

Italy Would Help Israel Mend Relations With U.S. (TS//SI//OC/REL TO USA, FVEY)

(TS//SI//OC/REL TO USA, FVEY) Israel has reached out to Europe, including Italy, for help in smoothing out the current rift in its relations with the United States, according to Italian diplomatic reporting of 13 March. Speaking with Italian Prime Minister (PM) Silvio Berlusconi, Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu insisted that the trigger for the dispute--Israel's decision to build 1,600 homes in contested East Jerusalem--was totally in keeping with national policy dating back to the administration of Golda Meir, and blamed this mishandling on a government official with poor political sensitivity. The objective now, Netanyahu said, is to keep the Palestinians from using this issue as a pretext to block a resumption of talks or to advance unrealistic claims that could risk sinking the peace negotiations altogether. Continuing, he asserted that the tension has only been heightened by the absence of direct contact between himself and the U.S. President. In response, Berlusconi promised to put Italy at Israel's disposal in helping mend the latter's ties with Washington. Other Israeli officials, meanwhile, believed that this tiff goes far beyond merely the question of the construction plans, marking instead the lowest point in U.S.-Israeli relations in memory.

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Italian leadership

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