

NATION&WORLD

Hamas seeks ceasefire guarantees

Netanyahu due for talks in Washington July 7

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REUTERS

CAIRO – Hamas is seeking guarantees that a new ceasefire proposal for Gaza would lead to the war’s end, a source close to the militant group said July 3, as medics said Israeli strikes across the territory had killed scores more people.

Israeli officials said prospects for reaching a ceasefire deal and hostage deal appeared high, nearly 21 months since the war between Israel and Hamas militants began.

Efforts for a Gaza truce have gathered steam after the United States secured a ceasefire to end a 12-day aerial conflict between Israel and Iran, but on the ground in Gaza intensified Israeli strikes continued unabated, killing at least 59 people on July 3, according to health authorities in the territory.

On July 1, President Donald Trump said that Israel had accepted the conditions needed to finalize a 60-day ceasefire with Hamas, during which the parties will work to end the war.

Ending the war has been the main sticking point in repeated rounds of failed negotiations.

Egyptian security sources said Egyptian and Qatari mediators were working to secure U.S. and international guarantees that talks on ending the war would continue as a way of convincing Hamas to accept the two-month truce proposal.

A separate source familiar with the matter said that Israel was expecting Hamas’ response by July 4 and that if it was positive, an Israeli delegation would join indirect talks to cement the deal.

The proposal includes the staggered release of 10 living Israeli hostages and the return of the bodies of 18 more in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, sources say. Of the 50 remaining hostages in Gaza, 20 are believed to still be alive.

A senior Israeli official close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said prep-



People look at damage to Mustafa Hafez school, which sheltering Palestinians displaced by the war, on July 3 after it was hit during an overnight Israeli strike in Gaza City, Gaza Strip. OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

arations were in place to approve a ceasefire deal even as the premier heads to Washington, D.C., to meet Trump on July 7.

‘Readiness to advance’

Israeli Energy Minister Eli Cohen, who sits on Netanyahu’s security cabinet, told news website Ynet that there was “definitely readiness to advance a deal.”

In Gaza, however, there was little sign of relief. According to medics at Nasser hospital, at least 20 people were killed by Israeli fire en route to an aid distribution site.

Further north, at least 17 people were killed in an Israeli strike at a school in Gaza City, according to medics. The Israeli military said it targeted a key Hamas gunman operating there and that it took precautions to reduce risk to civilians.

“Suddenly, we found the tent collapsing over us and a fire burning. We don’t know what happened,” one witness, Wafaa Al-Arqan, who was among the people sheltering there, told Reuters. “What can we do? Is it fair that all these children burned?”

The war began when Hamas fighters stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages back to Gaza, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel’s subsequent military assault has killed more than 57,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry, while displacing most of the population of more than 2 million, triggering widespread hunger and leaving much of the territory in ruins.

Israel says it won’t end the war while Hamas is still armed and ruling Gaza. Hamas, severely weakened, says it won’t lay down its weapons but is willing to release all the hostages still in Gaza if Israel ends the war.

Hamas warns against cooperating with GHF

The Hamas-run interior ministry in Gaza on July 3 warned residents of the coastal enclave not to assist the U.S.- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, saying deadly incidents near its food distribution sites endangered hungry Gazans.

“It is strictly forbidden to deal with,

work for, or provide any form of assistance or cover to the American organization (GHF) or its local or foreign agents,” an interior ministry statement said.

“Legal action will be taken against anyone proven to be involved in cooperation with this organization, including the imposition of the maximum penalties stipulated in the applicable national laws,” it added, without giving further details.

The GHF did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

The organization has previously said Hamas fabricated accusations against it. In a post on social media platform X late on July 2 it accused the militant group of: “a deliberate campaign to prevent aid from flowing to the people of Gaza outside of Hamas control.”

The GHF began distributing food packages in Gaza at the end of May, overseeing a new model of deliveries which the United Nations says is neither impartial nor neutral.

Since Israel lifted an 11-week aid blockade on Gaza on May 19, the United Nations says more than 400 Palestinians have been killed while seeking handouts of aid.

A senior U.N. official said on June 29 that the majority of people killed were trying to reach aid distribution sites of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

Israel’s military acknowledged on June 30 that Palestinian civilians had been harmed near the distribution centers and that its forces had been issued with new instructions following what it called “lessons learned.”

Israel has said its forces operate near the centers in order to prevent the aid from falling into the hands of militants, which Hamas denies.

More than 170 international humanitarian groups signed a letter this week calling on governments to press Israel to end use of the GHF to deliver aid and return to letting in aid mainly through U.N.-run channels.

The GHF has said it has delivered more than 52 million meals to hungry Palestinians in five weeks, while other humanitarian groups had “nearly all of their aid looted.”

Putin says he’s open to negotiations

Pentagon cuts off some weapons for Ukraine

Cybele Mayes-Osterman and Francesca Chambers
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Russian President Vladimir Putin told President Donald Trump in a phone call July 3 that Russia would not step back from its goals in Ukraine but is still interested in a negotiated settlement to the conflict, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said.

