

C.I.A. Director Arrives in Qatar for Talks on Hostage Releases

William J. Burns, the C.I.A. head, and David Barnea, who leads the Mossad, Israel's spy service, are scheduled to meet with officials in Qatar, which has been mediating talks between Israel and Hamas.

By Julian E. Barnes
New York Times

William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, arrived in Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday for a new round of negotiations aimed at freeing more hostages held in Gaza, according to U.S. officials.

Mr. Burns and David Barnea, the head of the Mossad, Israel's spy service, are scheduled to meet with Qatari officials. Qatar, which hosts Hamas's political leadership in Doha, has been a mediator in the talks between Israel and Hamas.

Qatar announced on Monday that Israel and Hamas had agreed to [extend a pause in fighting](#) for two additional days to exchange more hostages and prisoners and to allow more aid to come into Gaza.

One U.S. official said Mr. Burns's talks in Qatar would be meant to build on that agreement.

[U.S. officials have been deeply involved in pushing for a deal to release hostages](#) taken during the Hamas-led attacks on Israel on Oct. 7. Mr. Burns [traveled to Doha on Nov. 9](#) as he and Mr. Barnea held talks with Qatari officials who have been working on the issue.

Hamas and Israel [finally reached a deal on Nov. 21](#), and exchanges began later that week. During the first four days of the truce, 50 Israelis or dual nationals were released under the framework of the deal, and an additional 19 hostages — 17 Thais, one Filipino and one Russian-Israeli dual citizen — were released through separate negotiations. In exchange for the release of the Israelis and dual nationals, Israel paused its military campaign in Gaza, allowed more aid to flow into the enclave and released some Palestinian prisoners.

Some American officials have expressed hope that the temporary pause [can be extended into something of a more permanent cease-fire](#), though Israeli officials have said their military campaign must continue.

A spokeswoman for the C.I.A. said the agency does not comment on the director's travel.

Israel has been concerned that some of the Hamas hostage releases have separated children from their mothers or broken apart siblings. Throughout the talks this month, Israeli officials have pressed for Hamas to release entire families and over the weekend stressed to American officials that they did not believe Hamas was living up to the bargain.

Those concerns were addressed enough on Monday for the pause to be extended and for the parties to agree to additional talks in Doha.

Mr. Burns was chosen to represent the United States in the hostage talks after Israel selected Mr. Barnea to work with the Qatari government to secure a deal. Neither Mr. Burns nor Mr. Barnea has negotiated directly with Hamas officials, instead working through Qatari intermediaries.

President Biden has often used Mr. Burns as a secret negotiator, taking advantage of [his long diplomatic experience](#) and the C.I.A.'s policy of trying to keep the director's travel secret.

But Mr. Burns is particularly well suited for the current negotiations. A former ambassador to Jordan, he has a deep level of trust with leaders across the Middle East, according to U.S., Israeli and Arab officials. During his visit to Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Qatar earlier this month, he focused largely on building support for an agreement to release hostages.