

Some gaps have narrowed in elusive Gaza ceasefire deal, sides say

Reuters – Gaps between Israel and Hamas over a possible Gaza ceasefire have narrowed, according to Israeli and Palestinian officials' remarks on Monday, though crucial differences have yet to be resolved.

A fresh bid by mediators Egypt, Qatar and the United States to end the fighting and release Israeli and foreign hostages has gained momentum this month, though no breakthrough has yet been reported.

A Palestinian official familiar with the talks said while some sticking points had been resolved, the identity of some of the Palestinian prisoners to be released by Israel in return for hostages had yet to be agreed, along with the precise deployment of Israeli troops in Gaza.

His remarks corresponded with comments by the Israeli diaspora minister, Amichai Chikli, who said both issues were still being negotiated. Nonetheless, he said, the sides were far closer to reaching agreement than they have been for months.

"This ceasefire can last six months or it can last 10 years, it depends on the dynamics that will form on the ground," Chikli told Israel's Kan radio. Much hinged on what powers would be running and rehabilitating Gaza once fighting stopped, he said.

The duration of the ceasefire has been a fundamental sticking point throughout several rounds of failed negotiations. Hamas wants an end to the war, while Israel wants an end to Hamas' rule of Gaza first.

“The issue of ending the war completely hasn’t yet been resolved,” said the Palestinian official.

Israeli minister Zeev Elkin, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s security cabinet, told Israel’s Army Radio that the aim was to find an agreed framework that would resolve that difference during a second stage of the ceasefire deal.

Chikli said the first stage would be a humanitarian phase that will last 42 days and include a hostage release.



Israeli tanks take a position, as smoke from an airstrike rises over Gaza, amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, near the Israel-Gaza border, as seen from Israel, December 22, 2024. REUTERS/Amir Cohen

HOSPITAL

The war was triggered by Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel, in which 1,200 people were killed and 251

taken hostage to Gaza, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza has since killed more than 45,200 Palestinians, according to health officials in the Hamas-run enclave. Most of the population of 2.3 million has been displaced and much of Gaza is in ruins.

At least 11 Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes on Monday, medics said.

One of Gaza's few still partially functioning hospitals, [on its northern edge](#), an area under intense Israeli military pressure for nearly three months, sought urgent help after being hit by Israeli fire.

"We are facing a continuous daily threat," said Hussam Abu Safiya, director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital. "The bombing continues from all directions, affecting the building, the departments, and the staff."

The Israeli military did not immediately comment. On Sunday it said it was supplying fuel and food to the hospital and helping evacuate some patients and staff to safer areas.

Palestinians accuse Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate northern Gaza to create a buffer zone, which Israel denies.

Israel says its operation around the three communities on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip – Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and Jabalia – is targeting Hamas militants.

On Monday, the United Nations' aid chief, Tom Fletcher, said Israeli forces had hampered efforts to deliver much needed aid in northern Gaza.

"North Gaza has been under a near-total siege for more than two months, raising the spectre of famine," he said. "South Gaza is extremely overcrowded, creating horrific living

conditions and even greater humanitarian needs as winter sets in.”

Reports: Reuters