



### [Gaza Ceasefire Agreement Reached Between Israel and Hamas](#)

Earlier this week, mediators from Qatar, Egypt, and the U.S. stated that a Gaza ceasefire and hostage deal had been reached between Israel and Hamas which would halt more than 15 months of the devastating conflict. The agreement is slated to come into effect on Sunday following the Israeli cabinet's formal approval of it on Friday. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had delayed the cabinet vote which was supposed to take place a day earlier on Thursday to ratify the deal. Meanwhile, deadly Israeli airstrikes in Gaza continued even after the Wednesday announcement of the agreement, killing dozens of civilians and injuring hundreds of others. As of Sunday, the deal is expected to be implemented in three phases which would consist of an array of elements including an initial six-week stop to the fighting, the release of Israeli captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, a surge in humanitarian aid, the return of displaced civilians to their homes, the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces, negotiations leading to a permanent end to the war, and post-war reconstruction efforts.

Reports indicated that Netanyahu's delay of the cabinet vote was related to far-right extremist ministers' opposition to the deal, even though it was expected to still be ratified by a majority of the cabinet without the support of extremists like Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir. The latter is believed to have asked Smotrich to join forces with him and pull their parties out of the coalition government, potentially causing it to collapse. Earlier this week, Ben-Gvir boasted about Israel blocking a Gaza ceasefire deal "time after time" in the preceding months, debunking claims from various officials and media members who had repeatedly tried to pin the blame for the lack of an agreement on Hamas. In a post on social media, Ben-Gvir stated that "In the last year, using our political power, we managed to prevent this deal from going ahead, time after time." The remark vindicates what rights advocates had long been saying: that officials from Israel, not Hamas, have been the ones to consistently obstruct and derail efforts aimed at achieving a Gaza ceasefire agreement.

In addition to these political factors that have played a destructive role in the inability to initiate a deal much sooner, the fragility of the Gaza ceasefire agreement is exemplified by concern that Israel could be preparing to resume hostilities after the end of the initial six-week phase of the truce. In fact, one of Netanyahu's aides emphasized that the deal "includes the option to resume the fighting at the end of phase one if the negotiations over phase two don't develop in a manner that promises the fulfilment of the war's goals." This is particularly unsettling since experts have long criticized the vague and unrealistic "goals" of Israel's military assault on Gaza, and thus, there is fear that this could be used to try and justify a resumption of hostilities. One of the things that is most disheartening about all of the time it took to reach this ceasefire deal is that details suggest it is almost identical to the proposal that fell apart this past summer, and therefore, tens of thousands of innocent civilian lives could have been saved if it was agreed upon earlier. Back in May, President Biden and U.S. officials presented a draft agreement with the help of additional mediators Qatar and Egypt. This was accepted by Hamas and also received the backing of the United Nations Security Council, yet it faltered when Netanyahu introduced new conditions to the deal and insisted that it would not be made until "the total destruction of Hamas."

The biggest question now is whether the ceasefire deal will hold and if the first phase will be able to progress to the planned second phase. The specifics of the second phase and its implementation are contingent on further negotiations, which are due to start 16 days into the first phase. At that point, talks will be held that if successful,

would allow for the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent end to the war, and agreements on Gaza's future and reconstruction. Thus, the manner in which phase one is carried out will shape the prospects for phase two and beyond. It remains to be seen if the initial six-week cessation of hostilities turns into a permanent one as hoped, or if Israel's assault on Gaza ultimately resumes.