

# *White House says U.S. engaged in direct talks with Hamas*

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**White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt**

Washington, March 5 (RHC)-- The White House has confirmed a report alleging that the United States has engaged in direct negotiations with the Gaza Strip-based Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

President Donald Trump's administration dispatched Adam Bohler, Washington's point man on American captives held overseas, to discuss the fate of the country's captives, who are held in Gaza, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said on Wednesday.

"Engaging in discussions globally to serve the best interests of the American people is something the President believes in," she said during a press briefing. "The President believes it is the right thing for the

American people," she added.

The remarks came while the United States has designated Hamas as a "terrorist organization."

It took the move in 1997 due to the movement's unyielding resolve to resist U.S.-backed Israeli occupation and aggression.

The resolve has featured the group and its fellow resistance factions conducting numerous and incessant successful operations against the Israeli regime, Washington's most cherished regional ally, facing up to Tel Aviv's genocidal atrocities as well as other war crimes and crimes against humanity against Palestinians.

Leavitt, however, claimed that Boehler, in his capacity as captive affairs' envoy, "has the authority to speak with any relevant parties."

The remarks came hours after American website Axios carried a report pointing to the discussions, citing "sources familiar with the matter."

According to the sources, the report had said, Boehler had conducted clandestine meetings with Hamas' officials in the Qatari capital Doha over recent weeks. The primary focus of the discussions was the release of the American captives, with a purported potential to also cover a comprehensive truce in Gaza, it had added.

The Israeli regime began taking the Palestinian territory under a genocidal war in October 2023.

A ceasefire agreement began being implemented in January after the regime approved of the deal amid numerous successful operations by Hamas and Gaza's other resistance groups against the invading Israeli forces as well as sensitive and strategic Israeli targets.

The regime, though, has been routinely violating the accord, killing hundreds more Palestinians in addition to the roughly 48,000 people, mostly women and children, whom it had killed during the war.

Still addressing the issue of discussions between the US and Hamas, Leavitt noted that "Israel was consulted on this matter."

Axios' report had, however, claimed that "while the Trump administration [had] consulted with Israel about the possibility of engaging with Hamas, Israel learned about aspects of the talks through other channels."

The claim came despite overt and comprehensive intelligence cooperation between Washington and Tel Aviv, which is aimed at boosting the two sides' robust military and political collaboration.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office also acknowledged the reported discussions, saying the regime had expressed its views on the issue.

As of now, Hamas is reportedly holding 59 captives in Gaza, down from 240 Zionists, whom Palestinian fighters ensnared during a historic resistance operation targeting the occupied Palestinian territories on October 7, 2023.

Those who have been transferred to the regime, including the ones whose bodies have been handed over, have been exchanged for thousands of Palestinian prisoners. The Israeli military has said 35 of those remaining in Gaza have also died.

Hamas has confirmed that many of the deaths have been caused as a result of the regime's indiscriminate bombings of the coastal sliver during the war.

Twenty-two of the captives are believed to be alive, and the status of two remains uncertain, the regime's military says. Among the captives are five Americans, including 21-year-old Edan Alexander, who is presumed to be alive, reports say.

Reports of direct talks between Washington and Hamas come, while the initial 42-day phase of the ceasefire expired recently without extension, despite pressure from the regime for the first phase to be extended, and all the remaining captives be released in one batch.

Hamas has roundly rejected the demand as "unacceptable," urging implementation of a second phase.

The movement's insistence came after Tel Aviv enacted an unauthorized delay in the release of a group of Palestinian prisoners, despite Hamas' having already handed over a number of the Zionist captives, who were supposed to be exchanged with the prisoners.

Recently, Hamas' spokesman Hazem Qassem denounced the regime for evading provisions of the ceasefire agreement, asserting that captives would not be released without Tel Aviv's compliance.

The regime has, in the meantime, blocked the entry of all humanitarian aid deliveries into Gaza in a move aimed at pressuring the group, which has been denounced by human rights organizations as Tel Aviv's using starvation as a weapon of war.

The blockade exacerbates the already drastic humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where approximately 1.9 million Palestinians, namely 90% of the population, have been displaced and face the threat of famine, the organizations warn. Netanyahu has also threatened to resume the regime's full-scale war on Gaza.

Qassem, however, asserted, "Our position is clear, and we will not accept the language of American and Israeli threats."

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