

# [***Hamas has offered a ceasefire deal. Here's why that won't bring an immediate end to the war in Gaza***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYR-GYJ1-JBSS-S001-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

May 6, 2024 Monday 4:21 PM GMT

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**Length:** 1502 words

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**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; When Hamas declared on Monday evening that it has "agreed" to a ceasefire deal, it caught many off guard. Israel was evidently not expecting it, and it was not even immediately clear what Hamas had agreed to.

Hamas' announcement was initially met with jubilation in Gaza and cautious optimism by regional leaders after it was presented as an acceptance of an Israeli proposal. But Israel issued what looked like a holding position, saying that Hamas' position was "far from" meeting its demands.

And it pressed on with a controversial military operation in Rafah, southern Gaza, conducting air strikes on Monday and seizing control of the Palestinian side of a border crossing with Egypt on Tuesday morning amid intense pressure from his hardline coalition go all-in.

At the same time, Israel said that it would send a delegation to Cairo to assess Hamas' position. The CIA director, Bill Burns, [*traveled to Cairo*](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-07-24/h_c96fffd2a333389fe02ed9d25ffe234b) on Tuesday and was expected to hold a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv on Wednesday.

So what's going on?

What we know about what Hamas is offering

Hamas said on Monday that it has accepted an Egyptian-Qatari proposal for a ceasefire and hostage deal in Gaza, which includes a ceasefire, [*a complete withdrawal*](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-06-24-intl-hnk/h_2995b73ebf91b94576cad6b1de9b3b79) of Israeli troops from Gaza, an exchange of captives, reconstruction of the territory, and the lifting of Israel's blockade of the enclave.

The offer by Hamas would [*start with the release*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/29/middleeast/hamas-israel-ceasefire-proposal-cairo-talks-intl/index.html) of 33 hostages from Israel in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners over a 42-day period, and end with the rebuilding of Gaza during "a period of sustainable calm," according to a document shared with CNN by a regional source familiar with negotiations.

A diplomatic source familiar with the talks told CNN earlier that the reference to [*sustainable calm*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/29/middleeast/hamas-israel-ceasefire-proposal-cairo-talks-intl/index.html) was "a way to agree to a permanent ceasefire without calling it that."

The deal would be divided into three-phases, each lasting 42 days. It would include an eventual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in the second phase, according to the document seen by CNN.

US officials have pushed back on Hamas' claim that it had "agreed" to a ceasefire deal, instead characterizing the response as a counterproposal with changes. That counterproposal will need further negotiation, they said, and is being treated as a communication tactic to publicly demonstrate that Hamas is willing to make an agreement.

Still, the White House said Tuesday that a close reading of Israel and Hamas' separate negotiating positions indicates the two sides should be able to strike an agreement.

What has the response been from Israel and others?

Israel says the deal offered by Hamas isn't what Israel [*helped craft*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/29/middleeast/hamas-israel-ceasefire-proposal-cairo-talks-intl/index.html) with Egypt last week, with war cabinet member Benny Gantz [*saying Monday*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/06/middleeast/hamas-agrees-ceasefire-proposal-israel-gaza-latam-intl/index.html) that Hamas' version "does not correspond to the dialogue that has taken place so far with the mediators and has significant gaps." Netanyahu said the war cabinet "unanimously determined" that Hamas' offer was "very far from Israel's core demands."

Israel did however send a working-level delegation to Cairo to better understand the Hamas offer and determine whether a deal can be forged.

The biggest sticking point is the question of a permanent ceasefire and how to address it in the deal. The Hamas proposal calls for an end to the war, which is a red line for Netanyahu, a senior American official told CNN.

Frank Lowenstein, who worked as Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations under US President Barack Obama during the 2014 Israel-Gaza war, told CNN that this may be "the moment of truth for the blame-game both sides have been playing with the ceasefire negotiations."

"Hamas has apparently accepted the constructive ambiguity about duration that the mediators have been proposing, along with 'guarantees' of a permanent ceasefire that are obviously not enforceable," Lowenstein said, adding that it is now up to Netanyahu - "he would much rather invade Rafah for his extremist coalition ***politics*** than have a ceasefire that could end the war and likely bring elections."

How are the talks linked to Israel's Rafah operation?

Israel argues that Rafah is Hamas last bastion in Gaza, and last week Netanyahu [*vowed*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/29/middleeast/hamas-israel-ceasefire-proposal-cairo-talks-intl/index.html) to launch a ground operation there irrespective of a deal with Hamas and in defiance of US pressure not to go ahead.