Trump announced the call a day after the Pentagon cut off some aid to Ukraine as part of what it called an across-the-board, temporary review amid looming concerns that U.S. stockpiles of munitions are running low.

The pause in weapons deliveries is part of a “capability review” to “ensure U.S. military aid aligns with our defense priorities,” Pentagon chief spokesperson Sean Parnell told reporters July 2. The military still “has everything it needs to conduct any mission anywhere around the world,” he added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters in Denmark he hoped to speak with Trump July 4 or the coming days about the supply of U.S. weapons to Ukraine, adding that he was ready to take part in a meeting of leaders to end the war with Russia.

At a meeting July 2, Ukraine’s foreign minister told a U.S. diplomat in Kyiv that “any delay or slowing down in supporting Ukraine’s defense capabilities would only encourage the aggressor to continue war and terror,” according to a news release from the foreign ministry.

It’s unclear which weapons are held up. According to reports, the delay includes dozens of Patriot missiles, more than 100 Hellfire missiles and more than 250 missiles for precision-guided missile systems. Parnell said the Defense Department would not release any information about the types of weapons or munitions that are delayed or the timeline of the review.

It’s also unclear if the pause would apply to the \$3.4 billion the United



Firefighters work at buildings hit by Russian drone strikes in Poltava, Ukraine, on July 3. VYACHESLAV MADIYEVSKYY/REUTERS

States sends to Israel annually to bolster its missile defense. On June 30, the State Department green-lit another \$510 million in munitions support equipment, handing it to Congress for approval.

Washington is increasingly worried that American military support for Ukraine and Israel in its 12-day aerial war with Iran has left the Pentagon’s supply of munitions and air defense systems at alarmingly low levels.

“I’m not familiar with another instance in which we’ve had this level of a consumption rate” of missiles and interceptors, said Jon Ludwigson, director of the Government Accountability Office’s contracting and national security acquisitions team.

Adm. James Kilby, chief of naval operations, told Congress in early May, “Munitions transfers and expenditures related to the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas conflict” and Houthi attacks on U.S. ships in the Red Sea totaled \$2.3 billion at that point.

The Navy is also using SM-3s – Navy interceptors that can take down ballistic missiles – at an “alarming rate,” Kilby said at a June 24 Senate budget hearing.

The United States used Patriot air defense systems to defend Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar from Iranian ballistic missiles in an attack Iran launched in retali-

ation for the U.S. bombing of three of its nuclear facilities June 21.

The Trump administration used more than \$200 million worth of munitions in the first three weeks of Operation Rough Rider, its two-month attack on Houthi forces in Yemen, The New York Times reported.

As of mid-March, the United States had provided Ukraine with \$66.9 billion in military assistance since Russia launched its invasion, according to the State Department. Trump temporarily shut down all military aid to Ukraine in March following a volatile meeting with Zelenskyy in the Oval Office, but restarted it weeks later.

Russia confirms death of top officer during ‘combat work’

Maj. Gen. Mikhail Gudkov, deputy head of the Russian Navy who was praised and promoted by Putin, has been killed in action, depriving Moscow of one of its most senior officers, the Russian military said on July 3.

Gudkov, who was handed a top military honor in the Kremlin by Putin in February and appointed by him to the top naval post in March, was killed on July 2 “during combat work in one of the border districts of Kursk region,” which is next to Ukraine, the Defense Ministry

said in a statement.

Unofficial Russian and Ukrainian military Telegram channels had earlier reported that Gudkov had been killed, along with other servicemen and officers, in a Ukrainian missile attack on a command post in Russia’s Kursk region with a U.S.-made HIMARS missile.

Reuters could not independently verify how Gudkov, 42, whose call sign was “Viking,” died or what he was doing in Kursk. Some Russian war bloggers said he had been in overall command of marines advancing in Ukraine’s neighboring Sumy region.

In charge of the navy’s coastal rocket and artillery forces and all of the navy’s marine units, he is one of the most senior Russian military officers to have been killed since Moscow launched its full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022.

At least 10 other senior Russian commanders have been killed in action or assassinated by Kyiv since the start of the war.

There was no immediate comment from Ukraine, which accused Gudkov and his subordinates of committing various war crimes, which Moscow denied.

Kyiv: 2 killed in missile strike on Odesa port infrastructure

A Russian air strike on key Ukrainian export infrastructure in the southern Black Sea port city of Odesa killed two people and wounded six more, including two foreigners, Ukrainian officials said on July 3.

About 90% of all Ukrainian exports are shipped to foreign markets through the ports of the Odesa seaport hub, including millions of tons of grain and metals.

“Today, an Iskander missile hit one of the berths of the Odesa seaport. At the time, people were working at the berth, unloading metal from a foreign vessel flying the flag of São Tomé and Príncipe,” Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said on Telegram.

He said berthing facilities for bulk carriers, port cranes, cars and warehouses were damaged.

Contributing: Reuters