



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 22, 2023

Hamas Rebuffs Israeli Truce Offer, Fighting Continues

Hamas has rebuffed an Israeli proposal to halt fighting in exchange for the liberation of around 40 captives, the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on December 20, citing sources.

Moreover, the Palestinian terrorist group maintained that hostage talks could only start if Israel ceased its operations in Gaza first, the newspaper added.

The WSJ report came as Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Hamas political bureau, arrived in Cairo to meet with Egypt's intelligence chief and other local officials who have been attempting to mediate in the conflict.



AP Images
Smoke rising from Gaza after Israeli bombing

Based on unnamed Egyptian officials interviewed by the WSJ, Israel demanded that Hamas release several dozen hostages, including all remaining women and children. In return, Israel was reportedly prepared to stop its offensive on Gaza for a week and permit more humanitarian aid into the enclave.

For the first time, the talks were also scheduled to include representatives of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), another potent Gaza-based Islamist paramilitary organization, the article continued.

Nonetheless, both PIJ and Hamas were reported to have insisted that Israel enforce a ceasefire before negotiations on any potential agreement could materialize. Furthermore, they demanded that Israel free all Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the hostages held in Gaza. Israel is estimated to be keeping thousands of Palestinians captive.

More than 120 hostages are believed to remain in Gaza after Israel and Hamas negotiated a week-long truce last month, which led to the liberation of more than 105 captives in exchange for Israel freeing 240 Palestinians. The ceasefire did not last long, with both sides accusing one another of breaching the agreement.

Bsides, the aforementioned WSJ report came as Israeli President Isaac Herzog claimed Israel was "ready for another humanitarian pause and additional humanitarian aid in order to enable the release of hostages."

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman Daniel Hagari on December 20 said the military was approaching the end of its ground offensive in northern Gaza, and had expanded action in Khan Younis in the southern part of the enclave. Based on the UN, Israel made evacuation orders for the area, which functions as a shelter for around 140,000 displaced Palestinians.

On December 21, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to sustain Israel's war against Hamas until the terrorist group was completely eradicated and Gaza posed no threat.

"We are fighting until victory. We will not stop the war until we achieve all of its goals: Completing the elimination of Hamas and releasing all of our hostages," Netanyahu declared in a video message [posted](#) on X by his spokesman Ofir Gendelman.



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"The choice I propose to Hamas is very simple: Surrender or die," Netanyahu elaborated. "All Hamas terrorists, from the first to the last, are dead men walking."

Netanyahu stated that after extirpating Hamas, Israel will ensure that Gaza will no longer pose a threat and that "whoever thinks we will stop is detached from reality."

His message, in Hebrew with English subtitles, seemed to have been recorded on the evening of December 20, after talks on a possible ceasefire reportedly crumbled.

Hamas seized an estimated 240 Israeli captives during its October 7 brutal incursion into Israel, killing an estimated 1,200 people. Several of the hostages have since been killed by the IDF during their operations in Gaza.

Israeli forces have thus far taken the northern part of Gaza and thoroughly destroyed the enclave's infrastructure. According to recent figures, the ensuing fighting between Israel and Hamas has led to the deaths of some 20,000 Palestinians and 1,200 Israelis, as well as unprecedented destruction in Gaza.

Around 93 percent of Gaza's 2.28 million people are facing "crisis" or worse levels of hunger, and rates of disease among children have soared, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed in a post to X on December 21. Citing a [joint report](#) prepared by the UN and other international bodies, the WHO cautioned that 17 percent of Gaza residents face "catastrophic" levels of food insecurity, defined by the report as impending danger of starvation and death.

Yet despite the deteriorating humanitarian situation, both Hamas and Israel have not stopped fighting. Should Israel's military operation in Gaza and blockade of the strip persist, the report predicts famine conditions by the end of February.

"On recent missions to north Gaza, WHO staff say that every single person they spoke to in Gaza is hungry," the organization indicated. "Wherever they went, including hospitals and emergency wards, people asked them for food."

Other humanitarian groups working in the Palestinian enclave have noted similar conditions, with United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini acknowledging to reporters last week that Gaza is "not really a habitable place any more."

Malnutrition and the destruction of infrastructure has resulted in a proliferation of disease, the WHO stated. Over 100,000 cases of diarrhea and 150,000 cases of upper respiratory infections have been recorded since mid-October, the organization added, pointing out that the diarrhea cases among children under five years old are now 25 times more common than before the conflict began.

"The people of Gaza, who have already suffered enough, now face death from starvation and diseases that could be easily treated with a functioning health system," the WHO said. "This must stop. Food and other aid must flow in far greater amounts. WHO reiterates its call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire."

The United States has urged Netanyahu to restrict civilian casualties but continued to supply Israel with military and other support. Israel has faced criticism from abroad, with the Houthis of Yemen openly backing the Palestinians and attacking Israeli-linked shipping in the Red Sea.

On December 18, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [revealed](#) that the Pentagon has asked the



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U.K., France and other allies to help secure shipping traffic through the Red Sea after various missile and drone sorties launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels frightened away key transport operators and oil major BP from the prominent maritime route.

Austin said that Operation Prosperity Guardian would work to protect freedom of navigation through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

"This is an international challenge that demands collective action," he declared in a statement, adding that the group would enhance "regional security and prosperity."

Other members of the coalition include Canada, Norway, Bahrain, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Seychelles. The group hails from the Combined Maritime Forces, a 39-nation partnership that collaborates to safeguard maritime traffic through major international shipping lanes. About one-sixth of the world's commercial shipping traffic typically passes through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, from the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aden.

In recent weeks, dozens of ships have been rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, at the southern tip of Africa, following Houthi attacks, which came in response to the Israel-Hamas war.

At least five major maritime carriers, including Maersk, CMA CGN, and Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), have avoided the area.



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