On Monday evening, the Israeli military conducted air strikes against what it said were Hamas targets in eastern Rafah. By [*Tuesday*](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-07-24/h_80b44222427a054b7c3836ebe35e68cf) morning, it had seized control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, replacing Palestinian flags there with Israeli ones in a show of control. The move followed an order by the Israeli military to about 100,000 residents of northern Rafah to evacuate immediately.

The Hamas ceasefire offer was designed to "torpedo" the Rafah operation, Netanyahu said, and "that did not happen."

The Rafah crossing is a "strategic site" for Hamas, Barak Ravid, CNN political and global affairs analyst, told CNN's Anderson Cooper, adding that it is seen as a symbol of Hamas's continued control of Gaza.

Israel's seizure of the crossing may have damaged Hamas' image before the Palestinian people in Gaza, and it acts as leverage to make Hamas "more flexible in hostage talks," he said.

The Rafah operation wasn't on the scale of a major ground incursion the Biden administration had been warning Israel against, but it may have been designed to appease some of the extremist ministers in Netanyahu's cabinet who have been pressuring him to press on with an invasion of the city and threatening to collapse his coalition if he doesn't comply.

US officials told CNN Tuesday that the Biden administration doesn't believe Israeli military activity in Rafah is the beginning of a major operation into southern Gaza and a source familiar with Israeli plans said that a limited incursion into Rafah was intended to keep pressure on Hamas to agree a deal that would bring about a ceasefire and a hostage release.

A military operation in Rafah may be in the interest of both Israel and Hamas, said Lowenstein, the former US negotiator.

"Bibi (Netanyahu) wants to show how tough he is by standing up to us (the US) and the world to defend Israel. And Hamas thinks he's walking into a trap in Rafah that will leave Israel even more isolated, including from the US, and subject to even greater international condemnation."

What's at stake for Netanyahu and Hamas?

Hamas and Israel have accused each other of obstructing an agreement and prolonging the war.

Experts say both sides are pushing for maximalist demands because their political survival depends on it.

Netanyahu finds himself in a tough spot. He faces intense pressure from his closest international allies and the families of Israeli hostages to agree to a ceasefire deal and avoid a full-scale invasion of Rafah, as well as the need to [*oblige hardliners in his fragile coalition*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/01/middleeast/ceasefire-hostage-deal-talks-tensions-israel-intl/index.html) who don't want him to stop until Hamas is eliminated.

Hamas may also be wary of its fate if the war ends without a guarantee of a permanent ceasefire.

Since the short [*ceasefire deal in November*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/26/middleeast/truce-gaza-life-heartbreak-intl/index.html), Hamas has not been interested in a deal with Israel that doesn't include a permanent end to hostilities, Lowenstein said, as the group believes that is the only scenario that ensures its survival.

"Both sides only want a ceasefire deal that ensures their political survival," Lowenstein said. "For Hamas, that's a permanent ceasefire that allows them to retain some military capabilities. For Bibi, it's only a temporary pause on the path to '[*total victory*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/31/middleeast/netanyahu-pressure-hostage-deal-intl/index.html)'."

Hussein Ibish, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, DC, says that even though both Hamas and Netanyahu believe they have benefited politically from the continuation of the conflict, pressure has been mounting domestically for both to end hostilities.

"Hamas is under tremendous pressure, including to some extent from its own leaders living outside of Gaza, to accept cease-fire proposals from Egypt and Qatar in order to gain some respite for the organization" and relief for the Palestinians in Gaza, Ibish told CNN.

But Hamas may be aware that it has better chances of survival than Netanyahu, even if the group re-emerges in a different form, he says.

"Hamas will survive. It is a political organization and a brand-name. It is not a list of individuals who can be killed or infrastructure and equipment that can be destroyed," Ibish said. "Netanyahu, on the other hand, both personally and politically will not survive forever."

This story has been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Abeer Salman, Becky Anderson and Jeremy Diamond, Christian Edwards, Mostafa Salem, Nic Robertson, Lauren Izso, Michael Williams, Oren Liebermann, Benjamin Brown, Jennifer Hansler, Alex Marquardt, Ibrahim Dahman, Tim Lister, Michael Schwartz, Lauren Said-Moorhouse, Eugenia Yosef, Tareq El-Helou and Kareem Khadder contributed to this story.

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**Load-Date:** May 8, 2024

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