

Israel-Hamas Ceasefire: Prospects, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

Introduction

The latest ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, brokered by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States (US), presents both a temporary reprieve from hostilities and significant risks of collapse. While the truce is structured to facilitate humanitarian aid, secure hostage-prisoner exchanges, and reduce military operations, its success depends on a complex web of political, military, and regional factors.

In the short term, the ceasefire is likely to hold due to strong international mediation and mutual incentives for compliance. However, the medium-term outlook is less certain, as potential negotiation breakdowns, domestic pressures, and external militant activity could reignite tensions. In the long run, the absence of a clear political resolution for Gaza, continued military rearmament, and deep-seated ideological differences make a lasting peace highly improbable.

This strategic perspective evaluates the probabilities of the ceasefire's success across different time frames, outlining the challenges and risks that could determine whether this truce leads to lasting stability or another cycle of conflict.

The Deal

On 16 Jan 2025, Israel and Hamas reached a comprehensive ceasefire agreement to end 15 months of conflict in Gaza. Israel's full Cabinet on Saturday approved the long-awaited ceasefire deal with Hamas that will halt the fighting in Gaza and allow for the release of dozens of hostages held captive by the terrorist group for 15 months.

The Cabinet signed off on the deal hours after the smaller security Cabinet voted to move forward with the agreement that could open the door to permanent peace in the Palestinian territory. The full Cabinet debated for hours into early Saturday and well past the start of the Jewish Sabbath (otherwise a day of rest) – an emphasis on the importance of the situation — before the high-stakes deal was accepted.^[1]

Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire on 18 Jan 2025 after 15 months of brutal war. It is a multi-stage deal that would pause fighting for six weeks and include exchanging Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners. The agreement also lays the groundwork for a more permanent end to the conflict.^[2]

The agreement outlines a multi-phase plan focusing on halting hostilities, facilitating humanitarian aid, and securing the release of hostages and prisoners.

Key Components of the Ceasefire Agreement

- **Initial Ceasefire and Hostage Release.**
 - o Both parties have agreed to a 42-day ceasefire, commencing on 19 Jan 2025, marking a halt to the 15-month-long conflict that has resulted in significant casualties and displacement.^[3]
 - o Hamas to release 33 Israeli hostages, including women, children, and men over 50, as well as foreign nationals.^[4]

- o In exchange, Israel will release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, focusing on women and minors.

- **Humanitarian Aid and Military Adjustments.**

- o During the truce, Israel will allow increased humanitarian aid into Gaza
- o The agreement facilitates the entry of increased humanitarian aid into Gaza, addressing severe shortages of essential supplies and enabling the repair of critical infrastructure.[\[5\]](#) This will also facilitate the return of displaced Palestinians to their homes.
- o Israeli troops will pull back to the edges of Gaza, reducing their presence in populated areas.

- **Subsequent Phases.**

- o Further release of hostages and prisoners in additional phases, contingent on mutual compliance.
- o A complete ceasefire and full Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza.
- o Implementation of a Gaza reconstruction plan and the return of deceased hostages' bodies. [\[6\]](#)

This agreement marks a significant step toward ending hostilities and initiating a path to permanent peace in the region.

Assessing the Probability of the Israel-Hamas Ceasefire's Success

While the long-term stability of the ceasefire remains uncertain, there is optimism that it will hold through the initial six-week phase. Ceasefires are precarious arrangements at best, and they often fail very quickly, sometimes before they even go into effect. They can fall apart for many reasons. Sometimes the parties really do not intend for the ceasefire to last; they agree to a pause—often, as in this case, under intense international pressure—but hope to use the time to regroup and commence fighting again. Or even if they want peace at the beginning, they see some opportunity to take advantage of the other side that is too good to pass up.[\[7\]](#)

But it is very much not a permanent end to the war, nor does it guarantee freedom for the 65 hostages who would remain in Gaza at the end of this first phase—many of whom are likely dead. That is yet to be negotiated, starting by day 16 of the truce.[\[8\]](#)

