



Israeli Precautions Save Palestinian Lives

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Much as during previous Gaza conflicts, international media and multinational organizations have regularly condemned Israeli combat operations in Gaza on the grounds that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) jeopardize Palestinian lives by carelessly carrying out military operations in civilian areas. However, as events throughout the war—including the IDF’s recently-announced daily four-hour opening of a humanitarian corridor from northern Gaza to southern Gaza—have repeatedly shown, Israel has steadfastly worked to protect Palestinian lives, even at great risk to its own soldiers and at the risk of undermining its strategic objectives.

IDF measures to protect Palestinians in Gaza include precautions implemented before and during its military operations, such as cancelling airstrikes due to the prospect of civilian casualties, and dropping leaflets, sending text messages, and making phone calls to warn civilians to evacuate. The IDF has also provided humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, including establishing humanitarian corridors for civilians to evacuate and sending fuel and medical equipment to Gazan hospitals. These efforts highlight the IDF’s intrinsic desire to limit civilian casualties and its attentiveness to international law despite the immense challenges it faces operating in the Gaza Strip, one of the world’s most densely populated urban environments, against Hamas, which hides in hospitals, residential buildings, mosques, schools, and other civilian facilities.

What Happened?

- Senior UN officials and world leaders have recently made statements accusing Israel of being insufficiently attentive to humanitarian considerations.
 - » UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [remarked](#) on November 8 that “when one looks at the number of civilians that were killed with the military operations, there is something that is clearly wrong.”
 - » UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk [stated](#) on November 8 that “the collective punishment by Israel of Palestinian civilians is also a war crime.”
 - » French President Emmanuel Macron [admonished](#) Israel during a November 11 interview, claiming that “civilians are bombed” by Israel and that “these babies, these ladies, these old people are bombed and killed. So, there is no reason for that and no legitimacy. So we do urge Israel to stop.”

Israel's Precautionary and Humanitarian Measures in Operation Swords of Iron

<i>Types of Precautionary and Humanitarian Measures</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Establishing Humanitarian Corridors for Civilians</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IDF opens a four- to six-hour window daily for a humanitarian corridor from northern Gaza to southern Gaza• Over 200,000 Gazans evacuated along the IDF humanitarian corridor since November 9
<i>Sending Equipment to Hospitals in Combat Zones</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11/12/23: IDF tries to deliver 300 liters of fuel to al-Shifa Hospital but is blocked by Hamas• 11/14/23: IDF tries to provide over 30 incubators and four respirators to al-Shifa Hospital but is again blocked• 11/15/23: IDF sends medical staff and medical supplies to al-Shifa Hospital along with its combat units
<i>Cancelling Airstrikes Due to Civilian Presence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IDF releases footage of aborted airstrike on a terrorist target after several children run into the target zone
<i>Dropping Leaflets, Making Calls, and Sending Texts Warning Civilians to Evacuate Combat Zones</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Israel reported that it dropped over 1.5 million pamphlets, made nearly 6 million calls, and sent nearly 4.4 million texts to Gazans warning them to evacuate from combat zones during the war



Source: IDF Spokesperson's Office via [Ynetnews](#)

Why Is It Important?

- Israel's efforts to preserve Palestinian lives—including establishing humanitarian corridors, sending fuel and medical equipment to Gazan hospitals, cancelling airstrikes due to the presence of civilians, and dropping leaflets or otherwise communicating with Gazan residents, including on an individual basis, to facilitate their evacuation from combat zones—underscore the IDF's morality and attentiveness to international law. They also show the extent of Hamas's information warfare campaign, as well as the immense challenges the IDF faces while operating in a densely populated urban environment.
- » As JINSA's Gaza Task Force, comprised of twelve retired U.S. military generals and admirals and military lawyers, noted unanimously in its [assessment](#) of the 2021 Gaza conflict, "our consensus judgment is that IDF military operations complied with LOAC and consistently implemented precautions to mitigate civilian risk, some exceeding those implemented in recent U.S. combat operations that we participated in, despite confronting an adversary that often sought to exacerbate that risk deliberately."

