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Netanyahu is dragging out hostage deal to survive another day

Clash of interests is clear: Hamas fears a trap, while Netanyahu fears losing his coalition

Amos Harel

For the first time in a long while, the direction of things is clear and intentions are no longer obscured by contradictory declarations. U.S. President Donald Trump is aiming to leverage what he describes as the great victory over Iran to impose a new regional order in the Middle East.

His first stop: the Gaza Strip. According to the carefully synchronized messaging from the local mouthpieces earlier this week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears to understand this shift as well. In advance of Netanyahu's planned visit to Washington next week, Trump has renewed pressure on both Israel and Hamas to reach a new hostage deal.

As usual, however, obstacles remain. While Israel has already agreed in principle, Hamas – expected to respond this weekend – fears a trap. The group is concerned it may once again release captives without achieving its core objective: a final end to the war, while preserving as much of its remaining strength as possible.

Netanyahu, who owes Trump a considerable debt after the president mobilized on his behalf in the Iran campaign after defying the majority of his base in the Republican Party, is still looking for a way to preserve his fragile coalition.



Demonstrators calling for a cease-fire deal that will bring home the hostages from Gaza, in Tel Aviv on Thursday night.

Itai Ron

The far-right elements in his government also smell danger. After clashing with Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Eyal Zamir earlier this week over the objectives in the Gaza war, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir called on his colleague, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, to forge a united front to thwart the deal.

In contrast, the public sentiment in Israel is in a different direction. Even after a slight rise in Netanyahu's popularity after the Iran offensive and the resulting cease-fire, all the polls consistently indicate that a strong majority of

the Israeli public support ending the war and securing the hostages' release – even at a steep cost. Against this backdrop, both opposition leader Yair Lapid and MK Benny Gantz have offered

the government a safety net in Knesset voting to ensure that the deal passes. Despite various proposals, it appears the framework

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Hamas 'inclined' to take 60-day cease-fire, 5-stage hostage deal

Jack Khoury and Rawan Suleiman

Hamas is inclined to accept the new cease-fire proposal, and is expected to respond to it officially within two days, the Turkish site Anadolu reported. On Thursday, Hamas continued to consult its factions in the Gaza Strip regarding the proposal put forward by the United States, Palestinian sources told Haaretz.

The proposal includes the release of 10 living hostages and the bodies of 18 deceased hostages in five phases over the course of 60 days, an Israeli security official and Palestinian source close to Hamas told The New York Times on Thursday. In exchange, Israel will release Palestinian prisoners. Also, Hamas will be required not to hold staged hostage release "ceremonies" as it had done in the past.

Sources told Haaretz that Hamas' military faction, which is active in the Strip and is holding the hostages, supports the proposal, and has notified the organization's political branch in Doha of this.

According to the sources, the United States, Egypt and Qatar gave Hamas strong guarantees, the nature of which is not clear, for implementing the agreement. They said Turkey may also join the states guaranteeing the agreement. The Qatari site Alarabi reported that the mediators will also ensure that profound debates are held on a permanent cease-fire arrangement, including the possibility to extend the negotiation time

if needed. Also, a personal commitment from U.S. President Donald Trump was submitted to act in order to set into place a permanent arrangement during the 60-day cease-fire.

Discussions within Hamas are now focusing on crucial technical details in the agreement, such as the mechanisms to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza, the Israeli withdrawal maps and strategic and security moves in the period after the end of the cease-fire. Sky News in Arabic reported that a Qatari delegation would land in Cairo on Thursday to join the Hamas delegation that traveled there the previous day.

Surge in
PTSD cases
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Hamas sources said the organizations impressed on the other factions in the Strip that during the cease-fire, the main effort will focus on preventing acts that could be seen as provocation, which would lead Israel to renew the fighting. However, a Palestinian source says that Hamas expects Israel to adopt the "Lebanese model" – focused attacks on activists and infrastructure without resuming overall warfare – during the cease-fire period and especially after it. The source said this evaluation is based on watching Israel's conduct versus Lebanon and Syria

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A cluster bomb impact site in Be'er Sheva.

Eliyahu Hershkovitz

How three Iranian cluster missiles hit seven cities

Bar Peleg, Oded Yaron and Eden Solomon

Last Wednesday, shortly after 7 A.M., Gavriel was asleep with his son on the top floor of their home. Exhausted after another tense week, he had gone to bed just three hours earlier.

"My wife and the baby slept on the first floor, so they could reach the safe room faster," he

told Haaretz. "My son woke up from the siren and said, 'Dad, let's go to the safe room,' but I was nonchalant about it. I said I'd be down in a minute, that the siren would end soon and everything would be alright. But he said, 'Dad, I'm not going down without you.' So I got up, went downstairs – and then the missile hit."

