

# Trump's Middle East envoy in diplomatic push to help reach Gaza ceasefire before inauguration

Reuters – [Donald Trump's](#) Middle East envoy has traveled to Qatar and Israel to kickstart the U.S. president-elect's diplomatic push to help reach a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal before he takes office on Jan. 20, a source briefed on the talks told Reuters.

Steve Witkoff, who will officially take up the position under Trump's administration, met separately in late November with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the source said.

Witkoff's conversations appear aimed at building on nearly 14 months of unsuccessful diplomacy by the Biden administration, Qatar and Egypt aimed at a lasting ceasefire between Israel and militant group Hamas in Gaza and the release of dozens of Israeli hostages held in the enclave.

The meetings also signal that the Gulf state of Qatar has resumed as a key mediator after [suspending](#) its role last month, the source said.

The source added that Hamas negotiators would likely return to the Qatari capital Doha for more talks soon.

## **BIDEN'S EFFORTS**

Biden's aides have been aware of Witkoff's contacts with Israeli, Qatari and other Middle East officials and understand that Trump's envoy supports a Gaza deal along the lines the

administration has been pursuing, a U.S. official said.

The Biden administration, rather than Witkoff, retains the U.S. lead in efforts to revive negotiations towards a ceasefire in Gaza. Hamas leaders held [talks](#) with Egyptian security officials in Cairo on Sunday.

President Joe Biden's team has kept the Trump camp updated, but the two sides have not worked together directly, the U.S. official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Biden administration does not see a need to coordinate with Witkoff because it regards his discussions with regional players as largely an effort to learn the issues rather than negotiations, the official said.

Trump's transition team and representatives for Witkoff did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the meetings.

Trump [warned](#) on Monday there would be "hell to pay" in the Middle East if hostages held in the Gaza Strip were not released prior to his Jan. 20 inauguration.

## **WITKOFF'S REGIONAL TALKS**

Witkoff is a real estate investor and Trump campaign donor with business ties to Qatar and other Gulf states, but he has no prior diplomatic experience.

He met Sheikh Mohammed, who also serves as foreign minister, in Doha on Nov 22.

"Both agreed a Gaza ceasefire is needed before Trump's inauguration so that once the Trump administration takes office it can move onto other issues, like stabilizing Gaza and the region," said the source, who was briefed on Witkoff's meetings and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Witkoff met Netanyahu in Israel on Nov 23.

Qatar's foreign ministry and the Israeli prime minister's office did not respond to Reuters' request for comment.

Witkoff also met families of Israeli hostages, an Israeli official told Reuters.

He "spoke with them about Team Trump's efforts to try and broker the deal before inauguration," the official said.

Sheikh Mohammed traveled to Vienna on Nov. 24 to meet the director of Israel's Mossad spy agency David Barnea, who has led Israel's talks with Qatar over the last 14 months.

"There are plans for a subsequent round of indirect talks between Israel and Hamas to take place potentially in Doha soon, but no specific date has been set," the source said.

Hamas' negotiating team left Doha in recent weeks, Qatari officials said, after [Washington objected](#) to their presence. That followed Hamas' rejection of a short-term ceasefire proposal after talks in mid-October.

The source said the Hamas' negotiators were likely to return to Doha for new talks.

## **TRUMP'S WARNING**

Speaking about Trump's warning on Monday there would be "hell to pay" if hostages in Gaza were not released by his inauguration, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Reuters on Wednesday his comment was a "powerful reflection" of the urgency for a ceasefire and hostage deal among both Trump's Republicans and Biden's Democrats.

"We're going to pursue every avenue we can in the time that we have left to try to get the hostages back and to get a ceasefire. And I think the president-elect's statement reinforces that," Blinken said.

Reuters