Map released by the IDF showing the evacuation route:



Source: [Israel Defense Forces](#)

- By establishing humanitarian corridors for civilians to evacuate during set times, Israel not only preserves thousands of Palestinian lives but also expands its own flexibility in combat zones in northern Gaza by preemptively moving civilians out of the line of fire.
 - » On November 4, the IDF [announced](#) on its Arabic-language X account that it had opened up a humanitarian corridor for civilians to travel along during a four-hour window from the northern Gaza Strip, the current focus of IDF operations, to southern Gaza along the main thoroughfare of Salah al-Din Road.
 - » On November 9, the U.S. National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby [announced](#) that Israel has implemented a policy of daily four-hour pauses to allow for humanitarian evacuations out of northern Gaza, with three-hour advance notice to be given daily.
 - » On November 9, IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari [announced](#) in a press briefing that approximately 50,000 Palestinians had used the humanitarian corridor to evacuate northern Gaza. On November 11, Rear Adm. Hagari announced that nearly 200,000 Palestinians had [fled](#) northern Gaza along the IDF's designated humanitarian corridor since November 9.
- Israeli attempts to deliver life-saving fuel and medical equipment to civilians in Gazan hospitals have continued throughout the war, despite Hamas repeatedly impeding Israeli efforts, highlighting Israel's steadfastness in its precautionary and humanitarian measures despite Hamas attempting to prevent such measures.
 - » On November 12, the IDF attempted to [deliver](#) 300 liters of fuel to al-Shifa Hospital by placing cans of fuel for "urgent medical purposes" near the hospital. Israel later stated "the IDF received evidence that Hamas officials prevented the hospitals from receiving the fuel."
 - » On November 14, the IDF announced that it had attempted to deliver incubators and respirators to al-Shifa Hospital, and [released](#) an audiotape of a conversation between an Israeli official and a hospital staffer in which the staffer requested thirty-seven incubators and four respirators, which Israel agreed to try to provide.
 - The offer was ultimately [rebuffed](#) by the Palestinian side, according to Israel, despite Israeli efforts to deliver the medical equipment.
 - » On November 15, the IDF announced that it was [sending](#) medical equipment, medical staff, and Arabic speakers along with its combat units during IDF operations in al-Shifa Hospital.
 - The IDF released a [video](#) of its troops [delivering](#) baby food, incubators, and medical supplies on November 15 and also announced that it had [opened](#) a humanitarian corridor for civilians to evacuate the hospital.
- Israel has cancelled airstrikes when civilians are seen in proximity to the target, even when the airstrike would be justified under international law, demonstrating Israel's willingness to sacrifice tactical wins for humanitarian purposes.
 - » On November 9, the IDF released a video of its officers [aborting](#) an airstrike on a terrorist target "based on existing intelligence" after spotting Palestinian children playing nearby.
 - » The video shows an overhead shot of a field, with an IDF officer stating "we have a target here" and then, upon seeing children playing nearby, stating "there a lot of people here, it's a father and children who are playing here," followed by another officer stating "copy, don't shoot, don't shoot."

- » Under the principle of proportionality, a key component of the laws of armed conflict (LOAC), the aborted Israeli strike would have been [justified](#) under LOAC's proportionality principle given that any civilian casualties would be "an incidental consequence of an attack on a proximate lawful military objective."
- Israeli efforts to preliminarily warn civilians about impending IDF operations underscore its desire to mitigate risk to civilians despite Hamas's efforts aimed at, as JINSA has [noted](#), "shaping a narrative about Israel's tactics (especially allegations of harming civilians)" even as Hamas places "Gazan citizens in harm's way."
 - » On November 8, *BBC News* [released](#) an interview with Palestinian dentist Mahmoud Shaheen, who stated Israel had called him on October 19 to ask for his assistance in evacuating civilians from over a dozen buildings in Gaza that the IDF planned to target.
 - Shaheen told the outlet that the phone call had come from Israeli intelligence, and that he asked the caller to fire multiple warning shots to prove the call's authenticity, which was followed by several warning shots.
 - The article stated that the caller conveyed that Israel "would give Mahmoud time – [the caller] said he did not want anyone to die" and Shaheen also quoted the caller as saying, "take your time. I won't bomb unless you give me permission."
 - » Between October 13 and October 21, Israel dropped [numerous](#) leaflets across the northern Gaza Strip and sent numerous text messages to Palestinians warning them to evacuate to south of Wadi Gaza, a river in central Gaza, in advance of IDF combat operations.
 - On November 5, Israel [reported](#) that since October 13, it dropped over 1.5 million pamphlets, made nearly 20,000 direct phone calls and nearly 6 million pre-recorded calls, and sent over 4.36 million text messages asking Gazan civilians to evacuate from combat zones.
- Israel's objective of defeating Hamas, once achieved, will also enhance Palestinian civilians' well-being by removing a government that has directly caused the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians, including through [rocket misfires](#), and indirectly through [diverting](#) crucial resources like [fuel](#) for its own terrorist activity.
 - According to data the IDF [released](#) on November 9, approximately 1,140 rockets fired from Gaza in the conflict misfired and landed within Gaza, causing an unknown number of civilian casualties.
- Israeli precautions also expose the falsehoods in Hamas's concerted information warfare campaign, which is aimed at generating international pressure against Israel by accusing Israel of violating international law and committing war crimes.
- In contrast to Hamas's ubiquitous [violations](#) of international law, particularly the laws of armed conflict (LOAC), Israel has resolutely attempted to follow the four primary [principles](#) of LOAC, namely military necessity, humanity, distinction, and proportionality.

