

## Israel's Laws of War

How IDF Doctrine Shapes the Campaign Against Hamas in Gaza

By [Asa Kasher](#) / October 27, 2023

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As Israel begins the first stages of Operation Swords of Iron in response to Hamas's October 7 terrorist attacks, many questions have been raised about the moral and legal aspects of the war. In Gaza, units of the Israel Defense Forces will confront tens of thousands of heavily armed Hamas fighters deeply embedded in a large noncombatant population. Given this highly challenging setting, a core concern is how the IDF can effectively protect Israel, its citizens, and Israel's own soldiers while adhering to moral principles, military ethical norms, and international law.

Some have argued that Israel is not adhering to international laws of war. They assert that, in seeking to destroy Hamas's military and political infrastructure, Israeli forces have disregarded the civilian populations in Gaza and are causing excessive collateral damage. In such a difficult war environment, some collateral damage is, unfortunately, unavoidable. But it is crucial to understand that Israel has a legal, moral, and ethical framework for approaching questions about conduct in war. This approach derives from basic principles of Israeli law, namely the obligation to respect and protect human dignity, international laws of war, and the IDF Code of Ethics, which has guided the conduct of Israeli commanders over the past three decades.

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