

Netanyahu Outlines Hostage Deal Prospects and Iran Strategy in US Interview

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In a recent interview with Fox News' Mark Levin, aired on Saturday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed confidence in securing a deal to free hostages held in the Gaza Strip. Speaking during his visit to Washington, DC, last week, he revealed discussions with President Donald Trump about a potential deal to secure the release of some hostages, both living and deceased, in exchange for a 60-day ceasefire.

"I want as many saved as possible," Netanyahu stated, emphasising efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza's civilians without it being siphoned off by Hamas. "They loot it,

inflate prices, and use the funds to recruit children as young as 14 into their terror ranks. We're working to change that." He underscored Israel's dual objectives: the safe return of all hostages and the destruction of Hamas's military capabilities.

Netanyahu attributed the ongoing conflict solely to the hostage crisis, insisting that Israel is taking measures to avoid harming those held captive. This stance aligns with his position of rejecting any deal that would fully end the Gaza war solely in exchange for the release of hostages, with Netanyahu prioritising the elimination of Hamas as a strategic goal.

The interview also touched on the broader regional dynamics, with Netanyahu describing Gaza as Iran's "last stronghold" in the Middle East. He pointed to what he described as Hezbollah's weakening in Lebanon following its Iran-backed attacks, starting a day after Hamas's October 7, 2023, assault, and cited setbacks for Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria as evidence of Iran's declining influence. However, negotiations in Doha for a 60-day truce and the release of 18 hostages (reportedly 10 living and 8 deceased) are reportedly faltering. Sources familiar with the talks, cited by The Times of Israel, indicate that Israel's demands for partial IDF troop withdrawal during the ceasefire have not satisfied Hamas, despite some concessions.

Turning to Iran, Netanyahu described the regime as being "in deep trouble" after a 12-day conflict with Israel. He outlined terms for an "exceptional deal" with Tehran: halting uranium enrichment, limiting ballistic missiles to a 300-mile range as per international treaties, and dismantling its "terror axis." "If they agree to these, it's a different regime," he remarked, adding that without such concessions, Iran should be kept in check to allow internal pressures to mount.

Netanyahu highlighted Israel's recent military actions, which began on June 12–61 days after Trump's deadline for a new nuclear deal with Iran and targeted Iranian military leadership, nuclear scientists, and strategic facilities. The United States joined the strikes on June 22, hitting targets at Natanz, Fordo, and Isfahan, before a ceasefire brokered by Washington halted the fighting two days later. Netanyahu claimed the strikes disrupted Iran's nuclear program, asserting that Tehran was potentially weeks away from weaponisation.

Commenting on US leadership, Netanyahu praised Trump's approach, calling it "the America the free world has longed to see." He credited Trump with helping broker peace agreements, including a ceasefire between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo,

and improved diplomatic talks between India and Pakistan, suggesting the president deserves a Nobel Peace Prize. Netanyahu confirmed he had recommended Trump for the award, presenting him with a copy of his letter to the Nobel committee during their Washington meeting.

The prime minister also hinted at discreet talks with regional neighbours seeking improved relations with Israel, though he noted these would remain confidential until formal agreements are reached. Netanyahu gave no interviews to the Israeli press during his U.S. trip, instead appearing in three American media interviews, including the Fox News segment.

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