



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Egypt's peace plan for Gaza - an unacceptable paper, but no one has rejected it



Egypt's plan to end the conflict between Israel and Hamas has little chance of being fulfilled, as both sides have **reacted** rather coldly to its proposals.

But it seems that was not a goal. As the first serious peace initiative from mediators acceptable to both sides, its greatest triumph will be if it paves the way for a peaceful solution. So far, it has had success.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has not publicly commented on the proposals that the government in Cairo worked on together with Qatar. During a tour of the units in northern Gaza last Monday, he **told** them that nothing has changed in the original plans - "We're not stopping, the war continues until the end, until we finish it, no less".

However, later that day, his war cabinet discussed the Egyptian plan, which foresees a slightly different development than Netanyahu told his soldiers.

Caution and silence

The Egyptian plan envisages a phased exchange of Israeli hostages kidnapped by Hamas as retaliation for Palestinians in Israeli prisons, followed by the formation of an expert-led administration in Gaza and the West Bank and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Strip.

Its principal features have been revealed to the public through primarily anonymous sources involved in the mediation. This speaks of the caution that prevails among the parties to the conflict, particularly among the broad circle of mediators and sponsors of this plan.

Apart from Egypt and Qatar, Israel, Hamas, the US, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and European leaders were informed about this solution.

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There is evidence of continued diplomatic efforts and the willingness of all sides to contribute to the solution, cooperating discretely to ensure that none of the solutions get disqualified prematurely.

A member of the Israeli war cabinet, the former defence minister Benny Gantz, indirectly confirmed that the Egyptian proposals were on the table, even though he publicly presented them as just one of many peace initiatives.

"There are Egyptian proposals and there are other proposals flying around from all kinds of directions. I don't even know which of them are even relevant", said General Gantz last Sunday.

Conflict with the objectives of the Israeli operation

Israel's caution, reflected in the statement of the increasingly popular Gantz, is understandable. Of the 3 principal points from the Egyptian initiative, at least 2 do not coincide with the objectives with which Israel set out to deal with Hamas on October 7.

Freeing the Israeli hostages, destroying Hamas and preventing it from reappearing as a threat to Israel are the goals of the operation that the IDF has been conducting in Gaza for almost 3 months.

A hostage exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, as proposed in the Egyptian initiative, might be

acceptable to Israel.

Netanyahu's government has been under enormous public pressure to return those held hostage home. Time is not on the Israeli side because the internal pressure from day one to return hostages home outweighs all other objectives of the military operation.

Israel already showed in November that it could agree to such an exchange, even though it is not proportional. In the past decades, it has released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners whilst only a few Israelis returned home, sometimes only the bodies of the dead.



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The proposal from the Egyptian plan to establish a new expert administration in Gaza and the West Bank is not acceptable to either Israel or Hamas.

Even though it will have nothing to do with the future post-conflict governance arrangement in Gaza, Israel does not want Hamas to be part of that administration in any way.

The Egyptian proposal seems to provide such a possibility, leaving it to the agreements between the rival Palestinian blocs, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas does not want to relinquish control of Gaza, even though the Israeli operation is on its way to wipe it out as a factor in the conflict zone.

Also, the establishment of a technocratic administration in Gaza and the West Bank would imply previous **agreements** between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, which is almost impossible at the moment.

However, the pressure exerted on rival Palestinian factions by influential Arab factors in the region is probable if the success of the whole process depends on it.

Withdrawal of troops from Gaza is the most tactically complicated request and generally the least acceptable for Israel, so its fulfilment would have to include many previously fulfilled preconditions.

One of them would definitely be the exclusion of Hamas from any influence in the Gaza Strip so that October 7 would never happen again.

Potential for a solution

No one has yet rejected the Egyptian initiative, even though there are more disadvantages than advantages for the conflicting parties.

The silence shows that there is a proposal on the table that has the potential to grow into a solution. Reaching a compromise is ongoing, and neither side has discouraged it, even though the starting points are subject to rejection.

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Egypt and Qatar, as mediators, have credibility with both conflicting parties, which is a prerequisite without which an agreement is impossible and gives hope that diplomacy could produce results.

Whether it will come concrete depends on a whole series of circumstances, from internal pressures on PM Netanyahu's government and

the resistance of its conservative members to any compromise to intra-Palestinian disputes over supremacy over the administration of Gaza and the West Bank.

International pressure is perhaps crucial, particularly from regional stakeholders like Egypt, because their role in the post-conflict period will remain decisive. Therefore, they have a great interest in the success of this process because, in the long term, they will be the beneficiaries of its peace dividends.