

egypt plan for peace Ceasefire, hostage-prisoner swap, blueprint for Gaza rule

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Byline: Samy Magdy, Najib Jobain and Josef Federman the Associated Press

Highlight: Israeli soldiers stand on top of an armored vehicle Monday in southern Israel near the Gaza border. ap

Body

CAIRO - Israel and Hamas on Monday gave cool public receptions to an Egyptian proposal to end their bitter war. But the longstanding enemies stopped short of rejecting the plan altogether, raising the possibility of a new round of diplomacy to halt a devastating Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip.

The Egyptian plan calls for a phased hostage release and the formation of a Palestinian government of experts to administer the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank, according to a senior Egyptian official and a European diplomat familiar with the proposal.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the proposal, said the details were worked out with the Gulf nation of Qatar and presented to Israel, Hamas, the United States and European governments. Egypt and Qatar both mediate between Israel and Hamas, while the U.S. is Israel's closest ally and a key power in the region.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who visited troops in Gaza on Monday, did not comment directly on the proposal. But speaking to members of his Likud Party, he said he was determined to press ahead with Israel's offensive, launched in response to an Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and took 240 others hostage.

"We are expanding the fight in the coming days and this will be a long battle and it isn't close to finished," he said.

Hamas has continued to fire rockets into Israel throughout the fighting. Late Monday, it launched a barrage of rockets, triggering air raid sirens in the southern city of Ashkelon. AP video showed what appeared to be several interceptions by Israel's rocket defense system. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

The Egyptian proposal falls short of Israel's declared goal of crushing Hamas. It also appears to be at odds with Israel's insistence on maintaining military control over Gaza for an extended period after the war.

But Netanyahu faces heavy domestic pressure to reach a deal to bring home the more than 100 Israeli hostages who remain in captivity in Gaza.

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As he vowed to continue the war during a speech in parliament, relatives of the hostages interrupted him and called for their immediate return. "Now! Now!" they shouted.

The rising death toll of Israeli soldiers from the ground operation also threatens to undermine public support for the war. The Israeli military announced the deaths of two more soldiers Monday, bringing the total killed in the war to 156.

Netanyahu's War Cabinet was expected to meet late Monday. It was unclear if they would discuss the Egyptian proposal.

Hamas did not officially react to the proposal. But it is unclear if Hamas would agree to relinquish power after controlling Gaza for the past 16 years.

Izzat Rishq, a senior Hamas official who is believed to be based in Qatar, issued a statement repeating the group's position that it will not negotiate without a "complete end to the aggression." He said Hamas would not agree to a "temporary or partial truce for a short period of time."

Word of the proposal came as Israeli airstrikes heavily pounded central and southern Gaza.

In the Maghazi refugee camp Monday, rescue workers were still pulling bodies from the wreckage of a strike the previous night. Records at the nearby Al-Aqsa Hospital seen by the Associated Press showed at least 106 people killed, making it one of the deadliest strikes of Israel's air campaign.

The war has killed more than 20,600 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, and displaced almost all of the territory's 2.3 million people.

UN officials have warned that a quarter of the population is starving under Israel's siege of the territory.

In the southern Gaza Strip, Hamas admitted to shooting dead a 13-year-old boy who was among a group of people who tried to seize aid from a truck. The shooting prompted a violent protest and rare public criticism of Hamas.

The Egyptian proposal is an ambitious bid not only to end the war but also to lay out a plan for the day after.

It calls for an initial ceasefire of up to two weeks during which Palestinian militants would free 40 to 50 hostages, among them women, the sick and the elderly, in return for the release of 120 to 150 Palestinians from Israeli prisons, the Egyptian official said.

At the same time, negotiations would continue on extending the ceasefire and the release of more hostages and bodies held by Palestinian militants, he said. Israeli officials estimate that 20 of the hostages have died or been killed in captivity.

Egypt and Qatar would also work with all Palestinian factions, including Hamas and the rival, internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, to agree on creating a government of experts, he said.

