A Plan to Remake the Middle East

0:01

from New York Times I'm Michael Babar

0:04

this is the

0:06

[Music]

0:09

daily

0:11

today if and when Israel and Hamas reach

0:14

a deal for a ceasefire the United States

0:17

will immediately turn to a different set

0:19

of negotiations over a grand diplomatic

0:23

bargain that it believes could rebuild

0:26

Gaza and remake the Middle East my

0:30

colleague Michael Crowley has been

0:32

reporting on that plan and explains why

0:35

those involved in it believe they have

0:38

so little time left to get it

0:44

done it's Wednesday May

0:49

[Music]

0:53

8th Michael I want to start with what

0:55

feels like a pretty dizzying set of

0:57

developments in this conflict over the

1:00

past few days just walk us through them

1:03

well over the weekend there was an

1:05

intense round of

1:07

negotiations in an effort backed by the

1:09

United States to reach a ceasefire in

1:13

the Gaza War the latest ceasefire

1:16

proposal would reportedly see as many as

1:18

33 Israeli hostages released in exchange

1:22

for potentially hundreds of Palestinian

1:24

prisoners us officials were very eager

1:27

to get this deal pressure for a

1:29

ceasefire has been building ahead of a

1:30

threatened Israeli assault on Rafa

1:33

because Israel has been threatening a

1:35

military offensive in the southern

1:37

Palestinian city of Rafa where a huge

1:39

number of people are crowded fled the

1:41

violence to the north and now they're

1:43

packed into Rafa exposed and vulnerable

1:47

they need to be protected and the US

1:50

says it would be a humanitarian

1:51

catastrophe on top of the emergency

1:53

that's already underway

1:56

right breaking news this hour very

1:59

important breaking news an official

2:01

Hamas Source has told the BBC that it

2:04

does accept a proposal for a ceasefire

2:07

deal in Gaza and for a few hours on

2:10

Monday it looked like there might have

2:12

been a major breakthrough when Hamas put

2:15

out a statement saying that it had

2:17

accepted a negotiating proposal Israeli

2:20

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says

2:22

the ceasefire proposal does not meet his

2:24

country's requirements but Netanyahu

2:26

says he will send a delegation of

2:28

mediators to continue those talk now the

2:30

term but those hopes were dashed pretty

2:32

quickly when the Israelis took a look at

2:34

what Hamas was saying and said that it

2:36

was not a proposal that they had agreed

2:38

to it had been modified mhm and

2:42

overnight Israeli troops stormed into

2:44

rafo video showing tanks crashing over a

2:48

sign at the entrance of the city the

2:51

Israelis launched a partial invasion of

2:55

Rafa it says Hamas used the area to

2:57

launch a deadly attack on Israel troops

3:00

over the weekend and they have now

3:02

secured a border crossing at the

3:04

southern end of Gaza and are conducting

3:07

targeted strikes This Is Not Yet the

3:11

full scale Invasion that President Biden

3:13

has adamantly warned Israel against

3:16

undertaking but it is an escalation by

3:18

Israel mhm so while all that drama might

3:22

suggest that these talks are in big

3:23

trouble these talks are very much still

3:26

alive and ongoing and there is still a

3:28

possibility of a ceasefire deal

3:31

H and the reason that's so important is

3:34

not just to stop the fighting in Gaza

3:36

and relieve the suffering there but a

3:39

ceasefire also opens the door to a grand

3:43

diplomatic bargain one that involves

3:45

Israel and its Arab neighbors and the

3:48

Palestinians and would have very

3:51

far-reaching implications and what is

3:53

that grand bargain describe what you're

3:55

talking about well it's incredibly

3:57

ambitious it would reshape

4:00

Israel's relationship with its Arab

4:02

neighbors principally Saudi Arabia but

4:05

it's important to understand that this

4:06

is a vision that has actually been

4:08

around since well before October 7th

4:11

this was a diplomatic project that

4:14

President Biden had been investing in

4:16

and negotiating actually in a very real

4:19

and tangible way long before the Hamas

4:21

attacks and the Gaza war and President

4:25

