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Israel Offers Settlement Freeze for Jewish-State Recognition

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By CHARLES LEVINSON

JERUSALEM—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday he is willing to restart a partial freeze on Jewish settlement building if the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he is willing to restart a partial freeze on Jewish settlement building if the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Video courtesy of Fox News.

Palestinians quickly rejected the offer, saying a partial freeze isn't acceptable. Last month, a 10-month partial freeze on settlement building in the West Bank expired, and Mr. Netanyahu declined to extend it, despite intense pressure from the U.S., which is brokering peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

During the previous moratorium, exceptions allowed for work to continue on hundreds of already-started units. In the days since the freeze ended, hundreds more foundations have been laid, according to Israeli groups

that monitor settlement activity.



Associated Press

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, listens to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in Israel's parliament in this file photo from April 26, 2010.

The Palestinians have refused to continue talks until settlement building ceases. Arab states have backed that position.

Mr. Netanyahu's offer Monday appeared to be an attempt to regain the initiative in the stalled talks and refocus international attention on Palestinian officials' refusal so far to agree to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

"If the Palestinian leadership will say unequivocally to its people that it recognizes Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people, I will be ready to convene my government and request a further suspension," Mr.

Netanyahu told lawmakers at the opening session of the Israeli Knesset.

Palestinians have rejected Israeli demands that they recognize Israel as a Jewish state, believing it could jeopardize the status of the 20% of Israeli citizens who are of Palestinian origin as well as pre-empt negotiations over the status of Palestinian refugees, one of the conflict's core issues.

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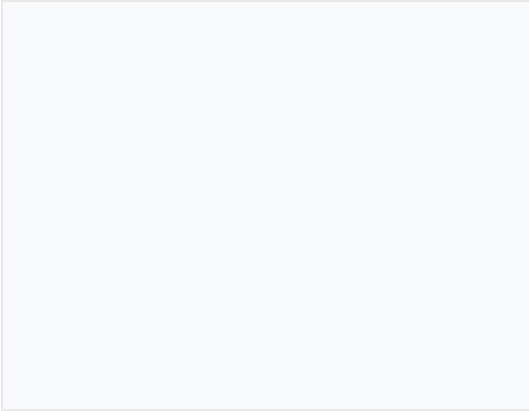
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