The government would rule Gaza and the West Bank for a transitional period as Palestinian factions work toward presidential and parliamentary elections, he added.

In the meantime, Israel and Hamas would negotiate a comprehensive "all-for-all" deal, he said. This would include the release of all remaining hostages in return for all Palestinian prisoners in Israel, as well as the Israeli military's withdrawal from Gaza and the Palestinian militants' halting of rocket attacks into Israel.

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Egypt plan to end Israel-Hamas war gets cool reception

Yerepouni Daily News

December 26, 2023 Tuesday

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YEREPOUNI - ARMENIAN INDEPENDENT NEWS

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Body

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By SAMY MAGDY, NAJIB JOBAIN and JOSEF FEDERMAN

<https://japantoday.com> -CAIRO

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"The hospital is taking in far more patients than its bed capacity and staff can handle. Many will not survive the wait," he said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

The war has devastated large parts of Gaza, killed more than 20,600 Palestinians and displaced almost all of the territory's 2.3 million people.

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More than 8,000 Palestinians are held by Israel on security-related charges or convictions, according to Palestinian figures. Some have been convicted in deadly attacks on Israelis. While their release would be controversial, Israel has a history of agreeing to lopsided releases.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry spoke by phone Monday with Iran's chief diplomat, Hossein Amirabdollahian, on the war in Gaza, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said. The statement said Shoukry discussed efforts to achieve a comprehensive cease-fire. It didn't offer further details. Iran is a major supporter of Hamas.

In Washington, the White House declined to comment about the Egyptian proposal.

U.S. officials remain in close contact with Egypt and Qatar about getting more hostages released and several proposals have been floated, according to a person familiar with the talks. While the Egyptian proposal is viewed as a positive sign, the U.S. is skeptical it will result in a breakthrough, the person said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss behind the scenes diplomacy.

Israel's offensive has been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than two-thirds of the 20,674 Palestinians killed have been women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants among the dead.

The offensive has led to a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with shortages of food, medicines and other basic supplies.

With aid shipments limited, crowds have tried to seize some of the goods coming in on trucks. Hamas gunmen have been seen on top of some of the vehicles. The group says it is protecting the shipments, while Israel accuses it of stealing aid.

In the southern Gaza Strip, Hamas acknowledged that a policeman with the Hamas-run Interior Ministry shot dead a 13-year-old boy, saying the shots were fired when a group of people tried to seize aid from a truck near the city of Rafah on Sunday, an official with Hamas government media office said Monday.

The shooting prompted a violent protest and rare public criticism of Hamas, which has shown little tolerance for dissent during its rule.

Enraged relatives of the slain boy, Ahmed Brikeh, attempted to attack a police station, burning tires and demanding the policeman be held accountable.

A relative, Mosaad Brikeh, blamed Hamas for the killing in video comments circulated on social media, accusing the policeman of shooting the boy "directly in his head."

He said the family has previously cooperated with Hamas to secure the border area with Egypt. He called for the policeman to be held accountable, warning the family would prevent "any vehicles" from passing through the area.

The devastation of the war over the past weeks has brought sporadic eruptions of anger against Hamas, something that has previously been unthinkable during the group's 16-year rule over Gaza.

Israel faces international criticism for the civilian death toll. It blames Hamas, citing the militants' use of crowded residential areas and tunnels. Israel says it has killed thousands of Hamas militants, without presenting evidence.

Late on Monday, the Israeli army said it had discovered the stolen car of the family of an Israeli hostage, Samer Al-Talalka, in a hospital compound in northern Gaza. Al-Talalka was among three hostages mistakenly shot dead by Israeli soldiers in Gaza earlier this month.

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The army said grenade fragments and bloodstains of another hostage were found in the vehicle. "The finding of the vehicle directly links the hospital to the brutal events of Oct. 7," it said.

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Niagara Falls Review (Ontario)

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First Edition

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