



IDF moves ease pressure on Gaza amid talks

Withdrawal from southern Strip, tripling aid could make Sinwar feel there's no hurry

Analysis **Amos Harel**

All the optimism heard in recent days in Cairo, Doha and Jerusalem about an impending deal to free the hostages should be met with a healthy dose of skepticism. There may have been some limited movement in the talks, but in the absence of specific and verified news, it appears for now to be little more than an exercise in collective positive thinking. The ultimate goal remains to convince the most stubborn partner, Hamas, to sign on to an agreement and alleviate the mediators of this unending headache. The United States in particular has a lot invested in this.

However, at least as of Monday night, it was hard to share in the optimism. The latest proposal from the mediators was given to the Israeli delegation in Cairo on Sunday evening. It includes an Israeli compromise on the question of allowing Gazans to return to the northern Gaza Strip in exchange for a certain flexibility in Hamas' demands regarding the release of prisoners held by Israel. At the same time, there were reports that the Hamas delegation was still in Cairo.

But at this juncture it's

apparent to everyone that Hamas' tradition of many years of collective decision-making has been subsumed by rule by one, namely Yahya Sinwar, its leader in Gaza. He is the one who will make the final decision on any new deal.

That leads to two problems, one technical and the other critical. The technical problem, which has been the case since the start of the Gaza war, is the sporadic communications between

King Bibi is King Midas in reverse
Analysis, Page 3

Sinwar – who is in hiding to avoid being killed or captured by Israel – and the organization's leadership in Qatar. It appears that messages are relayed to and from Sinwar through an elaborate network of middlemen and couriers. The experience from earlier negotiations is that an answer from Sinwar can take several days.

The critical problem relates to actions under-

taken by Israel in recent days, which Hamas most certainly sees as positive. The Israel Defense Forces has withdrawn its troops from Khan Yunis, ending its assault on the city and environs after four months of fighting. Only one Nahal Brigade is now left in Gaza, in the corridor south of Gaza City that splits the enclave into two parts. In addition, in recent days Israel has tripled the amount of humanitarian aid it allows to enter the Strip.

Both the government and the defense establishment deny that these steps were taken in connection with the hostage talks. As they explain it, the Khan Yunis operation had achieved its goals by last weekend, so there was no reason to have forces deployed there and continue risking lives. The increased aid was due to U.S. pressure after seven World Kitchen Central aid workers were killed last week by an Israeli drone strike. However, the bottom line is that the two moves alleviate the military and civilian pressure on Hamas and improve its situation to a degree. That may cause Sinwar to feel that there's no hurry to complete a hostage deal.

See **HAMAS**, Page 2



An Israeli tank outside the Gaza Strip on Monday.

Tsafrir Abayov/AP

U.S. pushing both sides for hostage deal

Mediators expect responses to latest proposal soon, but Hamas denies talks are advancing

Jonathan Lis, Jack Khoury, Ben Samuels and Adi Hashmonai

Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas continued on Monday night in Cairo amid heavy pressure from the United States to reach a deal for the release of hostages and a cease-fire amid conflicting reports about the negotiations' progress.

Israel and Hamas dis-

patched teams to Cairo on Sunday for the talks, which are being mediated by Qatar and Egypt as well as CIA Director William Burns. Burns' presence underscored the growing pressure from Washington to reach a deal.

An Egyptian official said progress had been made in the talks and that the Israeli and Hamas delegations were due to respond to the latest proposal within two days. A foreign diplomat told

Haaretz that "by tomorrow evening we will know if it is possible to advance a deal." He described the situation as "cautious optimism."

But Hamas denied reports of any progress. "There is no change in the position of the occupation [Israel] and therefore, there is nothing new in the Cairo talks," an official who asked not to be identified told Reuters in Cairo. "There is no progress yet."

Israeli officials familiar

with the negotiations refused to comment on whether progress had been made.

Al Jazeera cited senior Hamas sources as saying the latest proposal by the U.S. and Egypt includes the release of 900 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, including 100 who are serving life sentences, in the first stage of the deal, and Israel's agreement to let all displaced civilians return to northern Gaza, with no re-

strictions on age.

Israel also reportedly agreed to open Gaza's coastal road and Salah al-Din Road to traffic and to allow 500 aid trucks to enter Gaza daily, including to the northern part of the Strip.

The second phase of the proposed deal would reportedly include the release of all hostages and a permanent cease-fire, but there is

See **GAZA**, Page 3

A shift in pressure tactics on Gaza hostage deal

Analysis **Zvi Bar'el**

The maneuvering room or "mandate" of the Israeli negotiating delegation that was sent to Cairo has become the benchmark against which the prime minister's willingness to move forward on a hostage deal is measured. Reports indicate that this time there is

a "significant mandate," but the amount of maneuvering room remains unclear when compared with the limitations imposed on the negotiating team in the past.

The main question is whether the mandate will be enough to draw up a deal that

will be acceptable to Hamas, and no less important, whether the draft that will be achieved, if achieved, will successfully pass through the minefield waiting for it in the cabinet.