Biden was looking to build on something

4:27

that President Trump had done which was

4:31

a series of agreements that the Trump

4:33

Administration struck in which Israel

4:36

and some of its Arab neighbors agreed to

4:38

have normal diplomatic relations for the

4:41

first time right they're called the

4:42

abrahamic cours that's right and you

4:46

know Biden doesn't like a lot of things

4:47

most things that Trump did but he

4:49

actually likes this because the idea is

4:51

that they contribute to stability and

4:53

economic integration in the Middle East

4:56

the US likes Israel having friends and

4:59

likes having a tight-knit alliance

5:02

against Iran President Biden agrees with

5:05

the Saudis and with the Israelis that

5:07

Iran is really the top threat to

5:08

everybody here so how can you build on

5:11

this how can you expand it well the next

5:14

and biggest step would be normalizing

5:16

relations between Israel and Saudi

5:19

Arabia and the Saudis have made clear

5:21

that they want to do this and that

5:22

they're ready to do this they weren't

5:24

ready to do it in the Trump years but

5:26

Muhammad bin Salman the Crown Prince of

5:28

Saudi Arabia has made clear he wants to

5:30

do it now mhm so this kind of triangular

5:34

deal began to take shape before October

5:36

7th in which the US Israel and Saudi

5:39

Arabia would enter this three-way

5:40

agreement in which everyone would get

5:42

something that they wanted and just walk

5:44

through what each side gets in this

5:46

pre-october 7th version of these

5:50

negotiations so for Israel you get

5:53

normalized ties with its most important

5:56

Arab neighbor and and really the country

5:58

that sets the tone for the whole mus

5:59

Muslim World which is Saudi Arabia of

6:01

course it makes Israel feel safer and

6:04

more secure again it helps to build this

6:08

alliance against Iran which Israel

6:10

considers its greatest threat and it

6:12

comes with benefits like economic ties

6:14

and travel and tourism and prime

6:17

minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been

6:19

very open at least before October 7th

6:21

that this was His Highest diplomatic and

6:23

foreign policy

6:25

priority for the Saudis the rationale is

6:28

similar when it comes to Israel they

6:30

think that it will bring stability they

6:32

like having a more explicitly close Ally

6:35

against Iran there are economic and

6:38

cultural benefits Saudi Arabia is

6:40

opening itself up in general encouraging

6:42

more

6:43

tourism but I think that what's most

6:45

important to the Crown Prince Muhammad

6:46

bin Salman is what he can get from the

6:48

United States and what he has been

6:50

asking for are a couple of essential

6:53

things one is a security agreement whose

6:56

details have always been a little bit

6:58

vague but I think come down to Reliable

7:01

arms supplies from the United States

7:03

that are not going to be cut off or

7:05

paused on a whim as he felt happened

7:08

when President Biden stopped arms

7:09

deliveries in 2021 because of how Saudi

7:12

was conducting its war in Yemen the

7:14

Saudis were Furious about that Saudi

7:16

Arabia also wants to start a domestic

7:18

nuclear power program they are planning

7:21

for a very long-term future possibly a

7:23

post oil future and they need help

7:24

getting a nuclear program off the ground

7:26

and they want that from the US and they

7:28

want that from the US

7:31

now those are big asks from the US but

7:34

from the perspective of President Biden

7:36

there are some really enticing things

7:38

about this possible agreement one is

7:40

that it will hopefully produce more

7:43

stability in the region again the US

7:45

likes having a tight-knit alliance

7:48

against Iran the US also wants to have a

7:52

strong relationship with Saudi Arabia

7:54

You know despite the anger at Muhammad

7:56

bin Salman over the murder of the Saudi

7:59

dissident Jamal kogi the Biden

8:02

Administration recognizes that given the

8:04

Saudis control over global oil

8:07

production and their strategic

8:09

importance in the Middle East they need

8:10

to have a good relationship with them

8:12

and the Administration has been worried

