

# Trump administration ‘optimistic’ on Gaza ceasefire; Hamas expresses doubts

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**By Michael Birnbaum, Shira Rubin and Lior Soroka**  
**Washington Post**

The White House has sent an Israeli-backed ceasefire proposal to Hamas, press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Thursday, in the latest bid to quell fighting, free hostages and enable the flow of humanitarian aid to struggling Gaza.

The White House has been willing to engage directly with Hamas to help broker deals and successfully won the release this month of the last living U.S. citizen held hostage by the militant group, 21-year-old Edan Alexander. But a broader halt to the fighting has been more elusive since a two-month ceasefire broke down in mid-March.

Since then, Israel has engaged in some of the most intense bombardment of the territory since the conflict started in October 2023, and it has signaled that it plans to occupy Gaza. Aid to Palestinians there has come to a near stop, leading United Nations envoy Sigrid Kaag to warn Wednesday that “the entire population of Gaza is facing the risk of famine.”

But amid parallel talks this week with Israeli officials in Washington and with Hamas officials in Qatar, Trump administration officials believe the sides are closing in on a deal.

“I can confirm that special envoy [Steve] Witkoff and the president submitted a ceasefire proposal to Hamas that Israel backed and supported. Israel signed off on this proposal before it was sent to Hamas,” Leavitt told reporters on Thursday. “I can also confirm that those discussions are continuing, and we hope that a ceasefire in Gaza will take place so we can return all of the hostages home, and that’s been a priority from this administration from the beginning.”

The fate of the U.S. ceasefire proposal was unclear late Thursday, after Hamas officials said the draft purportedly approved by Israel failed to meet the group's demands.

Israel's response to the proposal "means perpetuating the occupation and continuing the killing and famine," top Hamas official, Basem Naim, said in a statement. He said Hamas leaders were studying the draft and considering their response to the text.

A second senior Hamas official, Sami Abu Zuhri, provided more details in an interview with Al-Masirah, a media outlet run by Yemen's Houthi fighters.

The proposal Israel agreed to had "no commitments" to a longer-term ceasefire or a military withdrawal, "as well as an insistence on receiving the hostages within just one week. This is far from what Hamas agreed to with the American mediator," he said.

Witkoff, the Trump administration's top Middle East negotiator, didn't publicize details of his proposal, but Israeli officials said Thursday that the offer includes the release of 10 living hostages from Gaza and the bodies of 18 more.

In exchange, both sides would adhere to a 60-day ceasefire. But the sides appear still to be split about what would happen after the 60 days, with Hamas seeking assurances that Israel would permanently halt its assault, and Israeli authorities wanting to keep their options open.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel won't stop fighting until Hamas is destroyed. His security cabinet approved a plan this month to seize all of Gaza and push its residents south, where Israel would then facilitate their expulsion from the enclave, a move experts say probably would be a crime under international law.

On Thursday, Netanyahu met with the families of deceased Israelis whose bodies are still in Gaza. He said Israel was willing to move forward with the Witkoff proposal but that there were still details to work out, according to three people who attended.

"We didn't receive any concrete information, and the message was that the war will end only when Hamas is completely defeated. We did not come out feeling optimistic," said Yael Adar, mother of 38-year-old Tamir Adar, who was killed on Oct. 7, 2023, and dragged back to Gaza.

President Donald Trump has sought to broker the lasting deal between Hamas and Israel that eluded former president Joe Biden. Trump has been less critical of Netanyahu's handling of the conflict than Biden was, but he has also been willing to talk directly to Hamas and Iran, over Israeli objections, to try to bring peace to the region and restrain Iran's nuclear program.

"We do believe that it has some significant promise," State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said Thursday about the latest proposal. "There is some optimism."

A vocal movement of hostage families in Israel has advocated for a deal with Hamas, rather than continuing the war.

Kobi Samerano, the father of 21-year-old Yonatan Samerano, also killed on Oct. 7, said he told Netanyahu that he wants all the hostages released at the same time. "But the prime minister didn't respond to that," Samerano said. "We didn't receive any new information beyond what's already been reported in the media."

*Rubin and Soroka reported from Tel Aviv. Hazem Balousha in Toronto and Susannah George in Dubai contributed to this report.*