

Israel-Hamas war

Israel halts aid to Gaza as Hamas rejects revised ceasefire proposal

First stage of the fragile truce lapsed early on Sunday



Relatives and supporters of Israeli hostages protest in Tel Aviv, demanding the release of all hostages © REUTERS

Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv

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Israel has halted all humanitarian aid to Gaza after militant group Hamas rejected a revised proposal to extend the ceasefire that lapsed early on Sunday and condemned the latest plan as “manipulation”.

The conflict in Gaza has been halted for 42 days, after the two warring parties agreed to an initial ceasefire in January through US, Egyptian and Qatari mediation.

Israel and Hamas in recent days have exchanged mutual recriminations over violations of the deal, failing to agree on an extension of the truce into a second stage that should have ended the war and secured the release of the remaining Israeli hostages held in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu early on Sunday said Israel had agreed to a proposal purportedly drafted by US special envoy Steve Witkoff, which would have extended the ceasefire for another six weeks, through the Muslim holiday of Ramadan and the Jewish festival of Passover.

The proposal calls for Hamas to release half of its remaining hostages, some 30 people, on the first day of the deal as the two sides begin talks over a “permanent

ceasefire”, according to Netanyahu’s office. Hamas would then commit to releasing all the remaining hostages “at the end . . . if an agreement is reached,” said the Israeli side.

It remains unclear whether Witkoff and the administration of US President Donald Trump are behind the proposal made public by Israel, although analysts believe that such an Israeli statement and the cut-off in aid to Gaza is likely to have been co-ordinated with Washington.

Mahmoud Mardawi, a Hamas spokesperson, immediately rejected the proposal and said Israel “repeatedly reneges on the agreements it signed and continues to evade implementation of its obligations”.

Mardawi reiterated the group’s position that the second stage of the ceasefire — to include a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, a permanent end to the war, and reconstruction of the shattered territory — would have to be agreed before any additional hostages are released.

“This continuous manipulation will not return the [hostages] to their families, but on the contrary will lead to the continuation of their suffering and endangering their lives,” Mardawi added.

Israel in response declared that “all entry of goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip will cease,” according to Netanyahu, who added: “Israel will not allow a ceasefire without the release of our hostages. If Hamas continues its refusal, there will be further consequences.”

Hamas in a statement described the decision as “cheap blackmail, a war crime and a blatant overturning of the agreement” and called on international mediators to pressure Israel to reverse the move.

Over the course of the initial six-week ceasefire Hamas released 33 Israeli hostages, eight of whom were no longer alive, along with five Thai foreign workers. Israel in turn released more than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners from its jails and allowed 4,200 trucks of aid to enter Gaza each week.

Israel had delayed starting talks over the second stage of the ceasefire, which should have begun four weeks ago, according to the terms of the original deal signed in January. Last-ditch negotiations late last week in Cairo failed to bridge the gaps between Israel and Hamas.

Netanyahu on Sunday claimed that Israel would return to war if it deemed the

“negotiations are ineffective,” adding that it had guarantees from the US administration for such a move.

US secretary of state Marco Rubio on Saturday said he had authorised the expedited delivery of \$4bn in military assistance to Israel, reversing what he claimed was a “partial arms embargo” by the previous US administration of president Joe Biden over concerns of high civilian death tolls and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Additional reporting by Heba Saleh in Cairo and Steff Chavez in Washington

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