8:15

about the influence of China in the

8:17

region and with the Saudis in particular

8:19

so this is an opportunity for the US to

8:22

draw the Saudis closer whatever our

8:24

moral qualms might be about bin Salman

8:27

and the Saudi government

8:30

this is an opportunity to bring the

8:31

Saudis closer which is something the

8:33

Biden Administration sees as a Strategic

8:36

Benefit all three of these countries big

8:39

desperate countries that normally don't

8:41

see eye to eye this was a winwin win on

8:45

a military

8:46

economic and strategic front that's

8:50

right but there was one important actor

8:52

in the region that did not see itself as

8:55

winning and that was the Palestinians

8:58

mhm first it's important to understand

9:00

that the Palestinians have always

9:03

expected that the Arab countries in the

9:05

Middle East would insist that Israel

9:07

recognize a Palestinian State before

9:10

those countries were willing to

9:12

essentially make total peace and have

9:14

normal relations with Israel mhm so when

9:17

the Abraham Accords happened in the

9:18

Trump Administration the Palestinians

9:20

felt like they'd been thrown under the

9:21

bus because the Abraham Accords gave

9:23

them virtually

9:25

nothing but the Palestinians did still

9:28

hold out hope that Saudi Arabia would be

9:30

their Savior and for years Saudi Arabia

9:33

has said that Israel must give the

9:35

Palestinians a state if there's going to

9:37

be a normal relationship between Israel

9:39

and Saudi

9:40

Arabia now the Palestinians see the

9:43

Saudis in discussions with the US and

9:45

Israel about a normalization

9:47

agreement and there appears to be very

9:49

little on offer for the Palestinians and

9:52

they are feeling like they're going to

9:53

be left out in the cold here right and

9:55

in the minds of the Palestinians having

9:56

already been essentially sold out by all

9:58

their other Arab neighbors the prospect

10:01

that Saudi Arabia of all countries the

10:04

most important Muslim Arab country in

10:06

the region would sell them out had to be

10:08

extremely painful it was a nightmare

10:11

scenario for them and in the minds of

10:13

many analysts and US

10:15

officials this was a factor one of many

10:20

in hamas's decision to Stage the October

10:22

7th attacks mhm

10:25

Hamas like other Palestinian leaders was

10:27

seeing the prospect

10:29

that the Middle East was moving on and

10:32

essentially in their view giving up on

10:34

the Palestinian cause and that Israel

10:37

would be able to have friendly normal

10:39

relations with Arab countries around the

10:41

region and that it could continue with

10:45

Hardline policies toward the

10:46

Palestinians and a refusal as prime

10:51

minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said

10:53

publicly to accept a Palestinian state

10:57

right so Michael once Hamas carries out

11:00

the October 7th attacks in an effort to

11:04

destroy a status quo that it thinks is

11:06

leaving them less and less relevant more

11:09

and more hopeless including potentially

11:11

this prospect that Saudi Arabia is going

11:13

to normalize relations with Israel what

11:15

happens to these pre-october 7th

11:19

negotiations between the US Saudi Arabia

11:23

and Israel well I think there was a snap

11:26

assumption that these talks were dead

11:29

and buried that they couldn't possibly

11:32

survive a cataclysm like this right but

11:35

then something surprising happened it

11:38

became clear that all the parties were

11:40

still determined to pull off the

11:43

normalization and most surprisingly of

11:46

all perhaps was the continued eagerness

11:48

of Saudi Arabia which publicly was

11:51

professing outrage over the Israeli

11:54

response to the Hamas attacks but

11:56

privately was still very much engaged in

11:59

these conversations and trying to move

12:02

them forward mhm and in fact what has

12:05

happened is that the scope of this

12:07

effort has grown substantially October

12:11

7th didn't kill these talks it actually

12:15

made them bigger more complicated and

12:18

some people would argue more important

12:21

than

12:25

[Music]

