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## *Gaza ceasefire negotiations are a fiction for Netanyahu*



A series of meetings between representatives of the United States, Qatar and Israel have just taken place in Cairo with, aimed at working out the details of an increasingly elusive ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Hamas representatives have repeatedly been invited to join these negotiations, but they have not yet given their consent.

The talks in Cairo were a continuation of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel and the closed-door debates that security delegations and military from Egypt, Israel and the United States held in the Egyptian capital during the week. After talks with Blinken in the Mediterranean city of New Alamein, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdel Aty gloomily [stated](#) that "escalation is likely to come if a ceasefire is not reached". This is quite clearly confirmed

by the fact that Netanyahu ordered the cleansing of the West Bank from Palestinians, which the IDF has already started in all brutality.

### **Egypt's position**

While in Cairo, Blinken received a clear Egyptian demand for the United States to work on a well-executed deal with clear deadlines and goals to encourage Hamas to sign the deal. Senior Egyptian government officials also informed Blinkin that, according to statements by Badr Abdel Aty, all security plans regarding the borders between Egypt and Gaza must take into account [Egypt's legitimate rights](#), which are not subject to compromise. "Egypt remains committed to its position on the Rafah crossing", a senior Egyptian diplomat told the Al-Ahram newspaper. Abdel Aty stated: "We need to put an end to the Palestinian bloodshed; more than 40,000 Palestinians have already been killed and about 100,000 injured in the war. This situation cannot continue for so long."

### **Hamas' position**

Judging by the statements of Hamas, leaks from Israel and Qatar, as well as unofficial remarks by many Arab officials and diplomats, there is little chance of a breakthrough in negotiations. The reason for this, according to sources who spoke with experts in the weekly Al-Ahram, is that Netanyahu is demanding more and more changes to the three-stage plan proposed earlier this summer by US President Joe Biden. Of course, it is imperfect, but it was aimed at introducing a 'progressive process' to end Israel's war in Gaza and reduce the level of tension between Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and the Israeli army on Israel's northern border.

Hamas has [told](#) US, Egyptian and Qatari negotiators that it cannot agree on the nature of the ceasefire and the format of its implementation. According to the original plan, which Hamas agreed to earlier this summer, a sustained cease-fire was to begin immediately. The adjusted plan, revised by the Americans during the negotiations held earlier, softened the wording in favour of Israel on the simultaneous and sustainable nature of the ceasefire.

Another discrepancy, with which Hamas told the negotiators that it could not work, concerns the three stages of the ceasefire. According to the initial plan, the details of the [three phases](#) were agreed upon by both Hamas and Israel before the first phase was implemented. The new proposal calls for the implementation of the first phase, in which Hamas is expected to hand over the remaining Israeli civilian hostages captured in Gaza on October 7, while negotiations on the second and third phases will continue.

For Hamas, this means that Israel is offering the Palestinians six weeks without guarantees of a complete cessation of attacks in exchange for all its civilian hostages. "Hamas will not

agree to this, no matter what promises it receives regarding the pressure that Washington will continue to exert on Netanyahu in order to continue the deal. The hostages are probably his last important trump card”, an informed Egyptian official said. Many diplomats question “whether it is really possible to assume that Netanyahu is so eager to return the hostages”. Israel has announced that it has taken the bodies of six hostages from Gaza who died as a result of an Israeli strike.

### **Netanyahu’s position**

Several sources who have communicated with Al-Ahram since the beginning of the war in Cairo and other interested capitals claim that [Netanyahu is not too concerned about the fate of the Israeli hostages](#), regardless of the widespread scale of demonstrations in Israel. They claim that the overestimation of Netanyahu’s concerns was a serious miscalculation made by the Hamas militant wing in preparation for October 7. “Judging by previous experience, Hamas assumed that taking a large number of hostages would immediately drive Israel into a corner. It turned out not to be the case”, an Egyptian source said.

Interestingly, Netanyahu actually knows that not all hostages are being held by Hamas. In the chaos and panic that reigned in Israel on October 7, some Palestinians from other organisations simply entered and took hostages. He added that Hamas had informed the mediators in Cairo and Doha that it was doing everything possible to compile a complete list of hostages, but the war and numerous forced displacements had made this impossible. Another difference in the deal that Hamas initially agreed to, in the latter wording, concerns the [future of the Israeli military presence in Gaza](#). The first deal included clear language on the eventual withdrawal of all Israeli troops by the end of the second phase from most areas of Gaza and the third phase throughout the sector. According to Biden’s original plan, there were three phases: a six-week cease-fire and the release of all Israelis held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel; a permanent ceasefire and Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza and the launch of a reconstruction process lasting from three to five years.

### **Netanyahu does not want the war to end**

It now turns out that Netanyahu refuses to completely withdraw troops from Gaza. He wants to maintain a presence on the Gaza-Egypt border, along the 15km [Philadelphi Corridor](#), which, as he has repeatedly stated, Hamas uses for underground operations. He also wants to establish a permanent military presence of Israel and security forces along

the 6km Netzarim Corridor, which divides Gaza in half, ostensibly to prevent Hamas militants, who are now in the south, from advancing north.

According to sources close to the talks, Israel also wants to determine the extent of buffer zones in the south and north of Gaza and between Egypt and Gaza, despite the many technologically innovative solutions proposed by the US technical team. Given the limited prerogatives that Netanyahu has given to Israeli negotiating teams, especially on these very difficult issues, the sources do not expect any progress to be made. The Israeli delegation, they said, could agree to add several names of Palestinian prisoners to the list of detainees to be released in the first phase of the deal and remove names that Netanyahu wants to expel from the Palestinian territories, but no more.

Experts believe that Netanyahu has always lacked the political will necessary to reach an agreement with the Palestinians. This fact is becoming increasingly apparent as his military plan in Gaza progresses and with the assassination of senior Hamas militants and political figures in the sector and the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, chairman of the Hamas political wing, in Iran.

According to Egyptian and foreign diplomatic sources who have served in Israel, the Israeli Prime Minister's endgame, after having failed to turn the civilian population of Gaza against Hamas rule by besieging the sector, is now to eliminate Hamas by brute military force. Nevertheless, after almost 11 months of war, Hamas is weakened, but not completely destroyed. As a result, Netanyahu has now turned his attention to forcing as many Palestinians as possible to stay in the south of the sector, making life in the north impossible. At the same time, more and more Palestinians are dying from US weapons generously supplied by the Biden administration, which makes the United States a clear participant in the massacre of Palestinians.

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