The second phase of the deal is meant to be worked out before the first one ends. To convince both sides to sign on to the ceasefire, foreign mediators seem to have left that second phase particularly ambiguous. The broad outline says all remaining hostages in Gaza, both alive and dead, are to be released in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the strip and a 'Sustainable Calm'. The talks are bound to be tricky, given the participants' antagonisms and sharply different goals. Israel says it will not agree to a complete withdrawal until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated, ensuring it can no longer rule.[\[9\]](#)

The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas presents both opportunities for peace and significant risks of collapse. While the truce aims to halt hostilities for the time being, facilitate humanitarian aid, and secure hostage-prisoner exchanges, its long-term viability remains uncertain. The probability of the ceasefire holding varies across short-term, medium-term, and long-term phases, each influenced by political, military, and geopolitical factors.

Hamas is badly battered but still controls much of Gaza and has said that it will only agree to a deal that permanently ends the war. It has refused to hand over the last Israeli hostages, until Israel removes all of its troops.

High Probability of Short-Term Success. In the immediate aftermath of the ceasefire, the likelihood of both sides adhering to the truce is relatively high. The main reason for this is the strong international mediation by Qatar, Egypt, and the US, who have a vested interest in preventing a rapid escalation. The ceasefire agreement also includes a structured hostage-prisoner exchange, providing both Israel and Hamas with tangible incentives to comply. Israel is prioritising the safe return of hostages, while Hamas is securing the release of Palestinian prisoners, particularly women and minors. Additionally, the agreement allows increased humanitarian aid into Gaza, which is essential given the dire conditions in the region. Israel has agreed to scale back military operations, reducing its footprint in populated areas, which further supports the ceasefire in the short term. However, there are risks to this phase, including Israeli hardliners opposing the truce, potential violations from Hamas' military wing, and rogue factions like Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) continuing sporadic attacks. While minor skirmishes may occur, a full-scale breakdown in the first three months remains unlikely due to the immediate benefits both sides seek to gain.

Moderate Probability of Medium-Term Success. The ceasefire's medium-term success is uncertain due to potential breakdowns in negotiations over subsequent hostage and prisoner exchanges, rising tensions in the West Bank, and pressures from right-wing factions within the Israeli government. Beyond the initial phase, maintaining the ceasefire becomes significantly more challenging. Several political and military factors could undermine stability within three to twelve months. If Israel delays prisoner releases or Hamas refuses to release remaining hostages, mutual distrust could escalate into renewed violence. Additionally, Iranian-backed militant groups like Hezbollah and PIJ may use this period to resume attacks, forcing Israel to retaliate, jeopardising the ceasefire. Domestically, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu faces pressure from right-wing factions, who oppose concessions to Hamas. If his political survival becomes uncertain, he may prioritise a more aggressive stance to appease his base. Conversely, Hamas' leadership must navigate internal divisions between its political and military wings, as hardliners may reject a prolonged truce. Despite these risks, the ceasefire could hold if international mediators intervene effectively, and both sides see continued benefits. However, given the history of fragile truces between Israel and Hamas, the probability of peace lasting beyond a year is significantly lower.

Low Probability of Long-Term Peace. Deep-rooted political and ideological differences between Israel and Hamas, including issues like Gaza's governance and Hamas' military rebuilding, pose significant obstacles to lasting peace.^[10] One of the major obstacles is the lack of a clear political resolution for Gaza's governance. Hamas still refuses to recognise Israel, while Israel is unwilling to allow Hamas to govern Gaza. Without a sustainable political framework, conflict could easily reignite. Another key issue is Hamas' military rebuilding. Historically, Hamas has used ceasefires to rearm and strengthen its military capabilities, which would make Israel increasingly wary of prolonged peace. If Hamas begins smuggling weapons and rebuilding its tunnel networks, Israel may launch pre-emptive strikes, leading to another cycle of war. Additionally, unresolved core disputes—such as the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and Palestinian statehood—continue to fuel tensions. Without a broader diplomatic settlement, any truce would remain temporary. Political changes in Israel or Palestine could also shift priorities. If Netanyahu is replaced by a more hawkish leader, or if

Hamas faces internal dissent, both sides may abandon their commitments to the truce. While regional actors like Egypt and Qatar may continue to push for long-term stability, the absence of a structured peace process significantly reduces the probability of the ceasefire evolving into a lasting peace agreement.