12:27

ever we'll be right back

12:31

Michael walk us through what exactly

12:34

happens to these three-way

12:36

negotiations after October 7th that ends

12:39

up making them as you just said more

12:41

complicated and more important than ever

12:44

well it's more important than ever

12:45

because of the incredible need in Gaza

12:47

and it's going to take a deal like this

12:49

and the approval of Saudi Arabia to

12:52

unlock the kind of massive

12:54

reconstruction project required to

12:58

essentially rebuild Gaza from the reubel

13:00

Saudi Arabia and its Arab friends are

13:03

also going to be instrumental in

13:05

figuring out how Gaza is governed and

13:09

they might even provide troops to help

13:11

secure it none of those things are going

13:13

to happen without a deal like this

13:14

fascinating but this is all much more

13:16

complicated now because the price for a

13:19

deal like this has gone up and by Price

13:22

you mean what Israel would have to give

13:24

up from Saudi Arabia's perspective you

13:28

have an Arab population that is furious

13:30

at Israel it now feels like a really

13:33

hard time to do a normalization deal

13:36

with the Israelis it was never going to

13:37

be easy MH but this is about as bad a

13:40

time to do it as there has been in a

13:42

generation at

13:44

least and I think that President Biden

13:46

and the people around him understand

13:48

that the status quo between Israel and

13:51

the Palestinians is intolerable and it

13:53

is going to lead to chaos and violence

13:57

indefinitely so now you have have two of

13:59

the three parties to this agreement the

14:01

Saudis and the Americans basically

14:04

asking a new price after October 7th MH

14:07

and saying to the Israelis if we're

14:09

going to do this deal it has to not only

14:12

do something for the Palestinians it has

14:14

to do something really big you have to

14:17

commit to the creation of a Palestinian

14:20

State now I'll be specific and say that

14:22

what you hear the Secretary of State

14:24

Anthony blankin say is that the

14:26

agreement has to include an IR versible

14:29

time bound path to a Palestinian State

14:32

we don't know exactly what that looks

14:33

like but it's some kind of a firm

14:36

commitment the likes of which the world

14:39

and certainly the Israelis have not made

14:41

before something that was very much not

14:44

present in the pre-october 7th vision of

14:47

this negotiation so much so that as we

14:50

just talked about the Palestinians were

14:52

left feeling completely out in the cold

14:54

and Furious at it that's right there was

14:57

no sign that people people were thinking

14:59

that ambitiously about the Palestinians

15:01

in this deal before October 7th and the

15:04

Palestinians certainly felt like they

15:06

weren't going to get much out of it and

15:07

that has completely changed

15:11

[Music]

