

Israel-Hamas Cease-Fire in Gaza

January 17, 2025

After 15 months of [war in Gaza](#), Israel and [Hamas](#) (a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, or FTO) [have agreed](#) to begin the first phase of a hostage-prisoner exchange and possible three-phase cease-fire. It will likely start on January 19, 2025, with Israel's cabinet set to vote on the agreement before then. A lasting end of hostilities may depend partly on the extent to which the parties implement the terms (discussed below) for the first stage, which is scheduled to last for six weeks, as well as additional indirect Israel-Hamas talks. One member of Israel's ruling coalition, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, [has pledged to leave the government](#), without seeking to bring it down. Another, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, [reportedly has agreed to stay in the coalition](#), possibly in exchange for assurances from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [to resume the war](#) at some point.

U.S. leaders from the Biden Administration and the incoming Administration worked with Egyptian and Qatari counterparts to mediate the deal, based on a framework [announced](#) by President Joe Biden in May 2024, and welcomed in June by [the UN Security Council](#). As the parties engaged in indirect on-and-off talks over the ensuing months, Israeli military operations [continued to degrade](#) Hamas's leadership and military capacity, while also striking major blows against Hamas supporters [Iran](#) and [Lebanese Hezbollah](#) (another FTO). In November, Hezbollah agreed to [a separate cease-fire with Israel](#) after dropping its previous insistence that Israel first end fighting in Gaza. As conflict wore on there, and damage to buildings and infrastructure worsened, about [90% of Gaza's some 2.1 million residents](#) faced displacement. Most confront unsanitary, overcrowded conditions alongside [acute food insecurity](#) and shortages of water, medical care, and other essential supplies and services. [Israeli airstrikes](#) and [Hamas guerrilla activity and rocket fire](#) have persisted in the run-up to the deal's effective date.

Key Terms and Outlook

According to [President Biden](#), [a reputed text](#) of the deal, and other sources, the parties have agreed to the following during the initial six-week stage:

- The return of [33 hostages](#) to Israel in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, some of whom [might live outside of the West Bank and Gaza](#) upon release. Reportedly, [Israel estimates](#) that most of these hostages are alive. They include women, children, the infirm, and men over 50, as well as two Israelis captured before October 7. [Two of the three U.S. citizens likely still alive](#) are apparently part of the group. Palestinians who

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IN12487

might be released [reportedly include](#) 1,000 Gazan detainees who were not allegedly involved in the October 7 attacks, and 110 prisoners serving life sentences.

- A pullback of Israeli forces to border areas within Gaza. The [reputed deal text](#) appears to call for Israel to draw down its forces from the [Philadelphi Corridor](#) bordering Egypt, with a full withdrawal from the corridor to happen 50 days after the agreement takes effect. Separate provisions apparently permit Israeli forces some continued presence around the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza. The Israeli prime minister's office [reportedly said](#) that Israel plans to reposition rather than draw down its troops during the first six weeks, and that forces would remain at Philadelphi if a next round of talks breaks down.
- Displaced civilians from northern Gaza “will be allowed” to return home, with vehicles subject to inspection by a private company.
- Increased humanitarian aid shipments to Gaza. UN officials [have asserted](#) that Israel has effectively impeded aid, partly in light of military strikes and [reported problems](#) preventing gang raids or looting, while Israel [has claimed](#) it makes best efforts to [safely facilitate aid](#).

The deal's implementation and the potential to move to additional cease-fire phases could depend on various factors, including the parties' interpretation of certain steps, their sequencing, and pressure from hardliners on both sides.

Under the deal, the parties reportedly will resume indirect talks for future cease-fire stages [16 days into the first phase](#), via the mediating countries. These talks would likely address a possible end to the conflict, the status of some [65 remaining hostages](#) (many of whom are presumed dead), potential additional Palestinian prisoner releases, and various roles Israel, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and other parties might play in Gaza's future.

Issues for Congress

Members of Congress may assess legislative options and conduct oversight of executive branch action on matters related to the cease-fire agreement and its implications. U.S. officials face apparent challenges in reconciling Israeli security priorities and political dynamics with Palestinian desires for statehood and post-conflict recovery. The end, abatement, or recurrence of conflict could affect congressional debates regarding the following:

U.S. security assistance to Israel and other Middle Eastern partners, and/or other forms of cooperation that aim to advance certain U.S. interests. These interests may include preventing major regional war, countering Iranian influence and threats to U.S. forces and partners, protecting and providing humanitarian relief for civilians, and safeguarding international commerce. More formal Israel-Saudi Arabia cooperation could bolster a U.S.-led effort to counter Iran. In [mid-January 2025 remarks](#), Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Saudi normalization of relations with Israel remains contingent on Israel ending the war in Gaza and agreeing to a “credible pathway” toward a Palestinian state—something the current Netanyahu government [has publicly resisted](#).

Humanitarian aid for Gaza, perhaps contingent on continued calm, specific civilian needs, entities willing and able to distribute aid, contributions from other countries, and arrangements to prevent diversion, destruction, or misuse of supplies. The [UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East \(UNRWA\)](#) is the main provider of humanitarian assistance and services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, but some factors, including a U.S. prohibition on funding until at least March 2025 (P.L. 118-47), and [Israeli legal provisions](#) set to take effect in late January, could impede its ability to act. U.S.

officials are [reportedly discussing](#) potential alternatives in UN settings to fill at least some UNRWA functions.

Security assistance for Palestinians, perhaps based partly on the degree to which Hamas may cede responsibility for governance and security in Gaza. In his mid-January remarks, Secretary Blinken [publicly announced](#) elements of a recommended transition plan: a possible interim governing authority backed by security from partner nations and “vetted Palestinian personnel,” a U.S.-trained PA-led security force, and an eventual return to Gaza by a “reformed” PA. The United States has provided [non-lethal train-and-equip assistance](#) for PA forces in the West Bank for nearly two decades, and [some PA forces](#) have made an effort since late 2024 to improve law and order, and counter Iran-backed militias in the West Bank—with [possible implications](#) for potential PA security contributions in Gaza. Forces loyal to PA President Mahmoud Abbas lost Gaza to Hamas in 2007. Prime Minister Netanyahu has been [openly skeptical](#), but [reportedly more ambiguous in private](#), about an official PA role in Gaza. He [stated in his July 2024 speech to a joint session of Congress](#) that a civilian administration should be run by Palestinians “who do not seek to destroy Israel.”

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