shaabura - which on the maps issued on Sunday and Monday appeared as a safe haven for those fleeing the fighting.

Among the dozens killed were displaced people who had complied with the IDF's instructions and moved south. According to the Israeli nonprofit Gisha Center for Freedom of Movement, which focuses on the Gaza Strip, the IDF's call to Gazans to evacuate based on numbers on a map is not feasible.

"In the areas where Israel is calling on residents to evacuate, which is now already collapsing from overcrowding and a lack of basic necessities, there aren't sufficient resources or facilities to take in such a large number of uprooted people," Gisha said, adding that the labeling of the blocs on the map "does not excuse the army from the obligation to protect civilians, including those who cannot or choose not to evacuate."

The negligence apparent in the evacuation map of Khan Yunis and Rafah isn't comparable to the lethal bombardments of an area declared safe. However, the disparity between this negligence and the technological pretense based on "the IDF's ethics and values" shows that the many public and media-based calls for residents to evacuate are designed to appease the leaders of Western countries who have lent their support for the carpet bombing of the Gaza Strip, "but without harming civilians."

**Amira Hass**

Dec 7, 2023 1:20 pm IST

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