15:14

now so Michael once this big new

15:18

dimension after October 7th which is the

15:21

insistence by Saudi Arabia and the US

15:24

that there be a Palestinian state or a

15:26

path to a Palestinian State what is the

15:29

reaction specifically from Israel which

15:32

is of course the third major party to

15:35

this entire conversation well Israel or

15:39

at least its political leadership hates

15:41

it you know this is just an extremely

15:44

tough cell in Israel it would have been

15:45

a tough sell before October 7th it's

15:47

even harder now prime minister Benjamin

15:50

Netanyahu is completely unrepentantly

15:54

open and saying that there's not going

15:55

to be a Palestinian State on his watch

15:57

he won't accept it he says that it's a

16:00

strategic risk to his country he says

16:02

that it would in effect reward Hamas his

16:05

argument is that terrorism has forced a

16:08

conversation about statehood onto the

16:10

table that wasn't there before October

16:12

7th sure it's always in the background

16:14

it's a perennial issue in global Affairs

16:16

but it was not something certainly that

16:18

the US and Israel's Arab neighbors were

16:21

actively pushing Netanyahu also has you

16:24

know he governs with the support of very

16:28

right-wing members members of a

16:29

political Coalition that he has cobbled

16:31

together and that Coalition is quite

16:34

likely to fall apart if he does embrace

16:38

a Palestinian state or a path to a

16:39

Palestinian State now he might be able

16:42

to Cobble together some sort of

16:43

alternative but it creates a political

16:45

crisis for him and finally you know I

16:48

think in any conversation about Israel

16:50

it's worth bearing in mind something you

16:52

hear from senior us officials these days

16:54

which is that although there is often

16:58

finger pointing at Netanyahu and a

17:00

desire to blame Netanyahu as this

17:03

obstructionist who won't agree to

17:06

Deals what they say is Netanyahu is

17:09

largely reflecting his population and

17:12

the political establishment of his

17:14

country not just the right-wingers in

17:16

his Coalition who are clearly extremist

17:19

but actually the prevailing views of the

17:21

Israeli public and the Israeli public

17:23

and their political leaders across the

17:25

Spectrum right now with with few

17:27

exceptions are not interested in talking

17:29

about a Palestinian State when there are

17:31

still dozens and dozens of Israeli

17:34

hostages in tunnels beneath Gaza so it

17:37

very much looks like this giant

17:39

agreement that once seemed doable before

17:42

October 7th might be more important to

17:46

everyone involved than ever given that

17:48

it's a plan for rebuilding Gaza and

17:50

potentially preventing future October

17:52

7th from happening but because of this

17:54

higher price that Israel would have to

17:57

pay which is the acceptance of a

17:58

Palestinian state it seems from

18:01

everything you're saying that this is

18:02

more and more Out Of Reach than ever

18:05

before and hard to imagine happening in

18:07

the immediate future so if the people

18:09

negotiating it are being honest Michael

18:11

are they ready to acknowledge that it

18:14

doesn't look like this is going to

18:16

happen well not quite yet as time goes

18:19

by they certainly say it's getting

18:20

harder and harder but they're still

18:22

trying they still think there's a chance

18:25

but both the Saudis and the Biden

18:27

Administration understand that there's

18:29

very little time left to do this well

18:31

what do you mean there's very little

18:32

time left it would seem like time might

18:34

benefit this negotiation in that it

18:36

might give Israel distance from October

18:39

7th to think potentially differently

18:42

about a Palestinian State potentially

18:45

but Saudi Arabia wants to get this deal

18:47

done in the bay administration because

18:50

Muhammad bin Salman has concluded this

18:53

has to be done under a Democratic

18:55

president why because Democrats in

18:57

Congress are going to be very Rel

18:59

to approve a security agreement between

19:01

the United States and Saudi

19:03

Arabia it's important to understand that

19:05

if there is a security agreement that's

19:07

something Congress is going to have to

19:08

approve and you're just not going to get

19:10

enough Democrats in Congress to support

19:12

a deal with Saudi Arabia who a lot of

19:14

Democrats don't like to begin with

19:16

because they see them as human rights

19:18

abusers but if a Democratic president is

19:20

asking them to do it they're much more

19:22

likely to go along right so Saudi Arabia

19:25

fears that if Biden loses and Trump is

19:28

president that those same Democrats

19:30

would bulk at this deal in a way that

19:32

they wouldn't if it were being

19:34

negotiated under President Biden exactly

19:37

now from President Biden's perspective

19:39

politically think about a president

19:41

who's running for re-election who is

19:43

presiding right now over chaos in the

19:46

Middle East who doesn't seem to have

19:48

good answers for the Israeli Palestinian

19:51

question this is an opportunity for

19:53

President Biden to deliver what could be

19:56

at least what he would present as a

19:58

diplomatic Master stroke that does

20:01

multiple things at once including

20:04

creating a new pathway for Israel and

20:07

the Palestinians to coexist to break

20:09

through the Log Jam Even as he's also

20:12

improving Israel's relations with Saudi

20:14

Arabia so Biden and the Crown Prince

20:16

hope that they can

20:18

somehow persuade BB Netanyahu that in

20:22

spite of all the reasons that he thinks

20:24

this is a terrible idea that this is a

20:27

bet worth taking on Israel's and the

20:30

Region's long-term security and future

