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U.S.-Israeli Hostage Discussions With Hamas Fail, Biden Admits Influencing Time of Gaza Invasion

Trilateral talks among the United States, Israel, and Hamas over a potential liberation of 50 hostages held captive by the Palestinian terrorist group have failed, as per a report by *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ). Nonetheless, Hamas did free two U.S. nationals on Friday, quoting “humanitarian reasons.”

On October 21, the WSJ, citing several unnamed officials, reported that the discussions brokered by Qatar had been challenging, and that no direct contact between Israel and Hamas had taken place last week.

The news outlet added that Hamas had listed various preconditions encompassing a “temporary cease-fire, the resumption of water supplies to Gaza by Israel and stepped-up humanitarian aid to the territory.” Eventually, the reported hostage-release deal could not be inked, the WSJ elaborated.

However, on October 20, Hamas agreed to release two hostages, with the group saying in a statement that “in response to Qatari efforts, Al-Qassam Brigades [Hamas’ military wing] released two American citizens for humanitarian reasons.”

The WSJ cited an unidentified U.S. official as verifying that Qatar’s government had been “very helpful.” The official added, nevertheless, that attempts to free the hostages have been undermined by persistent Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

Based on Hamas’ claims, the group is presently keeping around 200 people, with 50 more in the hands of various other militant groups in the enclave. Twenty captives have been killed as a result of Israeli air strikes, Hamas posited. Some 20 Americans remain unaccounted for, with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying on October 20 that “some of” this number are being held hostage in Gaza.

Earlier last week, senior Hamas official Khaled Mashaal hinted that Israeli hostages could be exchanged for Palestinians in Israeli prisons, while foreigners would be freed “when circumstances allow.”

More than 20 Americans have been reported missing after Hamas’ attack on Israel on October 7, when the former staged a brutal and massive incursion, killing and wounding many, while taking hundreds hostage, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters.

On October 20, President Joe Biden told reporters that he hopes that Israel could delay its planned ground invasion of Gaza to buy more time for hostages to be freed. Following Biden’s remarks, the White House instantly backtracked and maintained that Biden had no influence on Israel’s plans.

As he boarded Air Force One en route to his Delaware beach house, Biden was questioned whether he was encouraging Israel to postpone dispatching troops into Gaza. “Yes,” the U.S. leader replied, as he mounted the stairs of the airplane.



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Less than an hour later, White House Communications Director Ben LaBolt told reporters that Biden had misunderstood the question, and was not trying to influence Israel's decision-making.

"The president was far away," LaBolt said, according to a pool report. "He didn't hear the full question. The question sounded like 'Would you like to see more hostages released?' He wasn't commenting on anything else."

These comments came hours after Hamas militants freed two American hostages in what they labeled as a "humanitarian" gesture. The two women, a mother and daughter from Chicago, were liberated with the aid of Qatari mediators, who have claimed that they are still mediating between Hamas and Israel in a hope to free more hostages.

In light of ongoing talks, Israel has also been gearing up to mobilize its forces for a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. Since last week, Israeli military officials have declared that they were prepared for such an incursion. However, as of the time of reporting, no such orders have materialized, despite Defense Minister Yoav Gallant pledging on various occasions that an invasion was on the cards.

In the meantime, various reasons have been offered by the Israeli military for the apparent delay, with sources telling the *Times* news outlet that [cloudy weather](#) was an impediment in planning for the operation, while other media reports have reported on the dim prospect of massive Israeli losses and Iranian intervention.

Moreover, Bloomberg reported that the United States and some of its European allies have been mounting pressure on Israel to postpone the attack until more hostages are freed. Sources privy to talks told Bloomberg that Israel had "agreed under US pressure to hold off," although the United States told CNN that "we're not directing the Israelis, the timeline is theirs — their thinking, their planning."

Meanwhile, Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto declared in an interview with the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* published on Sunday that Moscow was not behind the conflict between Hamas and Israel, when invited to give his take on the role of Russian President Vladimir Putin in the latest conflict in the Middle East, which has claimed thousands of lives.

Stopping short of accusing the Russian leader, Crosetto stated, "Putin is simply observing, to see if he can take advantage of it. But there are other nations that have played with the Palestinians and Hamas, not Russia," he said, without identifying the countries in question.

Crosetto elaborated that defeating the Palestinian armed group Hamas — which he described as a "terrorist organization whose goal is to exterminate Israel" — does not imply punishing all the people of Gaza. Besides, the Italian minister hailed attempts to address the Israeli-Hamas conflict at a peace summit hosted by Egypt.

Crosetto's comments came after Biden made a comparison between Hamas and Russia on October 20, claiming they shared a common aim of "completely annihilating a neighboring democracy."

In response, Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov disavowed Biden's remarks as "an emotional moment," adding that "it's doubtful that this type of rhetoric is suitable for responsible national leaders."

Russia has called on both warring sides to cease hostilities and warned against an escalation that could jeopardize regional stability.

After the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called on both Israel and Hamas to end bilateral violence and begin negotiations, adding that "the risk of the crisis



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escalating region-wide is quite serious.”

Putin has voiced similar fears over Israel’s planned ground operation into Gaza, pointing out that combat in the urban enclave with a population of two million people would lead to immense civilian casualties.

Local officials on both sides have claimed that recent episodes of violence have led to more than 4,000 Palestinians and 1,400 Israelis dead, with thousands more injured. In turn, the UN and human rights groups have cautioned against an upcoming humanitarian crisis in Gaza.



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