Key Principles of the Law of Armed Conflict

Military Necessity: allows the military to employ all measures, not otherwise prohibited by international law, to bring about the prompt submission of the enemy.

Humanity: prohibits the infliction of suffering that cannot be justified by military necessity. This principle implicitly recognizes that both belligerents and civilians will suffer the consequences of war.

Distinction: requires that military forces constantly distinguish between persons, places, and things that are military targets—especially belligerents—and those which are civilian persons and property. The former are usually lawful objects of attack; the latter are protected from deliberate attack unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities.

Proportionality: tolerates harm to civilians or civilian property when it is not the result of deliberate attack but is instead an incidental consequence of an attack on a proximate lawful military objective, so long as the destruction to civilian property and life is not assessed as excessive in relation to the military advantage sought. It does not require a close balance—just the avoidance of an excessive imbalance—between anticipated risk and gain.

- » As JINSA has noted in its [primer](#) on LOAC, “the IDF systematically implements innovative precautionary measures to attempt to mitigate risk to the civilian population, often at significant operational and tactical cost to itself and therefore beyond those measures that are legally required.”
- » The primer also notes that the IDF emphasizes LOAC obligations to all IDF members at every level, and that Israel has integrated military legal advisors into the targeting process to avoid LOAC violations.
- Israel’s precautionary measures and the extent to which Israel has successfully limited civilian casualties also contrast sharply with other countries facing similar circumstances.
 - » In the 1999 NATO air campaign over Belgrade, Serbia, NATO officials reportedly [adopted](#) a policy of not issuing warnings to civilians in advance of NATO airstrikes due to fears it would endanger NATO pilots.
 - » Underscoring the challenge of issuing successful warnings to civilians, the United States unsuccessfully [attempted](#) to employ Israel’s tactic of alerting civilians of impending airstrikes during its air campaign against the Islamic State in 2014.
 - The attempted warning—which was issued in advance of an airstrike on Mosul, Iraq—was unsuccessful, as the strike resulted in multiple civilian casualties.
 - » As JINSA’s 2014 Gaza Task Force, comprised of twelve retired U.S. generals and admirals and military lawyers, [noted](#) after the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, “it is our assessment as military professionals that IDF operations in Gaza exercised considerable restraint and exceeded the requirements of LOAC.”
 - The Gaza Task Force also noted that Israel’s precautionary measures go “above and beyond the standard set by LOAC” to such an extent that “we do not believe the Israeli level of restraint should be the expectation for [U.S.] adherence moving forward. Israel’s additional warning measures above and beyond the standard set by LOAC – although morally admirable – may prove incompatible with operational and tactical requirements in future conflicts ... adherence to overly restrictive rules of engagement for fear of criticism or prosecution will reduce U.S. forces’ effectiveness.”
 - » Col. Richard Kemp, former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, [told](#) Israeli media outlets in 2015 that Israel’s self-imposed high standards for its precautions against civilian casualties “isn’t something other nations can handle.”