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Israel Prepares for Invasion by Using Phone Data to Track Gazans Fleeing

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Tracking Cellphone Data by Neighborhood, Israel Gauges Gaza Evacuation

The Israeli military says the tracking and the call to evacuate are to preserve as many civilian lives as possible during an expected ground invasion, even as deadly airstrikes continue.





Aid was distributed to displaced Palestinians in schools in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, on Monday. Credit... Yousef Masoud for The New York Times

By [Patrick Kingsley](#) and [Ronen Bergman](#)

To understand Israeli military preparations, the reporters spoke to senior officers and visited military positions in southern Israel.

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In a windowless control room on an army base in southern Israel, five soldiers monitored the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Gazans on a massive computer screen.

The screen showed a live map of northern Gaza, the densely populated area of roughly 1.1 million residents who were told on Friday by the Israeli military to head south for their own safety. Using data harvested mainly from more than one million mobile phones, the map gave the soldiers a real-time assessment of how many Gazans had heeded Israel's demand.

The Israel Defense Forces have [telegraphed for days](#) that they will soon begin a ground operation in northern Gaza to oust Hamas, the armed Palestinian group that controls Gaza and orchestrated the worst [terrorist attacks](#) in Israel's history on Oct. 7, killing more than 1,400 people and abducting at least 199 others. Israeli counterattacks have killed more than 2,800 Palestinians, according to the Gazan health authorities.

The Israeli military allowed a New York Times journalist to view the data-tracking system, hoping to show that it was doing what it could to reduce harm to civilians — even as its warplanes killed hundreds more Palestinians on Monday, including in southern Gaza, where civilians had

been told to take shelter.

Some neighborhoods were colored white and red on the screen, suggesting that they still housed the majority of their residents. But an increasing number of areas were turning green and yellow, signaling that most of their residents had left.

“It’s not a 100 percent perfect system — but it gives you the information you need to make a decision,” said Brig. Gen. Udi Ben Muha, who oversees the monitoring process. “The colors say what you can and can’t do,” General Ben Muha said.

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