

Israel-Hamas 1-yr truce, Gaza power & seaport in Egypt paid by Qatar

The agreement would see pay for Strip's supply and salaries of Hamas workers, Arab media reports as Egypt's intelligence chief visits Israel • Plan calls for construction of Sinai • If cease-fire holds it may be extended.

Newsletter Thursday August 16, 2018

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Report: Israel-Hamas deal to include one-year truce

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Israel Hayom Staff

Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar | Archives: AFP

The cease-fire agreement Egypt is trying to negotiate between Israel and Hamas includes a one-year truce as well as several measures meant to alleviate the dire economic situation in the Gaza Strip, the Hezbollah-affiliated Al Mayadeen TV reported Thursday.

According to the report, under the deal, Qatar would pay the salaries of Hamas government officials in Gaza as well as for the enclave's power supply. Those payments used to be carried by the Palestinian Authority, but PA President Mahmoud Abbas suspended them earlier this year in a bid to pressure Hamas into ceding control of Gaza.

The deal also includes establishing a "naval corridor" between Cyprus and Gaza through which goods could be delivered to Gaza, as well as the construction of a port in the Sinai Peninsula, which would operate under Israeli security supervision to send goods to Gaza.

It was unclear whether these two plans would coincide.

The report said the next 48 hours of the negotiations would be "crucial" to the efforts to achieve a cease-fire.

If the truce holds for the planned year, negotiations will be held to extend it.

The report came several hours after the London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat reported that Egyptian General Intelligence Service Director Maj. Gen. Abbas Kamel met with senior Israeli defense officials in Tel Aviv on Wednesday as part of Cairo's efforts to

broker a long-term cease-fire between the Jewish state and the terrorist group that rules Gaza.

Kamel is also expected to meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, the report said.

According to Al-Hayat, Kamel's meeting with Israeli officials focused on the two main issues of the agreement, namely humanitarian gestures for Israel to offer the Gaza Strip and the fates of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two soldiers held by Hamas.

Both Al-Hayat and Al Mayadeen said the issue of a potential prisoner exchange deal would be discussed only after the cease-fire proves viable, giving no timeframe.

Hamas is holding the remains of Staff Sgt. Oron Shaul and Lt. Hadar Goldin, killed in the Gaza Strip in separate battles in 2014, as well as two living Israeli civilians – Ethiopian Israeli Avera Mengistu and Bedouin Israeli Hisham al-Sayed – both men with mental health issues who crossed into Gaza willingly in 2014 and 2015 and were captured.

A senior Israeli official denied that an agreement with Hamas would exclude the issue of the Israeli captives.

"There can be no true agreement with Hamas without the return of our citizens and soldiers, and a guarantee of long-term calm on the border," he said.

"The current calm is the result of determined IDF operations that will continue as needed, in accordance with the understandings reached by the Egyptians and the United Nations. It is in light of these understandings that the Kerem Shalom crossing was opened and the Palestinian fishing zone was expanded.

"As long as this calm e quiet is maintained, it will be possible to deal with humanitarian issues, including the return of the Israeli captives."

Residents of Israeli communities near the Gaza border harshly criticized the negotiations with Hamas.

The residents, who have already experienced five violated cease-fires in recent months, said they believe a large military operation in the Gaza Strip is unavoidable.

Pentagon punishes reporters over tough coverage

Coupled with eroding access to top Defense Department officials, Pentagon reporters say it's becoming increasingly difficult to provide critical information to Americans.

By JASON SCHWARTZ 08/16/2018 05:05 AM EDT

James Mattis is pictured. | Getty Images

The Pentagon's press operation had already restricted access to briefings, interviews and travel with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, but several reporters said the situation is getting worse. | Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

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America's Newspapers Just Played Right Into Trump's Hands

By JACK SHAFER

The Pentagon's top spokesperson was ostensibly seeking to make peace with the media when she headed down to the building's press bullpen about three weeks ago for an off-the-record discussion on how to improve relations.

