

FAQ: Ceasefire

What is a ceasefire?

There is no official legal definition of a ceasefire; however, the term is typically used by diplomats, politicians, and military leaders to describe a situation in which fighting between two belligerent sides is halted but no formal, permanent peace agreement is reached. Ceasefire agreements can be imposed unilaterally or agreed upon by multiple parties. Ceasefires are often negotiated for humanitarian purposes to allow civilian aid to enter warzones. Sometimes ceasefires are agreed upon indefinitely to end hostilities and allow formal peace negotiations to commence, while other times ceasefires are designated as temporary and a resumption of hostilities ensues once the truce expires.¹

What words are used interchangeably with ceasefire?

Due to the lack of a consensus definition for the concept of a “ceasefire,” many words and phrases are used interchangeably. For example, cessation of hostilities, humanitarian pause, and truce. Each of these words and phrases also takes on a slightly different connotation. Cessation of hostilities denotes a more informal pause in fighting. Humanitarian pause emphasizes civilian need for aid as the core of the stoppage. A truce often suggests a more long-term agreement than a ceasefire—even though, in theory, a truce can be temporary while a ceasefire can be indefinite.

Why and with whom has Israel signed ceasefires in the past?

Since its founding, Israel has on several occasions signed ceasefires with neighboring Arab countries that refuse to negotiate a full peace agreement. Israel’s War of Independence and the wars that followed ended when Israel reached ceasefire agreements with the surrounding Arab countries. Oftentimes, Israel has been pressured into agreeing to ceasefires by the international community, particularly the United States, when the IDF has been deemed to have gone “far enough” or “too far”—such was the case in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In exchange for the cessation of hostilities, Israel has seen the return of captives, the drawing or redrawing of borders, and American security commitments. However beneficial they may be in certain situations, ceasefires are no replacement for full-fledged permanent peace agreements.

¹ For a discussion of the different forms ceasefires can take, see “[Terminology and a Typology of Ceasefires](#).” *Guidance of Mediation of Ceasefires*, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, chapter 1.

Have ceasefire agreements between Israel and Hamas been brokered prior to October 7th?

Yes. Ceasefire agreements and truces between Israel and Hamas have been brokered on multiple occasions—and all of them have been violated. The agreements were brokered by a variety of parties, including Egypt, Qatar, and the United States. The oft-repeated sequence entails an escalation of violence, a flurry of negotiations mediated by third-party countries, promises of eased blockades and a break in hostilities, a period of fragile calm, and re-escalation. Between 2014 and 2023 alone, no fewer than 15 such breaks in hostilities were put into place, and all of them failed to last.

What happened during the November 2023 Israel-Hamas pause in fighting? ²

In a deal brokered by Qatar, the United States, and Egypt, Israel and Hamas agreed to a four-day cessation of fighting. During that time, Hamas released 50 Israeli hostages as well as a number of international hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. The released hostages were civilians—including women, children, and the elderly—while some of the Palestinian prisoners that were released were convicted of violent crimes, though not anybody convicted of murder. Trucks carrying humanitarian aid and fuel were allowed to enter Gaza every day as part of the agreement. After the initial period, the sides extended the deal on a day-by-day basis for three additional days. The pause ended after disagreements over further hostage releases and Hamas fired rockets into Israel.

Who is currently calling for a ceasefire?

Many Palestinian and Arab leaders like Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas have called for a ceasefire since the IDF's military campaign in Gaza began. As the war has progressed, death tolls have risen, and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza has worsened, many countries in Europe and around the world have called for a ceasefire. In Western countries like the U.S., college campuses and other sites of public protest host demonstrations in support of a ceasefire. As of the start of 2024, 64 Democratic members of Congress have called for a ceasefire or supported a resolution calling for an immediate deescalation. Some Israelis are also increasingly calling for a ceasefire—or another “pause in fighting”—in exchange for the release of all remaining hostages.

² In Hebrew, the pause in fighting was referred to as a *hafugah*, which implies a temporary stoppage of military activity. In the U.S., the agreement was often referred to as a humanitarian pause. The pause was also referred to as a temporary ceasefire, truce, pause in fighting, and hostage exchange by media outlets.

Who opposes a ceasefire?

The Israeli government opposes a ceasefire and remains committed to continuing its operation to erode Hamas' military capabilities in Gaza, viewing the IDF's military pressure as vital towards the eventual release of the hostages. The Biden Administration, for the time being, also opposes a complete ceasefire, though it has indicated it would support further humanitarian pauses. Most Israelis oppose a total cessation of hostilities, though an increasing number are advocating for a ceasefire in exchange for the release of all hostages.

Why would anyone *not* want a ceasefire right now?

The past history of failed agreements between Israel and Hamas does little to inspire faith in a truce. A ceasefire is also antithetical to Israel's stated goals of eliminating Hamas and securing the release of all of the hostages. Some people contend that Hamas broke the ceasefire that was in place before October 7th and should not be rewarded by reinstating it when they are suffering heavy losses. Additionally, a ceasefire that allows Hamas to retain power in Gaza would ignore the organization's pledge to continue fighting Israel and killing Jews.