

Source: Gaps still large but Israel will agree to negotiate under fire

Jonathan Lis

Israel will agree to hold negotiations with Hamas even without a cease-fire, in an attempt to narrow the gaps between the two sides and continue with the earlier cease-fire and hostage-prisoner exchange agreement, Israeli sources believe. This signals a possibility of further flexibility on Israel's part, despite major differences between the parties.

The talks are expected to take place despite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's declaration that he intends to expand Israel Defense Forces operations in Gaza and take over territory.

According to a source involved in the talks, Hamas has agreed to show flexibility and release five living hostages in phases spanning 50 days, in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners serving long sentences for serious offenses. Israel submitted its counterproposal to the mediators early Saturday.

This proposal was formulated in coordination with the U.S. administration after consultations with Netanyahu over the last few days.

The Israeli side continues to publicly emphasize the original outline put forth by U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff, which called for 11 living hostages to be released on the first day of the agreement, with the rest being released on the last day. Witkoff himself has retracted this proposal and laid an initiative for releasing only five hostages on the mediators' table.

At first Hamas declared its willingness to release only one hostage along with four bodies of deceased hostages, but may now agree to release five living hostages.



Hamas shared a new video of hostage Elkana Bohbot begging to be released. This was the second video of Bohbot released in a week. See story, Page 2.

An Israeli source forecast Saturday that Egypt, Qatar and the Americans would now exert heavy pressure on the two sides, which could lead to a breakthrough in the negotiations. "It's too soon to know what the chances are of this succeeding," added the source.

The common element in all these proposals is that the last living hostage with

American citizenship, Edan Alexander, would definitely be released. A senior Israeli official warned in recent days that freeing Alexander would likely reduce American pressure for future deals and would cause President Donald Trump to lose interest in solving the crisis.

"The release of Edan Alexander will take American pressure off Netanyahu too,

with regard to releasing the other hostages or making progress toward a post-war arrangement. This should be taken into consideration," added the official.

The calendar is again providing Israel and Hamas with a pretext for a deal. Eid al-Fitr takes place on Sunday and Passover is approaching. This may urge the sides to make concessions they

have found difficult to make until now. The release of hostages and stopping the war for the holidays are of great value to Israel; the release of Palestinian prisoners and a renewed flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza is something Hamas has stated it wants.

However, the calendar aspect has not proven itself in the past. Qatar, Egypt and senior officials in the previous

U.S. administration learned that hopes and reality are two different things. Last year, the two sides held optimistic negotiations ahead of a deal to be implemented at the beginning of the month of Ramadan. "All sides expressed their willingness to realize the deal that month, with the first day of Ramadan being a

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PM's billionaire friend sped up Qatari cash at Hamas' request

Gur Megiddo

Israeli billionaire and businessman Shlomi Fogel, who is close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, helped coordinate cash transfers from the government of Qatar to Hamas in the Gaza Strip, which were carried out with Israel's approval.

A document obtained by Haaretz's sister publication TheMarker, most of whose content was confirmed by an associate of Fogel, purportedly details Fogel's sustained relationship with Mohammed Al-Emadi, the chair of the Qatari Committee for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The relationship with "the Qatari envoy," as he is known in the Israeli media, existed approximately from the late 2010s to the early 2020s. The

two men were in especially close contact from 2018 to 2021, when Emadi organized the cash shipments to the Strip, accompanied the convoys that brought the money from Israel's Ben-Gurion International Airport to the Strip and participated in the ceremonies at which Hamas officials received the cash.

According to the document, Fogel's Gazan contacts in the Strip, where Fogel had a number of projects, urged the businessman on a few occasions to do what he could to accelerate the cash deliveries from Qatar, saying they could prevent violence along the border with Israel. Fogel appealed to Emadi to expedite the transfers.

Israeli defense officials believe that some of the See QATARI, Page 2

100 soldiers, settlers vandalized homes in Masafer Yatta village

Nir Hasson

Israeli soldiers and settlers spent several hours early Saturday morning vandalizing a Palestinian village in the Masafer Yatta area of the West Bank, the focus of the Oscar-winning documentary "No Other Land." This was the second attack on the village in two days, according to testimonies by local residents.

The residents of Jinba said that between 2 and 6:30 A.M., around 140 uniformed and civilian-dressed Israelis raided the village, broke into all the homes, dumped food, vandalized appliances and terrorized the locals.

The Israel Defense Forces confirmed it carried out an

overnight operation in the village to search for weapons but did not disclose any findings. The army added that allegations of soldiers "deviating from procedures" during the searches are under investigation by the brigade commander.

On Friday morning, a young settler shepherd complained that he had been assaulted and lightly wounded by Palestinians near Jinba. In footage obtained by Haaretz, the settler who claimed to have been assaulted is seen driving away a flock of sheep and Palestinian shepherds.

Later, a settler mob raided the village and beat six residents with batons. One of the See VANDALS, Page 3

Levin won't appoint judges till new law goes into effect in next Knesset

Chen Maanit

The law changing the composition of the Judicial Appointments Committee, which the Knesset passed on Thursday, is one of the judicial coup's core pieces of legislation, if not the most important.

