



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 21, 2023

Israel Provides New Deal to Hamas

Israel is ready to briefly cease its military operation in the Gaza Strip if the terrorist group Hamas liberates more hostages, the leftist Axios outlet, along with various Israeli media, reported on December 19, citing officials and sources acquainted with ongoing negotiations.

Qatari mediators reportedly transmitted the Israeli proposal that purportedly envisages a seven-day ceasefire in exchange for the freeing of up to 40 women, elderly, and sick people, as per reports by Israeli Channel 12.

For its part, Hamas requested a complete cessation of hostilities. However, the broadcaster reported that Israel's leaders, who had pledged to continue its war against the Hamas until it is neutralized, regarded such a demand as unacceptable.

Some 128 Israeli and foreign nationals, including at least eight Americans, are believed to be held hostage in Gaza. Israel is reportedly open to a "flexible" approach to the number of ceasefire days and the number of Palestinian prisoners it may release in exchange.

In a week-long truce last month, Hamas released 105 hostages in exchange for the liberation of 240 Palestinians being held in Israeli prisons. Nonetheless, negotiations headed downhill and the war resumed on December 1.

On December 19, Israeli President Isaac Herzog verified that "Israel is ready for another humanitarian pause and additional humanitarian aid in order to enable the release of hostages," but the precise details of the deal have yet to be ironed out. Additionally, the president maintained that the "responsibility lies fully" with Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar.

About 1,200 people were killed by Hamas in its October 7 cross-border attacks on Israel, prompting Israel to pound the Gaza Strip in retaliation. Health officials in the bombarded enclave say that almost 20,000 people have been killed so far.

The fate of the remaining hostages has also been brought into the spotlight after the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) acknowledged last week that its soldiers had accidentally killed three unarmed men later confirmed to have been Hamas captives.

On December 18, CIA director Bill Burns reportedly conducted talks with Israeli and Qatari officials as part of a renewed effort to reboot discussions.

Burns met with the head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, David Barnea, and Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported, quoting officials familiar with the discussions. Barnea has been leading Israel's hostage negotiation efforts, whereas the Qataris — who host Hamas' political wing in Doha — have been facilitating talks between both sides.



AP Images
Israeli soldiers in Gaza



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U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Q. Brown also conducted talks with officials in Israel on December 18.

The WSJ pointed out that such talks were part of the Biden administration's "intense focus" on addressing the crisis in Gaza.

Earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken blamed Hamas for the resumption of the conflict, saying that the terrorist group "renege[d] on commitments it had made." On its end, Hamas blamed the failure of the truce on Israeli air strikes.

Egyptian officials, meanwhile, declared that Hamas has told its negotiators that it was willing to allow the freeing of more hostages provided that aid to Gaza is doubled, WSJ reported. Hamas' conditions also include Israel declaring a ceasefire and withdrawing its forces to an agreed line, the report added.



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