But the meeting quickly grew combative, according to three people who were in the room. When reporters raised issues like vanishing access to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and

other top officials, Dana White pushed back by criticizing the accuracy of press corps members' reporting.

She made clear, according to the reporters present, that she was watching what they wrote and put on-air — with the implication that there would be repercussions for stories she and her staff did not like.

White and the Pentagon's press operation have already restricted access to briefings, interviews and travel with Mattis. But in recent weeks, several reporters said that they increasingly feel as though individual journalists are being retaliated against for stories they've written, losing yet more access. In one case this spring, officials pulled away a reporter's plum opportunity to embed with U.S. troops overseas following a story they found too critical.

Another example involved the military-news outlet Defense One, which was left out of a media roundtable with the deputy secretary of defense earlier this month to help roll out President Donald Trump's proposed Space Force. The slight came after a Defense One reporter got an early scoop on plans to set up the new branch, breaking the story before the Pentagon was ready for it to go public.

Kevin Baron, the executive editor of the site, confirmed that none of his reporters were invited to the briefing and said that White had conceded to him in an email that the snub was due to the initial story.

Baron said White apologized for the incident in the email, saying that she was not aware that Defense One had been singled out and that the decision was made unbeknownst to her office's leadership. The briefing had been organized out of the deputy secretary of defense's office.

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“It seems Defense One was deliberately left out of a briefing in retaliation for our reporting,” Baron said, adding that he had been assured that “we would be included to all future, relevant briefings.”

Baron said he was pleased with how the situation was resolved and that White addressed it with him promptly.

White declined to comment, other than to offer a statement through Pentagon spokesman Charles Summers: “We are guided by the principles of information and committed to ensuring the accessibility of timely and accurate information to the media, the Congress and the American people. And we prioritize diversity of reporting during engagements and travel with Secretary Mattis and all of our senior leaders in the Department of Defense.”

After initially declining to comment further, Summers called back to more forcefully deny any retaliation against reporters, though he said he had not seen the email Baron said White sent him and could not address it.

“There is no retaliation,” Summers said, adding that while some reporters might feel they are invited on fewer foreign trips with Mattis than they were in previous administrations, that was because the department was seeking to include more “regional media and bring non-traditional media.”

“The notion that someone doesn’t have access or someone is shut out, that’s absolutely not accurate,” Summers added.

Still, Pentagon reporters say that the sorts of tactics they’re noticing, coupled with eroding access to top Defense Department officials, make it increasingly difficult to provide information to Americans about the activities of the Defense Department, a huge sector of the Trump administration that controls billions of dollars in spending and oversees U.S. troops at home and abroad.

“There is a climate of punitiveness here if you don’t write what they like,” one reporter said.

Another reporter said: “It’s not unusual for an administration to monitor what reporters are doing and reporters produce. What’s unusual now is it’s being used to evaluate whether we’ll be included in things or invited to things. ... It’s never been so overt.”

White, a political appointee who previously worked for The Heritage Foundation and in Republican politics, has also been accused of retaliating against her own staff: On Tuesday, CNN broke the news that she is being investigated by the Defense Department inspector general for allegedly using staff members to run personal errands, such as picking up dry-cleaning or lunch, and helping her with personal business, including filling out mortgage paperwork. In addition, CNN reported that she is accused of retaliating against staffers who complained by having them transferred.

Reporters say they see similar treatment applied to their colleagues by White and others in her department. Several Pentagon reporters said NBC News’ Courtney Kube has not

been invited to multiple briefings and has been left off emails alerting reporters about press opportunities. Kube has written about issues in Mattis' relationship with President Donald Trump, earning the particular ire of the defense secretary, who derided one of her stories as "fiction" to other reporters.

Kube did not respond to a request for comment.

James Mattis is pictured. | Getty Images
MEDIA

'We are fighting for information about war': Pentagon curbs media access

By JASON SCHWARTZ

Reporters who find themselves left out of briefings or excluded from traveling with the press secretary — seemingly with little explanation — have been left to wonder if it was something they said or wrote. For instance, after The New York Times published a story on the death of four American soldiers in Niger — ahead of the official Pentagon report on the subject — there was a background briefing to prepare reporters for the Pentagon's assessment. Two reporters from other outlets who were in the room told POLITICO that, when they looked around, it struck them as odd that nobody from the Times was present.

