



Netanyahu's Visit to the United States and the Prospects of a Ceasefire in Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's latest visit to the United States this week has come amid ongoing indirect talks between Israel and Hamas in Qatar that have renewed hopes regarding the possibility of a new Gaza ceasefire deal. U.S. President Donald Trump has stepped up pressure on Israel and Hamas to reach an agreement, pushing both sides for a breakthrough in the now 21-month-long Gaza War due to what is seen by many as a clear desire to live up to his pledge to be a "peacemaker" and bring an end to the longstanding conflict. In fact, the evident optics behind the gathering of U.S. and Israeli officials at the White House was on full display. During a dinner meeting on Monday, Netanyahu gave Trump a letter that he said had been used to nominate the American president for the Nobel Peace Prize. Trump has made it no secret that he is seeking a Nobel, while Netanyahu is keen on trying to portray himself as being in the good graces of Trump. At the same get-together, the two leaders also again touted the widely denounced proposal to forcibly transfer Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip – something that has been universally condemned by the United Nations, human rights organizations, and governments across the world. These various entities have outlined that such action is strictly prohibited under international law and tantamount to ethnic cleansing.

Analysts have described a sense of cautious optimism regarding the prospects of a ceasefire, with it being unclear whether key obstacles can be overcome. For months, in the time since Israel reneged on a promise to engage in negotiations to implement the agreed-upon second phase of the January ceasefire, resumed hostilities in mid-March, and in doing so violated the terms of the previous agreement, efforts to reach a new deal have been hindered by Israel's refusal to commit to a permanent end to the war. Hamas has repeatedly expressed that it will not release the remaining hostages without assurances of this, and as such, has sought to secure U.S. guarantees on bringing the war to an end (by proposing stronger language to ensure that the initial 60-day truce be extended indefinitely until an agreement is reached on permanently ending the war), in addition to clarifying the timeline and locations for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. Key sticking points also exist over the distribution of humanitarian aid, with Hamas demanding an end to operations by the controversial and highly criticized Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), and a return instead to the United Nations and its partners overseeing all relief efforts. Just last week, more than 170 charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) called for the aid distribution takeover to be shut down.

Following their gathering on Monday, Trump and Netanyahu met again on Tuesday to further discuss the situation in Gaza. Prior to this, U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff had suggested that the issues keeping Israel and Hamas from reaching an agreement had dropped from four to one, with the remaining difference being related to the nature of Israeli forces' withdrawal from the Palestinian territory. The Tuesday meeting concluded, however, without any public announcement of a breakthrough in the ongoing ceasefire and hostage release talks. While he still expressed plans to do so, it was also revealed that Witkoff had delayed his flight to Qatar to meet with mediators, with the decision to push back the trip leading observers to suspect that a significant amount of progress still needed to be made regarding the talks.

Even as there are still believed to be gaps in the negotiations, certain recent developments have raised hopes that momentum may be gathering towards a possible deal. Some outlets have reported that discussions were held at

the White House earlier this week aimed at addressing the purported major remaining sticking point concerning the lines to which Israeli forces would withdraw under the prospective agreement, with this resulting in headway being made. This came after U.S. and Qatari officials compelled Israeli negotiators to amend their proposed redeployment map to consist of a wider troop withdrawal, calling the previously presented one including Israeli occupation of large parts of Gaza a “nonstarter” which was also labelled a “no-go” for the Trump administration. The new map put forth seems to have created a sense that it had increased the chances of a deal as Gaza ceasefire talks carry on. Still, mediators have cautioned that an agreement could yet take time to materialize.