

Fragile Peace: Nuances of Gaza Ceasefire

Introduction

The Israel-Hamas conflict witnessed yet another turning point with the announcement of a ceasefire on 15 Jan 2025. The peace plan was brokered by Egypt, Qatar, and the United States (US) after 15 months of relentless hostilities triggered by the Oct 2023 terror attack on Israel by Hamas terrorists.

According to the [United Nations](#) (UN), this war claimed 45,000 Palestinian lives. At least 1.9 million [people](#)—or about 90 per cent of the population—across the Gaza Strip were displaced during the war. Many have been displaced repeatedly, some 10 times or more.

The road to this first phase six week ceasefire has not been easy. Israel and Hamas had agreed to a brief truce in Nov 2023, before the hostilities broke out again on 1 Dec 2023. There were protests around the world against Israel as the war dragged on but the end to hostilities remained elusive. In a sign of their support to Palestine, [nine](#) countries: Armenia, Slovenia, Ireland, Norway, Spain, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados recognised the state of Palestine in 2024.

Despite hectic negotiations, a ceasefire again remained elusive in May 2024; although former US President Joe Biden had suggested that Israel had [offered](#) a new proposal to end the war. Hostilities had also broken out between the Hezbollah and Iran, and there were fears of a region-wide escalation. In Nov 2024, the UN-backed International Criminal Court had issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant, together with former Hamas commander Mohammed Deif, citing allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In Dec 2024, the-then President-elect Donald Trump made it clear that he wanted the issue of Gaza hostages to be settled before he assumed office in Jan 2025. The ceasefire agreement would not have been possible without the unprecedented team work and [cooperation](#) between the outgoing President Biden's team and incoming President Trump's team.

Israel and Hamas had their own reasons to agree to the ceasefire agreement. Israeli PM Netanyahu had refused to agree to a May 2024 ceasefire proposal, as the end to the war would have brought focus on his decisions. He could have [faced](#) scrutiny and legal troubles over intelligence failure and corruption charges in case he had agreed to the ceasefire.

There were threats from the far-Right members in his ruling coalition to quit, in case a ceasefire was signed. There was no serious external pressure on Israel to halt the war and the US military aid to Israel did not stop. He has now agreed to the ceasefire as his approval ratings have improved and the ruling coalition is more stable than before. In addition, the ceasefire deal is [supported](#) by majority of the Israeli people.

Hamas has been battered and bruised by Israeli strikes and elimination of its key leaders. The external support through Iran has been [weakened](#) and with the fall of Syrian regime, Iran cannot supply replenishments to Hamas via Syria. There was also diplomatic [pressure](#) on Hamas from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Qatar, who wanted to assuage their own domestic discontent by ensuring respite for Palestinians through a ceasefire.

The Three Phase Ceasefire Agreement

The ceasefire agreement announced on 15 Jan 2025 took effect from 19 Jan. It is divided into three phases and each phase consists of six weeks each.

In the phase [one](#), there will be complete ceasefire. Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages while Israel will release 1,900 Palestinian prisoners. Israel will [release](#) 30 Palestinian prisoners for each civilian hostage and 50 Palestinian prisoners for each female soldier. The Israeli forces will leave the populated areas while Palestinian civilians will be allowed to return to their homes. The Israeli troops will also leave the Netzarim Corridor, a military zone that cuts off Gaza's North from its South. It [allowed](#) Israel to control Gaza indefinitely from within, even raising concerns of occupation.

According to the [information](#) released by India's Ministry of External Affairs, a sustained and sufficient aid flow is to be ensured with entry of 600 trucks per day, including 50 fuel trucks. Out of the 600 trucks, [half](#) will go to North Gaza, where it has been difficult to deliver aid while concerns of famine have been raised for months in areas that were under the control of Israeli forces.

Negotiations for the phase two have already begun and this phase will include efforts to establish a permanent ceasefire, more hostage exchange, and complete withdrawal of Israeli forces. In the third phase, the mortal remains will be exchanged, border crossings for movement in and out of Gaza will be opened, and implementation of a reconstruction plan for Gaza will begin, which is likely to take years to complete.

Prospects of the Ceasefire Agreement

Historically, ceasefire agreements between Israel and Gaza have been characterised by their [impermanence](#). There are numerous such instances like Jun 2008, Jan 2009, Nov 2012, Jul-Aug 2014, May-Jun 2021, and May 2023. It has been a familiar cycle of escalation of violence, followed by negotiations mediated by third countries, leading to easing of blockades and aid flow, and fragile calm before hostilities break out again.

Past ceasefire agreements have frequently been violated due to deliberate provocations and misinterpretations of the terms. The legacy of broken promises makes both sides wary of fully committing to the current truce. Previous ceasefires have often been brokered in the wake of intense violence, with the immediate goal of halting hostilities. While many of these agreements successfully reduced violence in the short term, their long-term impact has been limited.

The domestic political situation on both sides will have a serious impact on the current ceasefire agreement. In Israel, the coalition government comprises parties with divergent views on handling the Gaza situation, creating internal pressures that may hinder unified action. The tensions between Hamas and rival Palestinian factions may complicate efforts towards a cohesive ceasefire.

The negotiated agreement should include explicit provisions outlining both parties' responsibilities, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms. This can help reduce ambiguities that often lead to disputes and violations. There is a [verification](#) mechanism for this agreement based in Cairo that includes representatives from Israel, Hamas, and the mediators—the US, Egypt, and Qatar. This mechanism has already been tested when a crisis broke out on 25 Jan and the verification mechanism seems to have resolved the issue within a day.

Israel and Hamas may have different levels of motivation to stick to the ceasefire. A weak Hamas has to take the ceasefire deal in order to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. However, a militarily dominant Israel may not have any motivation for a ceasefire, apart from seeking the release of its citizens. Israel and Hamas continue to see each other as existential threats to one another.

Conclusion

The Israel-Hamas ceasefire presents a crucial opportunity to overcome violence, alleviate humanitarian suffering in the short term and possibly create conditions for a more comprehensive peace process in the long term.

Two factors will play an important role in the future long-lasting peace in the region. The first is President Trump's policy for Gaza's reconstruction and his overall West Asia policy. At the moment, it does not encourage any hope as he has a commercial understanding of Gaza's reconstruction while his [maximum](#) pressure on Iran policy could exacerbate Israel-Iran tensions that could provoke wider tensions in the region. Second, Saudi Arabia, too, will have an important role to play in the long-term peace between Israel and Hamas. Saudi Arabia may not [agree](#) to normalise ties with Israel without seeking guarantees for a future Palestinian state. There are many stakeholders like Iran, Houthis, and Hezbollah, apart from Hamas, who could potentially create provocations that could lead to the breakdown of the current ceasefire.

A sustained ceasefire could serve as a foundation for renewed peace talks between Israel and Palestinians. Successful ceasefire implementation may build trust, enabling more constructive dialogue between the parties. A stable truce could reduce tensions between Israel and neighbouring countries, paving the way for improved diplomatic relations. Conversely, a breakdown of the ceasefire could exacerbate regional instability, drawing in external powers, and escalating conflicts beyond the immediate actors.

Brig Jeewan Rajpurohit, PhD is a former Indian Army officer. He writes on Leadership, Arthashastra and International Affairs and is a Defence Analyst.

Article uploaded on 21-02-2025

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he/she belongs to or of the USI of India.