The law, which will go into effect in the next Knesset, subjects the judge's selection process to the control of politicians, suppresses the influence of Supreme Court justices and eliminates the involvement of the Israel Bar Association.

Petitions against the law were filed with the High Court of Justice immediately following the vote,

most of which were written and prepared for submission in advance.

They are demanding that the law be invalidated on grounds that it violates the checks and balances of power in Israel and contravenes basic democratic values. Afterward, an expanded High Court panel will convene and decide whether the law should be treated like the reasonableness law, which was blocked by the court.

However, unlike that law, which was due to go into effect immediately, the new law will only go into effect after the next Knesset elections, scheduled for October 2026.

Nonetheless, Justice Minister Yariv Levin intends to continue paralyzing the Judicial Appointments Committee's work in its current composition and prevent the selection of new judges until the amendment goes into effect. In other words, no new judges will be appointed in Israel until the next Knesset or until his conflict with Supreme Court President Isaac Amit ends.

The Supreme Court has been operating with 12 justices, instead of the usual 15. Because of Levin's objections, no successor was appointed when the former president of the Supreme Court Esther Hayut retired,

Justice Anat Baron retired in October 2023 or when acting President Uzi Vogelman retired in October 2024.

Moreover, Justice Yosef Elron will retire in September 2025. The Judicial Section Committee's paralysis will soon result in a Supreme Court with just 11 justices instead of 15, which will have further ramifications on the entire judiciary.

The shortage of Supreme Court Justices is already greatly increasing the caseload and damaging the quality of judicial services. A panel of at least three justices hears every case, with the result that the Supreme

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After Columbia accepts Trump's demands, university's interim president steps down

Etan Nechin, Reuters and The Associated Press

Columbia University's interim president, Katrina Armstrong, is stepping aside and the co-chair of its board of trustees, Claire Shipman, has been named acting president, the university said in a statement on Friday.

"The Board of Trustees appreciates Dr. Armstrong's service at a time of great uncertainty for the University. She worked tirelessly to promote the interests of our community and has always given her heart and soul to Columbia. We look forward to her continued contributions to the University," the statement said.

Armstrong wrote in university wide email that, "over the last few months,



A protest against immigration enforcement agents on Columbia's campus this month. Dana Edwards/Reuters

I appreciate having had the opportunity to play a small part in navigating this vast enterprise through some of the most difficult moments in its history. The world

needs Columbia University, and you can be assured that I will do everything I can to tell that story."

Shipman served as co-chair of Columbia University's

Board of Trustees. Last April, she testified before the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce regarding the Gaza solidarity encampment on Columbia's campus.

The news comes one week after Columbia agreed to nearly all demands from federal regulators after U.S. President Donald Trump's administration pulled \$400 million in grants and contracts, accusing the school of failing to stop antisemitic incidents in the wake of the October 7 attacks in Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza.

As part of the sweeping reforms, the university also announced a ban on student protests inside academic buildings and said it would

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Clockwise from top left: France's Jordan Bardella, Paraguayan ex-president Horacio Cartes, Chikli and France's Marion Marechal at the conference. Menahem Kahana/AFP, Naama Grynbau

European far-right politicians dominate antisemitism confab

Judy Maltz

Jordan Bardella, leader of France's far-right National Rally, opened his keynote at the international conference on combatting antisemitism in Jerusalem on Thursday with the following observation: "I'm aware of the symbolic significance of this invitation."

Indeed, its symbolic significance could not be overstated. This was the first time in history that leaders and representatives of far-right political parties in Europe had been invited to attend an official event hosted by the government of Israel.

Not only was Bardella invited, but so was the even more extreme European Parliament member Marion Maréchal, the granddaughter of France's National Front founder and Holocaust denier Jean-Marie Le Pen. The speaker list also included European Parliament

members Hermann Tertsch of Spain's Vox party, Charlie Weimers of the far-right Sweden Democrats party; and Kinga Gál, of Hungary's ruling Fidesz party.

The event drew national, and even international, attention not only because of who was there, but also because of who was not: There were hardly any leaders of major Jewish organizations or communities in attendance.

Among those who withdrew their participation after finding out who was on the guest list were Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League; Britain's Chief Rabbi Efraim Mirvis; German antisemitism czar Felix Klein, and French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy.

Although the conference was meant to address the growing international problem of antisemitism, a key focus was bashing leftists and Islamists. Aside from

one panelist, who was not even on the schedule, none of the speakers at any of Thursday's sessions addressed antisemitism on the right.

Quite a number of the speakers were also fixated on this particular Israeli newspaper.

Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli, who organized the conference, opened Thursday's event with a diatribe against Haaretz. Apologizing to his guests "for the lies spread against them by those who slander the state of Israel worldwide," he said: "How surprising that the charges against you were led first and foremost by Haaretz newspaper - a far-left and pro-Palestinian newspaper that over the course of the past decade, and especially since the war began, has become a beacon of lies, an anti-Zionist propaganda tool, a source of

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