

**Israel-Hamas war**

## US and Israel to hold Gaza peace talks in Doha

Washington in push for a ceasefire ahead of presidential election next month



Talks have been deadlocked for months as Israel continues its offensive in Gaza © Eyad Baba/AFP via Getty Images

**Andrew England** and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv YESTERDAY

US and Israeli spy chiefs will hold talks in Doha this weekend as the Biden administration renews its push to halt the war in Gaza and secure the release of Israeli hostages after the killing of Hamas's leader.

The negotiations between CIA chief Bill Burns and David Barnea, the head of Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, are scheduled for Sunday and will be the first discussions on a ceasefire for the besieged strip since August.

The US and its fellow mediators believe that Israel's killing last week of Yahya Sinwar — the mastermind of Hamas's October 7 2023 attack that triggered the war — has opened a window to revive the talks, which have been stalled for months.

But the Biden administration is proposing a shorter, temporary truce rather than the multiphase deal it had previously endorsed, which was intended to lead to the release of all the hostages, Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and a permanent end to the conflict.

A diplomat briefed on the described the latest effort as an attempt to broker a "mini version" of the previous deal.

The original proposal set out plans for a six-week initial pause in hostilities, during which Hamas would release female captives, the elderly and the wounded in exchange

for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

Israel would also have pulled back from all of Gaza's populated areas and the parties would have negotiated the arrangements to get to the second stage, during which there would have been a permanent end to hostilities and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza.

The new proposal is expected to have similar terms for the release of hostages and Palestinian prisoners, but would probably last less than a month, the diplomat said.

It is not clear how either Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government or Hamas will react to the new proposal.

The latest push for a breakthrough comes as US secretary of state Antony Blinken has been touring the region in a last-ditch effort for a ceasefire ahead of the US elections.

He met Netanyahu in Israel this week, and on Thursday held talks with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, one of the lead negotiators.

Blinken said there was an "opportunity" to move forward on a deal "because the biggest obstacle to concluding that agreement was Sinwar".

But others have blamed Netanyahu for blocking the diplomatic efforts in recent months by insisting on additional conditions for a deal.

The talks have been deadlocked since July when Netanyahu said that he would not withdraw troops from a strip of land along the Egyptian-Gaza border known as the Philadelphi corridor.

Since then, Israel has dramatically escalated its offensive against Hizbollah, killing the Lebanese militant movement's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and invading the south of Lebanon.

It has also continued its offensive in Gaza, killing scores of people in the north of the devastated strip in the week since Israeli soldiers discovered and killed Sinwar — Israel's most wanted man.

After the Hamas leader's death, Netanyahu said Israel was "determined to achieve all our war objectives and change the security reality in our region for generations to come".

Far-right members of his ruling coalition have insisted that Israel should continue its war in Gaza.

But on Thursday, Netanyahu's office said Barnea would go to Doha to "discuss the various options for starting the negotiations for the release of the hostages from Hamas captivity, against the background of the latest developments".

Hamas, meanwhile, is leaderless but is sticking to its demands that it will only agree to a ceasefire and the release of hostages if there is an end to the war and Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza.

A Hamas "leadership council," which includes [Khalil al-Hayya](#), Sinwar's deputy and main negotiator in Doha, and other senior officials within the group is expected to make the Palestinian militants' decisions.

"Mediators are serious and think they can get a temporary deal that could lead to a longer agreement," the diplomat briefed on the talks said. "However, the bigger issues for a permanent ceasefire still remain unresolved."

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