The Way Ahead

Ensuring the durability of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire requires a multifaceted approach involving international mediation, structured agreements, and long-term political resolutions. Active involvement from global mediators such as the United States, Egypt, and Qatar is crucial in facilitating dialogue, addressing disputes, and monitoring compliance through mechanisms like a joint operations room.^[11] A sustainable ceasefire in Gaza requires also requires a broader coalition, including the United Nations (UN), the European Union, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Sustained regional and international support from actors like Egypt and Qatar, backed by global powers, reinforces accountability and assistance in conflict resolution. By implementing these measures, the parties involved can enhance the likelihood of the ceasefire holding, paving the way for a more stable and peaceful future in the region. A structured hostage-prisoner exchange process, such as the release of 33 Israeli hostages in return for Palestinian prisoners, helps build mutual trust.^[12] Additionally, facilitating humanitarian aid is essential to easing tensions, with 600 aid trucks per day allowed into Gaza to address civilian needs.^[13] A gradual military de-escalation, including Israeli troop withdrawals to the edges of Gaza, can minimise the risk of accidental confrontations.^[14] However, long-term stability requires addressing political and ideological differences, including the governance of Gaza and mutual recognition, through comprehensive peace talks.^[15] Moreover, internal political stability in both Israel and Gaza is necessary, as Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu faces right-wing opposition, while Hamas navigates internal divisions.^[16] Economic revitalisation is also crucial—a Gaza Rebuilding Fund financed by international donors could rebuild critical infrastructure and create job opportunities, while Israel could ease trade restrictions in exchange for security guarantees, fostering long-term regional cooperation.

Final Assessment: A Fragile but Necessary Truce

While the ceasefire provides an interim halt to hostilities, it may not settle the fundamental Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The short-term gains for both sides may bear the truce, but without long-term governance reforms, security agreements, and economic stabilisation, another cycle of violence is definitely on the cards. The path forward requires regional and global collaboration, sustained diplomatic arrangement, and an inclination to redefine Gaza's political and security framework. If international actors, including the UN, the US, and the Arab nations, commit to long-term mediation, governance restructuring, and economic rebuilding, this ceasefire could lay the groundwork for a more stable and peaceful future in the region. Without such processes, however, this ceasefire may become yet another momentary pause in a persistent conflict.

Endnotes

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[2] Sonja Hutson, “Transcript: Israel and Hamas agree ceasefire”, Accessed 18 Jan 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/6b0b683e-5c12-44c1-a808-e106ccb200>

[3] “Israel’s Cabinet approves a deal for a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of dozens of hostages”, Accessed 18 Jan 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-news-01-17-2025-9a97e6c7b2badb3d3e278ab090d6ad15>

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[6] “A look at the terms — and tensions — in the Israel-Hamas draft ceasefire deal”, Accessed 18 Jan 2025, [These are the terms of the Israel-Hamas draft ceasefire deal | AP News](#)

[7] “Good to Know: What is a ceasefire?”, Accessed 17 Jan 2025, <https://goodauthority.org/news/good-to-know-what-is-a-ceasefire-israel-hamas/>

[8] “Israel’s approval of the Gaza deal unmasks deep schisms that could threaten the ceasefire and Netanyahu’s political future”, Accessed 18 Jan 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/17/middleeast/israel-gaza-ceasefire-hostage-deal-netanyahu/index.html>

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[10] “A long overdue ceasefire in Gaza”, Accessed 18 Jan 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/4403eb43-e0d6-427f-8889-ed406f21a8?>

[11] “Israel ministers vote on ceasefire deal — as it happened”, Accessed 18 Jan 2025, [Israel ministers vote on ceasefire deal — as it happened](#)

[12] *ibid*

[13] *Ibid*, How the deal to pause the Israel-Hamas war could unfold

[14] *Ibid*, A look at the terms — and tensions — in the Israel-Hamas draft ceasefire deal

[15] *Ibid*, A long overdue ceasefire in Gaza

[16] *ibid*

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