

Blinken meets with Israeli opposition leaders amid Gaza truce push



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends the 'Call for Action: Urgent Humanitarian Response for Gaza' conference in Jordan, June 11, 2024
[Sukhni/Pool via Reuters]

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Amman, June 11 (RHC)-- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with top Israeli opposition leaders as the United States continues to push for a truce deal in Gaza. Blinken held talks with Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid in Israel on Tuesday before travelling to Jordan to attend an international Gaza aid conference.

In his meeting with Gantz, Blinken blamed Hamas for failure to reach a truce agreement.

“They discussed the proposal to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza as part of a hostage deal that would secure the release of all hostages and surge humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza,” the State Department said in a statement describing the meeting.

Gantz, who resigned from Israel’s war cabinet and joined the opposition on Sunday, is seen as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s main domestic rival. It is rare for the top U.S. diplomat to meet opposition figures on foreign trips, although he has met Gantz and Lapid on several previous visits to Israel.

Tuesday’s talks come as the Biden administration voices growing frustration with Netanyahu over his Gaza policies.

In March, top U.S. officials – including Blinken and Vice President Kamala Harris – had also met Gantz in Washington, DC, in what was seen by some analysts as a message to Netanyahu.

U.S. officials have been pressing the Netanyahu government to present a post-conflict plan for Gaza to no avail.

After months of opposing a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the US says it is seeking to end the war.

U.S. President Joe Biden presented a multiphased American proposal last month, saying that it would bring an “enduring” end to the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians.

While U.S. officials have repeatedly said that Hamas is the “only” obstacle to the deal, Netanyahu has promised to continue the war in Gaza until the Palestinian group is eliminated.

Blinken, who met Netanyahu late on Monday in Jerusalem, told reporters on Tuesday that the Israeli prime minister had reaffirmed his support for the U.S.-backed proposal for a ceasefire. Netanyahu has not said publicly that he accepts the truce proposal, while other members of his right-wing cabinet have outright rejected it and threatened to bring down the government if the agreement is adopted.

Hamas has said it is dealing “positively and constructively” with the proposal while demanding explicit commitments from Israel to a lasting ceasefire. The Palestinian group says its non-negotiable position that it will not agree to anything that would not lead to a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and permanently end the offensive on the territory.

On Monday, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for an “immediate, full and complete ceasefire” based on the U.S. plan.

The proposal includes three phases, starting with a six-week truce that would see an exchange of some Israeli captives in Gaza for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. That pause can be renewed to enable negotiations over the next stage.

The second phase would include the return of all captives and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. The final phase would include the start of efforts to rebuild the territory.

Hamas welcomed Monday’s Security Council’s ceasefire resolution. “Hamas emphasizes its readiness to cooperate with the mediators to engage in indirect negotiations on implementing these principles that are consistent with the demands of our people and resistance,” the group said in a statement.

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