Times Washington Bureau Chief Elisabeth Bumiller declined to comment.

"There have been individual cases where people have been told we don't like your coverage," one reporter said. "You'll say to someone innocuously, 'Are you going to that briefing?' and that's how you'll discover they weren't invited. You don't know. You find out by accident you weren't invited."

Mattis occasionally strolls into the Pentagon press bullpen to talk with reporters and, when he does, his staff usually sends out an email to give reporters a heads-up — but the message typically does not reach everybody. As a result, reporters have started alerting one another when such a note goes out.

The issues extend beyond briefings. The Washington Post's Dan Lamothe had a rare opportunity to embed with U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan in May pulled away after officials objected to an April story he wrote on Afghan commandos, according to reporters familiar with the situation.

The story in question was a straightforward account of how the Afghan military, by increasing its number of elite commando troops, was depleting its conventional army ranks. But officials took issue with the tone and some of the quotes used, the reporters said.

Securing that type of embed with special forces requires intense planning and consideration of risk on both sides, said a reporter from a different outlet, who called it "a

hell of a thing to get.” To have the opportunity revoked, the reporter said, “is as egregious as it is unusual.”

Lamothe was able to embed with other units — salvaging the trip he had planned — but he lost out on his front row seat on the elite U.S. forces.

In a statement to POLITICO, Lamothe said: “During a reporting visit in April to cover U.S. troops in Afghanistan, I was offered a rare opportunity to embed with U.S. Special Forces fighting Islamic State militants in Afghanistan. While preparing for that assignment in May, I was told that the Special Forces embed offer was revoked. I traveled back to Afghanistan a short time later, and instead accepted offers to embed with the Army’s new security force adviser brigade and U.S. military advisers who train the Afghan air force. I stand by my reporting, and thank the units that allowed me to spend time alongside them.”

Donald Trump is pictured. | Getty Images

Trump administration splits over journalists as ‘enemy of the people’

By REBECCA MORIN

It's not clear whether that decision was made by Pentagon civilian staff or by the military. But Baron said tensions have grown to the point that any snub of a news organization raises questions of retribution.

“Because of the preexisting climate, people start to wonder if it’s retaliation more than I think you would normally,” he said. “I worry, because I’ve heard that it may be happening to other reporters, and I worry what kind of signal it sends to the rest of military bases around the world.”

In many realms of journalism, it’s not unheard of for a company or an agency to cut off a reporter after a tough story. Last month, controversy erupted after the White House banned CNN reporter Kaitlan Collins from covering a Rose Garden event, because officials were unhappy with questions she shouted at Trump during an Oval Office photo op.

But given the gravity of their beat, Pentagon reporters have traditionally stayed above the political fray. Journalists who work out of the Pentagon’s press center are free to roam most areas of the building, and many have worked there for years, allowing them to build strong relationships, especially with the nonpolitical staff. But much of that has eroded under Trump. Many believe Mattis has avoided the press in part to stay out of the president’s cross hairs.

Hired in April 2017, White alienated many in the Pentagon — inside and outside the press corps — by forcing out a popular military spokesman, Col. Steve Warren, shortly after coming on the job. Her relationship with the press has been difficult since, all the way through to the accusations of retribution.

“It’s definitely a change of past practice from previous administrations and defense secretaries,” said Baron, the Defense One executive editor. “It’s not something that we’re used to at the Pentagon. Things are just different at the Pentagon. These are veteran reporters who cover life and death and war and peace.”

One former Pentagon spokesman said retaliation for stories “should not be in the toolbox.”

“You should have good healthy relationships with the press corps covering your agency,” the former spokesman said. “If you invest in those relationships, you won’t even have to get to the point of retaliation.”

He added, “Like war itself, it should be the last option.”