20:34

that's right now no one has explained

20:37

very clearly exactly how this is going

20:39

to work and it's probably going to

20:40

require Artful

20:42

diplomacy possibly even a scenario where

20:45

the Israelis would agree to something

20:47

that maybe means one thing to them and

20:49

means something else to other people but

20:51

Biden officials refuse to say that it's

20:53

hopeless and they refuse to essentially

20:56

take

20:56

netanyahu's preliminary note for an

20:59

answer and they still see some way that

21:01

they can thread this incredibly narrow

21:03

needle Michael I'm curious about a

21:05

constituency that we haven't been

21:07

talking about because they're not at the

21:08

table in these discussions that we are

21:11

talking about here and that would be

21:13

Hamas how does Hamas feel about the

21:16

prospect of such a deal like this ever

21:18

taking shape do they see it as any kind

21:21

of a victory and Vindication for what

21:24

they did on October 7th so it's hard to

21:27

know exactly what M's leadership is

21:29

thinking I think they can feel two

21:31

things I think they can feel on the one

21:34

hand that they have established

21:36

themselves as the champions of the

21:38

Palestinian people who struck a blow

21:40

against Israel and against a diplomatic

21:42

process that was potentially going to

21:45

leave the Palestinians out in the cold

21:47

MH at the same time Hamas has no

21:50

interest in the kind of two-state

21:52

solution that the US is trying to

21:54

promote they think Israel should be

21:56

destroyed they think the inan State

21:59

should cover the entire geography of

22:01

what is now Israel and they want to lead

22:03

a state like that and that's not

22:05

something that the US Saudi Arabia or

22:07

anyone else is going to tolerate so what

22:09

Hamas wants is to fight to be the leader

22:13

of the Palestinian people and to destroy

22:15

Israel and they're not interested in any

22:17

sort of a peace process or statehood

22:19

process it seems very clear from

22:22

everything you've said here that neither

22:24

Israel nor Hamas is ready to have the

22:27

conversation about a grand bargain

22:29

diplomatic program and I wonder if that

22:33

inevitably has any bearing on the

22:36

ceasefire negotiations that are going on

22:39

right now between the two of them that

22:42

are supposed to bring this conflict to

22:44

some sort of an end even if it's just

22:47

temporary because if as you said Michael

22:50

a ceasefire opens the door to this

22:53

larger diplomatic solution and these two

22:56

players don't necessarily want want that

22:58

larger diplomatic solution doesn't that

23:01

inevitably impact their enthusiasm for

23:03

even reaching a

23:05

ceasefire well it certainly doesn't help

23:08

you know this is such a hellish problem

23:10

and of course you first have the

23:12

question of whether Israel and Hamas can

23:14

make a deal on these immediate issues

23:17

including the hostages Palestinian

23:19

prisoners what the Israeli military is

23:21

going to do how long a SE fire might

23:23

last right but on top of that you have

23:25

these much bigger diplomatic questions

23:28

that are looming over them and it's not

23:29

clear that either side is ready to turn

23:32

and face those bigger

23:35

questions so while for the Biden

23:38

Administration and for Saudi Arabia this

23:41

is a way out of this crisis these larger

23:44

diplomatic Solutions it's not clear that

23:46

it's a conversation that the two parties

23:49

that are actually at War here are

23:51

prepared to start

23:53

having well Michael thank you very much

23:55

we appreciate it thank you

24:00

[Music]

24:04

on Tuesday afternoon under intense

24:06

pressure from the US delegations from

24:09

Israel and Hamas arrived in Cairo to

24:13

resume negotiations over a potential

24:16

ceasefire but in a statement Israel's

24:19

prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu made

24:21

clear that even with the talks underway

24:25

his government would quote continue to w

24:28

AG war against

24:33

[Music]

24:43

Hamas we'll be right

24:52

back here's what else you need to know

24:54

to day in a dramatic day of testimony

24:57

stor Nory Daniels offered explicit

25:00

details about an alleged sexual

25:02

encounter with Donald Trump that

25:05

ultimately led to the hush money payment

25:07

at the center of his trial Daniels

25:10

testified that Trump answered the door

25:13

in pajamas that he told her not to worry

25:16

that he was married and that he did not

25:19

use a condom when they had sex that

25:22

prompted lawyers for Trump to seek a

25:25

mistrial based on what they called

25:27

prejudice judicial testimony but the

25:30

judge in the case rejected that

25:33

request and we've seen a ferocious surge

25:36

of anti-Semitism in America and around

25:39

the world in a speech on Tuesday

25:42

honoring victims of the Holocaust

25:45

President Biden condemned what he said

25:47

was the alarming rise of anti-Semitism

25:50

in the United States after the October

25:52

7th attacks on Israel and he expressed

25:55

worry that too many Americans for

25:58

already forgetting the horrors of that

26:01

attack to the Jewish Community I want

26:03

you to

26:05

know I see your fear your hurt and your

26:08

pain let me reassure you as your

26:12

president you're not alone you

26:16

belong you always have and you always

26:21

will today's episode was produced by

26:24

Nina Feldman Claire tennis ketter and

26:26

Ricky nety it was edited by Liz o balen

26:30

contains original music by Maran Lozano

26:33

Alicia beup and Dan Powell and was

26:36

engineered by Alysa Moxley our theme

26:39

music is by Jim runber and Ben Lark of

26:46

wonderly that's it for the daily I'm

26:49

Michael Babar see you tomorrow

26:55

[Music]