

# US says Gaza ceasefire to start as planned despite 'loose end'

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## Summary



Media say Netanyahu's cabinet to vote on deal on Friday or Saturday

Prime minister's office has not confirmed when vote will occur

DOHA/CAIRO/JERUSALEM, Jan 16 (Reuters) - The Gaza Strip ceasefire should begin on Sunday as planned, despite the need for negotiators to tie up a "loose end" at the last minute, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

With longstanding divisions apparent among ministers, Israel delayed cabinet meetings to ratify the ceasefire with Hamas, and media reports said voting could occur Friday or even Saturday, although the deal is expected to be approved.

Israel blamed the militant group for the hold-up, even as Israeli warplanes pounded Gaza in some of the most intense strikes for months. Palestinian authorities said at least 86 people were killed in the day since the truce was unveiled.

Hamas senior official Izzat el-Reshiq said the group remained committed to the ceasefire deal, which is scheduled to take effect from Sunday to halt 15 months of bloodshed.

"It's not exactly surprising that in a process and negotiation that has been this challenging and this fraught, you may get a loose end," Blinken told a press conference in Washington. "We're tying up that loose end as we speak."

A U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the parties were making good progress in ironing out the last-minute obstacles. "I think we're going to be okay," the official told Reuters.

Earlier the official said the sole remaining dispute was over the identities of some prisoners Hamas wanted released. Envoys of [President Joe Biden](#) and [President-elect Donald Trump](#) were in Doha with Egyptian and Qatari mediators working to resolve it, the official said.

Inside Gaza, joy over the truce gave way to sorrow and anger at the intensified bombardment that followed the announcement.

Tamer Abu Shaaban's voice cracked as he stood over the tiny body of his young niece wrapped in a white shroud on the tile floor of a Gaza City morgue. She had been hit in the back with shrapnel from a missile as she played in the yard of a school where the family was sheltering, he said.

"Is this the truce they are talking about? What did this young girl, this child, do to deserve this? What did she do to deserve this? Is she fighting you, Israel?" he asked.

[The ceasefire accord](#) emerged on Wednesday after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. to stop [the war](#) that began with deadly Hamas attacks on Israel and saw Israeli forces kill tens of thousands of Palestinians and devastate Gaza.

The deal outlines a six-week initial ceasefire with the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces. Dozens of hostages taken by Hamas would be freed in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel.

It paves the way for a surge in humanitarian aid for Gaza, where the majority of the population has been displaced, [facing hunger, sickness and cold](#). Rows of aid trucks were lined up in the Egyptian border town of El-Arish waiting to cross into Gaza, once the border is reopened.



[2/24] A man holds a placard on a road as supporters and family members of hostages kidnapped during the deadly October 7, 2023, attack on Israel by Hamas, protest ahead of a ceasefire between Israel and... [Purchase Licensing Rights](#) [Read more](#)



Peace could also have wider benefits across the Middle East, including ending disruption to global trade from Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement which has attacked ships in the Red Sea. The movement's leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi said his group would monitor the ceasefire and [continue attacks if it is breached](#).

#### MEETING DELAYED

Israel's acceptance of the deal will not be official until it is approved by the security cabinet and government. A vote had been expected on Thursday, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delayed the meeting, accusing Hamas of making last-minute demands.

"The Israeli cabinet will not convene until the mediators notify Israel that Hamas has accepted all elements of the agreement," Netanyahu's office said.

Israeli media outlets reported the cabinet was expected to vote on Friday or Saturday, but the prime minister's office declined to comment on the timing. Hardliners in Netanyahu's government were still hoping to stop the deal, though a majority of ministers were expected to back it and ensure its approval. Hardline National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said on Thursday he would resign from the government if it ratifies the Gaza deal. But opposition leader Yair Lapid told the prime minister in a post on X that he would "get every safety net you need to make the hostage deal," suggesting opposition lawmakers would support the government to ensure the return of hostages.

In Jerusalem, some Israelis marched through the streets carrying mock coffins in protest at the ceasefire, blocking roads and scuffling with police. Other protesters blocked traffic until security forces dispersed them.

The agreement leaves the fate of most of the remaining 98 Israeli hostages still in Gaza unresolved for now. The list of 33 due to go free in the first phase includes women, children, elderly, sick and wounded.

Palestinians said they were desperate for the bombing to stop as soon as possible.

"We lose homes every hour. We demand for this joy not to go away, the joy that was drawn on our faces - don't waste it by delaying the implementation of the truce until Sunday," said Mahmoud Abu Wardeh.

Israel launched its campaign in Gaza after Hamas-led gunmen burst into Israeli border-area communities on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 soldiers and civilians and abducting over 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

If successful, the ceasefire would halt fighting that has razed much of heavily urbanised Gaza, [killed over 46,000 people](#), and displaced most of the tiny enclave's pre-war population of 2.3 million, according to Gaza authorities.

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