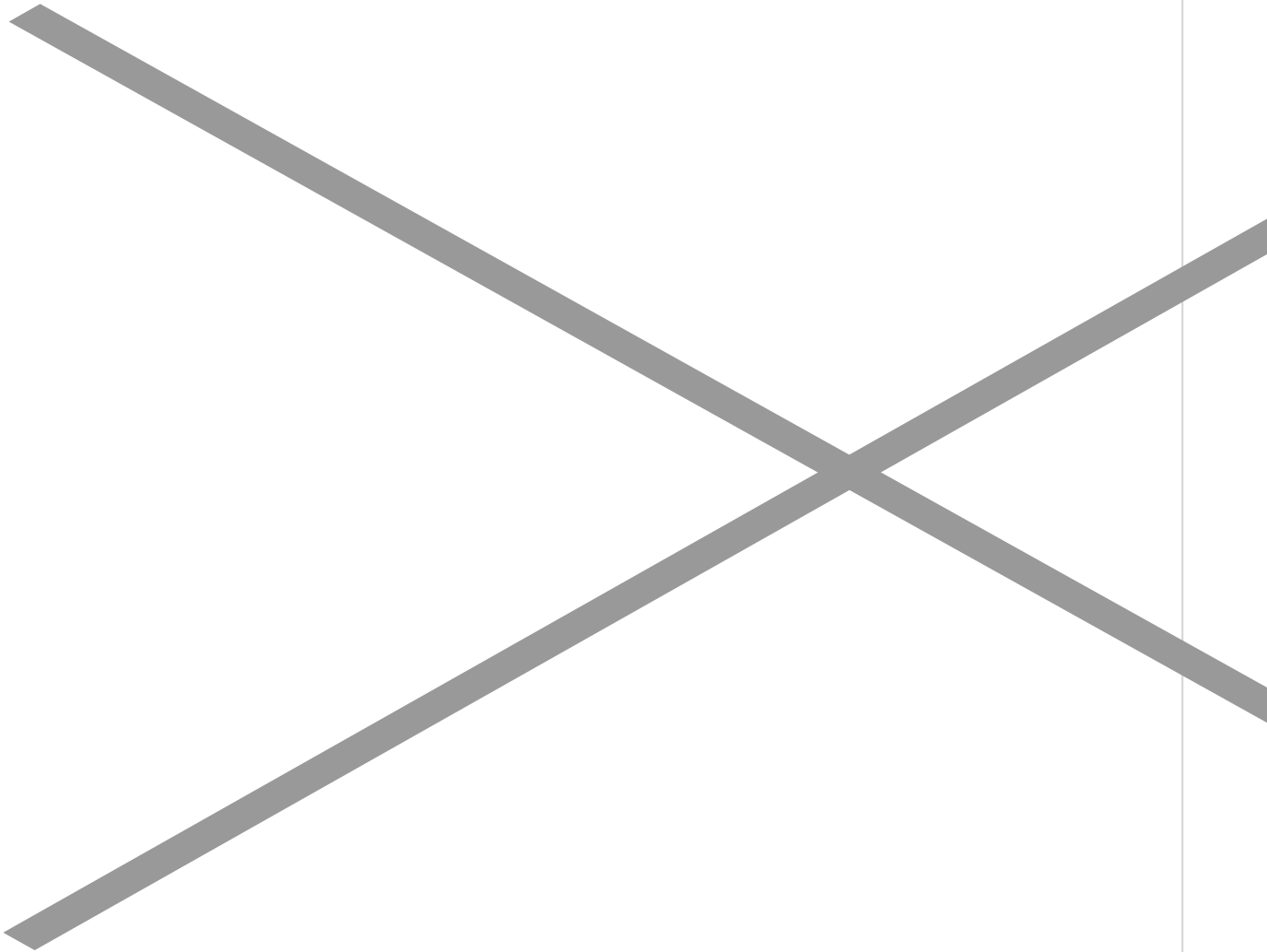


Top Israeli officials say military chiefs believe Netanyahu uninterested in Gaza truce deal

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Tel Aviv, August 3 (RHC)-- Israeli military chiefs believe that prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not interested in clinching a lasting ceasefire deal in the war-torn Gaza Strip, a top official says, as the premier accused the chiefs of being too "soft" on Palestinians.

There is a gaping "chasm" between Netanyahu and the regime's top military officials over a ceasefire in Gaza and reaching a hostage deal to bring back dozens of Israeli captives from the Palestinian enclave, Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported on Friday, citing an unnamed senior member of Israel's negotiating team with the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

"There is a chasm between us and the prime minister. Everyone is convinced that Israel's new additions will blow up the talks, and, conversely, that we have the security tools to handle a deal that doesn't include them," the top official added, commenting on a tense meeting between Netanyahu and military leaders on Wednesday.

According to a report by Israel's Channel 12, a heated exchange had occurred between the embattled premier and the regime's military chiefs in a meeting on July 31. "It feels like the prime minister doesn't want the framework that's on the table," said Shin Bet head Ronen Bar during the meeting. Turning to Netanyahu, he then noted if that is the case, "you should tell us."

According to Channel 12, the head of the Missing and Captive Soldiers Division in the IDF, Maj. Gen. (res.) Nitzan Alon, also told Netanyahu: "You know that all the parameters you've added [to the framework] will not be accepted and there will be no deal."

Moreover, Mossad chief David Barnea, as quoted by Channel 12, stressed to the Israeli prime minister during the meeting that "There is a deal on the table. If we delay, we could miss the opportunity. We have to take it."

According to the report, Netanyahu was enraged by his security chiefs, accusing them of being "soft." "You don't know how to negotiate. You're putting words in my mouth. Instead of pressuring me, pressure [Hamas leader Yahya] Sinwar," the prime minister reportedly told them.

According to Haaretz, the team has offered Netanyahu to draft a better proposal than the one on the table. The current proposal includes changes the prime minister had dictated, chiefly among them his insistence on military control of Gaza's Netzarim Corridor and along the Egyptian border.

Netanyahu rejected the idea, saying he prefers to negotiate the current deal but "on his own terms."

The Palestinian resistance movement says the Israeli prime minister is setting new conditions that mark a retreat from an earlier draft. In a statement, Netanyahu's office denied the report on Channel 12, claiming that Hamas has not agreed to the terms of the deal.

"It even remains unclear if Hamas had backed down from its demand for an Israeli commitment to end the war and completely withdraw from the Gaza Strip, without the option of resuming the fighting," it further alleged.

Early this week, Hamas denounced Netanyahu for preventing a ceasefire in Gaza by adding new conditions and demands to a US truce proposal, following the latest round of talks in Rome conducted through mediators.

"It is clear from what the mediators conveyed that Netanyahu has returned to his strategy of procrastination, stalling, and evading reaching an agreement by setting new conditions and demands," the movement added.

Israel and Hamas have been engaged in indirect talks, through Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators, since January to reach a deal that ends the war on Gaza and swaps Israeli captives with Palestinian prisoners.

The two sides have been back and forth over a three-phased proposed outline for the agreement presented by mediators.

Israel's war on Gaza, now nearing its tenth month, has destroyed large swaths of the besieged territory. The regime has killed nearly 40,000 people, the great majority of them women and children, in Gaza since October 7. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under rubble.

After months of barbaric hostilities, the regime has failed to achieve its objectives of "destroying Hamas" and finding Israeli captives.

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