What penetrated the roof of their home wasn't an ordi-

nary Iranian ballistic missile, but a bomblet released from a cluster munition that had descended from beyond the atmosphere – one of many that fell in the heart of populated areas across Israel. Gavriel managed to make it into the safe room just before the impact. The roof gave in, and chunks of concrete fell onto the bed.

"The demolition experts

said we were lucky it didn't explode," he recounted. "I immediately recited Birkat Hagomel," the Jewish prayer of thanksgiving traditionally said after surviving a life-threatening event.

Over the 12-day war, Iran launched more than 500 ballistic missiles at Israel, including at least three cluster missiles. These are warheads designed to split at an altitude

of around seven kilometers (about five miles), dispersing dozens of submunitions – or bomblets. The military was not surprised by the use of this weapon, and the air defense systems did attempt to intercept them.

The dispersal of many small bombs from such a high altitude causes damage over a much wider area than a single missile, but the individual im-

pact of each is significantly smaller. A typical ballistic missile carries a warhead weighing 500 to 1,000 kilograms, whereas the submunitions in a cluster missile carry an explosive charge of up to 7 kilograms (around 15 pounds) – similar in power to the short-range rockets fired by Hamas and Hezbollah.

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117 residents murdered or kidnapped

Netanyahu makes first visit to Kibbutz Nir Oz since Oct. 7

Bar Peleg and Nir Hasson

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrived on Thursday afternoon at Kibbutz Nir Oz – 635 days after the October 7 massacre. Dozens of protesters gathered at the entrance to the kibbutz, but Netanyahu entered from a back entrance, where only a few protesters had gathered.

About a year ago, Netanyahu's office announced he was preparing to visit the kibbutz. But the visit never took place despite repeated pleas from residents. During one of his press conferences over a year ago, the prime minister presented a map of the Gaza border communities with the kibbutz's name missing.

Nearly a quarter of Nir Oz's residents – 117 people – were

killed or kidnapped to Gaza on the day of the massacre.

After arriving at the kibbutz, Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, met with former hostage Gadi Mozes, who was released from captivity in January, Einav Zangauker, whose son Matan was kidnapped from the kibbutz on October 7 and has been held in Gaza ever since, and Yizhar Lifshitz, son of Oded Lifshitz, who was kidnapped and killed in Gaza.

Ahead of the visit, about 20 protesters gathered at the entrance to the kibbutz, while anti-government protest groups called on others to join them during Netanyahu's stay.

There was a rift among the residents in the kibbutz regarding the visit. Some hostages' families had pri-

vately asked the kibbutz to let him visit, using the time to try convince him to sign a hostage deal. Others had voiced strong objections to a visit, arguing that it would exploit the kibbutz's grief and dishonor the memory of those murdered.

Reuma Kedem, whose daughter, son-in-law and three young grandchildren were murdered in their home in Nir Oz, expressed outrage at Netanyahu's visit.

"The blood of my daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren is on your hands," she wrote on X.

"You funded, betrayed, abandoned and brought about the destruction of this home with your own hands. Don't you dare, two years later,

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Cafe strike victims: a journalist, a star soccer player and Gaza's youngest female boxer

Naghm Zbeedat

An Israeli airstrike on Sunday struck the Al-Baqa Café, a popular seaside venue in Gaza City, killing at least 30 people and wounding dozens more, according to Palestinian health officials.

Al-Baqa Café was one of the few businesses that remained open amid the ongoing war, which has now stretched past 20 months. For many in Gaza, it served as a rare space for connection, especially among journalists, artists, families and young people – a place to charge phones, access the internet and find a brief relief from daily violence.

The strike occurred without warning, according to several eyewitnesses. "All of a sudden, a warplane hit the place, shaking it like an earthquake," Ali Abu Ateila, who was inside the café at the



Gazans walking through the remains of the cafe destroyed by Israel, last week.

Jehad Alshrafi/AP

time, told AP. "It was full of women and children."

Fares Awad, head of

emergency and ambulance services in northern Gaza, confirmed the death toll and

said many of the wounded were in critical condition. Videos shared on social me-

dia showed bodies at the site and survivors transporting the injured using blankets and makeshift stretchers.

Among those killed was Amneh al-Salmi, 36, a visual artist known by the name of Frans al-Salmi. Her work, often created using charcoal and salvaged materials, focused on trauma, survival and memory. Just 10 days prior to her death, she shared her final artwork on Instagram: a painting depicting three women covered in red streaks of paint. The caption read: "The blood of the martyr – blood scented with cardamom."

After her death, friends and colleagues circulated a photograph of her body alongside the painting, noting the visual parallels between her final piece and the

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