The renewal of the hostage release talks can point to the validity of the working assumption according to which all sides involved want to reach an agreement. This

assumption also suggests that the external, political, financial and military pressure that can be applied to Hamas by Qatar, Egypt, the U.S. and other countries has exhausted itself, and that the time for a "business" negotiation, in which every side is required to compromise to the maximum, has arrived.

"Qatar has no more means to apply on Hamas. At most,

it can deport the Hamas leadership to another country, but that would mean losing its ability to continue to serve as a mediator, especially as deportation could cause the Hamas leadership to go to Iran or Syria, which would do little to serve negotiations for the release of the hostages," a European diplomat close to the negotiations told Haaretz.

He continued, saying that

"relations within Hamas and its decision-making hierarchy have been in turmoil as a result of the war, to the point that it is not fully clear how much Ismail Haniyeh, Khaled Meshal, and even the Shura Council, the movement's supreme guiding body, can impose their demands on Yahya Sinwar,

See **HOSTAGE**, Page 2



Mossad chief Barnea, left, with Netanyahu.

Kobi Gideon/GPO

PM's new military secretary used a minor for unauthorized psyops



Brig. Gen. Roman Gofman

IDF Spokesman's Office

Michael Hauser Tov

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Monday his decision to appoint Brig. Gen. Roman Gofman as his military secretary.

Gofman will be promoted to major general, replacing Maj. Gen. Avi Gil, who is completing his three-year term. Gofman previously served as commander of the 210th Division of the Northern Command.

Haaretz revealed earlier

this year that, three years ago, in his capacity as division commander, two intelligence officers, with Gofman's approval, sent classified messages to a 17-year-old and asked him to publish them online in an effort to create an "influence campaign" for which he was not authorized.

The teenager was indicted for publishing classified material and jailed for 18 months, until it became clear that he was run by the army and the indictment was voided.

The youth, an honors' student, taught himself Arabic at a high level and operated various pages on social media, where he published information about happenings in Arab countries. He was arrested in 2022, on suspicion of publishing classified information he received from two soldiers he knew who served in Military Intelligence.

According to information obtained by Haaretz, police dismissed the teenager's claim that he was recruited

by the IDF, concluding it was false after the IDF denied any connection to him. Only after the boy's lawyers convinced the police to check his phone records, they found it to be true and released him from custody, dropping all charges.

Sources told Haaretz that Gofman personally approved the communication with the teenager. He initiated the establishment of a team, which would be responsible for the online influence campaign, even though the division he commanded did not carry out psychological warfare and its officers were not authorized to do so.

Gofman argued that he was unaware of the teenager's age or identity, and that he constantly told his subordinates not to provide classified information, but only open source intelligence.

Gofman's involvement was concealed from the minor and his defense team. When the article was published, the IDF Spokesperson's Office said, "This is a valued and principled officer who served for years in combat positions for the country's defense. We emphasize that this is a professional error that will be investigated and examined, and it was decided that it would be dealt with at the command level."

HAARETZ
Online now

Journalists' plea to Israel Foreign Press Association seeks access to Gaza

Freed teenage hostage speaks 'They shot me in the stomach for no reason'



IDF Spokesperson

haaretz.com

Ben-Gvir's pick

New police chief was probed for breach of trust, abuse of office

Josh Breiner

National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, announced on Monday that he has chosen Israel Police deputy chief Avshalom Peled to succeed Commissioner Kobi Shabtai, whose tenure is expected to end in July.

The appointment is expected to encounter difficulties because Benny Gantz was given the right to veto the appointment of senior officials according to the emergency government coalition agreement, and it is likely that the members of his party will oppose the controversial appointment promoted by Ben-Gvir.

However, political sources estimate that it is possible that the party's ministers will withdraw from the coalition before the appointment is brought before the government, a move that is expected to happen only in a few weeks. Sources in the coalition claimed that the announcement of Peled's appointment at this stage is mainly an "attempt to grab headlines", because the committee for the appoint-



Peled

Noam Revkin-Fenton

ment of senior officials will have difficulty supporting the appointment against the background of the Ministry of Defense's recommendation not to promote him to the rank of lieutenant.

Last year, Haaretz revealed that Peled was investigated in 2015 on suspicions of breach of trust and abuse of office. The criminal case was closed, and the charges were reduced to a disciplinary infraction. Roni Alsheich, who was police commissioner at the time, rejected a recommendation by the internal investigations division to deny him a promotion to major general. The case ended with a disciplin-

ary warning and two years later Alsheich raised Peled in rank.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir promoted Peled from head of training to deputy commissioner and tagged him as a possible candidate to be the next commissioner.

The two have known each other since Peled was commander of the Hebron district in 2007-2009 and Ben-Gvir was a well-known right-wing extremist. At the ceremony where Peled was promoted to deputy commissioner, Ben-Gvir said Peled "performed miracles" during his service in Hebron and "showed me what it is like to like the police."

A senior police source told Haaretz in December that Peled behaves like "Ben Gvir's puppet," because he "will do anything" to inherit the commissioner post. The source said that at a discussion held last year with the participation of Ben-Gvir's chief of staff, Hanamel Dorfman, the latter presented several demands. Peled then replied to Dorfman: "Whatever you ask will happen. Your wish is my command."