By CHARLES LEVINSON

JERUSALEM—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to put a controversial loyalty oath law to a cabinet vote on Sunday, a surprise move that appears to be aimed at securing the support of his coalition for an extension of restrictions on Jewish building in West Bank settlements.

Also on Thursday, U.S. and Israeli defense officials signed a $2.75 billion deal involving the sale of 20 advanced latest-generation F-35 fighter jets to Israel. The deal has long been in the works, but the timing suggested it may be aimed at swaying Mr. Netanyahu to extend the building restrictions. The U.S. has offered Israel security guarantees and a package of other enticements in exchange for a freeze extension, but Mr. Netanyahu has refused.

The fate of Israeli-Palestinian direct peace talks appears to hang on whether Mr. Netanyahu agrees to extend the partial 10-month moratorium, which expired last week.

The 23-member Arab League is expected to vote on whether to support the talks in a meeting in Libya on Friday. Palestinian officials say the U.S. has lobbied Arab states heavily in recent days. They said they expect the Arab League to stop short of voting to torpedo peace talks altogether and instead to cast a vote that leaves the door open for peace talks to resume if Israel agrees to suspend settlement building down the road.

Palestinian leaders refuse to resume direct peace talks while settlement building...
continues on land they claim for their future state.

Amid the impasse, a top adviser to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas offered another grim prognosis for talks.

“There will be no serious political process while Netanyahu’s government pursues settlements,” the adviser, Yasser Abed Rabbo, said in an interview with Palestine Radio. “I can go further still and say that there will be no serious political process with Netanyahu’s government.”

The right-of-center pro-settlement parties that dominate Mr. Netanyahu’s coalition say they won’t support another building moratorium.

Among the most outspoken opponents of any further restrictions on building is Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the hard-line Yisrael Beitenu Party, which is the second-largest party in Mr. Netanyahu’s coalition. Mr. Lieberman is a leading proponent of the bill to amend the citizenship oath.

The proposed law, which is due to be put to a cabinet vote on Sunday, before being sent to the Knesset for a final vote, would require non-Jewish immigrants to swear loyalty to Israel as a “Jewish and Democratic state” as a condition of citizenship.

The Labor Party, which is the lone left-of-center member of Mr. Netanyahu’s coalition, human-rights groups and representatives of Israel’s Palestinian minority oppose the law. They call it racist and undemocratic and say it singles out Israel’s Palestinian citizens and forces them to pledge allegiance to a pro-Zionist ideology that many reject.

“This is another way to impose political Zionist values on the Arab minority who do not have such values,” said Sawsan Zaher, an Israeli human-rights lawyer.

Labor Party officials speculated that the move was aimed either at securing Mr. Lieberman’s support for a freeze extension, or at shoring up Mr. Netanyahu’s support on the right, which appears to have eroded in recent months.

A person close to Mr. Lieberman said Mr. Netanyahu’s gambit would fail if indeed it was meant to secure Mr. Lieberman’s support for another building moratorium. But this person didn’t rule out the possibility that Mr. Lieberman could still come to support such an extension.

"From our point of view, this law is totally irrelevant," this person said. "The foreign minister's position remains not to extend the freeze. If that changes and they work some agreement, it will not be because of this law."

A spokesman for Mr. Netanyahu declined to comment on speculation that the decision to bring the law to a vote was connected to efforts to secure coalition support for an extended building moratorium. The spokesman, Mark Regev, said the bill was instead connected to Mr. Netanyahu’s demands that Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state as part of any final peace deal.

Mr. Netanyahu says such recognition is key to ensuring that any peace deal represents the end of Palestinian claims to Israeli territory. Palestinians have rejected the demand, fearing it would harm the status of Palestinians who Israeli citizens.

Write to Charles Levinson at charles.levinson@wsj.com
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