

**Israel-Hamas war**

## Israel meets Qatar mediators to discuss Gaza ceasefire with Hamas

Diplomats push for deal that would include release of hostages before Trump takes office



An Israeli military vehicle and soldier near the Gaza border © Reuters

**James Shotter** in Jerusalem and **Andrew England** in London 3 HOURS AGO

Israeli negotiators are holding talks with mediators in Doha over a ceasefire with Hamas and the release of hostages from Gaza, as diplomats push for a deal before Donald Trump takes office in January.

Israeli and US officials have expressed guarded optimism about the chances of a deal, but mediators have previously been hopeful that the warring parties were edging towards an agreement, only for the process to founder over their refusal to compromise on important issues.

The Israeli team arrived in Qatar on Monday evening, and the talks are expected to be crucial in gauging whether the parties are finally willing to break the months-long deadlock that has stymied efforts to end the [14-month war in Gaza](#).

“Both sides have taken the talks more seriously and have compromised on certain details that used to be a sticking points,” one diplomat said.

Israel and Hamas are expected to give their responses to the mediators’ latest proposal, which is based on a version of a three-phase plan US President Joe Biden endorsed at the end of May.

A person familiar with the situation said the talks were focused on narrowing gaps

between the sides as a prelude to higher-level negotiations. The biggest gap remains over the number of hostages to be released as part of the deal, the person said.

Momentum for a deal has accelerated since Trump won the US election. Steven Witkoff, his Middle East envoy, has [held talks](#) with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Qatar's prime minister in recent weeks to push for an agreement.

Netanyahu also met Adam Boehler, Trump's envoy for hostage affairs, on Monday, as he paid a private visit to Israel, Netanyahu's office said.

The latest negotiations revolve around an initial six- to eight-week ceasefire, during which some of the roughly 100 hostages still being held by [Hamas](#) would be freed in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.

According to two people familiar with the situation, Hamas has softened its stance on details of where Israeli troops deploy in Gaza during the different phases of the proposed arrangement, raising hopes that a deal could be reached.

The Palestinian militant group has previously said it would only accept a deal that guaranteed a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the besieged strip by the end of the second phase.

But [Netanyahu](#) has insisted that any truce would only be temporary and that he would not pull troops out of Gaza.

A person familiar with the situation said "creative ideas" were being examined as an alternative to the continued presence of Israeli troops in the Philadelphi corridor on the Gaza-Egypt border after a ceasefire takes effect.

Israel's refusal to withdraw from the corridor, the only entry point to the strip not bordering Israel, has been a big stumbling block in previous rounds of talks.

Trump has demanded the hostages be released by his inauguration on January 20, posting on his network Truth Social last week that "there will be ALL HELL TO PAY in the Middle East" if they are not.

Israel's defence minister Israel Katz last week told his US counterpart Lloyd Austin that there was "a chance" for a deal that would allow for the release of all hostages, according to a summary from his office.

However, other officials cautioned that obstacles would still have to be overcome before any deal was reached. "Even with the shift in position from Hamas, still the gaps are very wide," said an Arab diplomat. "We see the momentum . . . but we are not

...suppose they think, but we have to be realistic. We see the momentum... but we are not very optimistic.”

The war in Gaza began last year after Hamas launched a shock attack on southern Israel on October 7, during which militants killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli officials, and took a further 250 hostage.

In response, Israel launched an offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 45,000 people, according to Palestinian officials, as well as laying waste to the enclave and displacing most of its 2.3mn citizens.

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