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Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu suspends housing settlements ahead of Obama's visit

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<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/mar/1/israel-pm-benjamin-netanyahu-susp...> [1]

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Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) [2] has suspended all housing construction in contested areas of east Jerusalem and the West Bank as a diplomatic nod at President Obama's upcoming visit.

[Mr. Netanyahu](#) [2] said the ban on the issuance of housing permits would last the full month, in an Agence France-Presse report. Mr. Obama is set to visit [Israel](#) [3], for the first time in either of his terms, on March 20.

The concession — to avoid “embarrassing” leaders, [Mr. Netanyahu](#) [2] said in the Israeli newspaper, [Maariv](#) [4] — is a turnaround from 2010, when Vice President [Joseph R. Biden](#) [5] visited. Then, [Israel](#) [3] announced its intent to build 1,600 homes in an east Jerusalem section contested by Palestinians — and U.S. officials were reportedly angered by the timing of the announcement.

Israeli officials say construction will go forth once Mr. Obama's visit ends on March 22.

“In telephone conversations, which [Netanyahu](#) [2] held with officials, it was emphasized that there was no freeze, but rather a suspension whose purpose is not to embarrass the political establishment during the president's visit,” [Maariv](#) [4] reported.

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