Israel Asked Trump to Intervene to Avert U.N. Vote on Settlements: Israeli Official

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By [Matt Spetalnick](http://www.reuters.com/journalists/matt-spetalnick)

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Israel asked President-elect Donald Trump to apply pressure to avert U.N. approval of a resolution demanding an end to settlement building after it learned the Obama administration intended to allow the measure to pass, a senior Israeli official told Reuters on Thursday.

Israeli officials contacted Trump's transition team at a "high level" after failing to persuade U.S. officials to veto the Security Council draft resolution and asked him to intervene, the official said. Two Western officials said that President Barack Obama had intended to abstain from the vote.

Trump then sent a tweet urging a U.S. veto and spoke by phone to Egypt's president, who abruptly ordered his country's delegation to postpone the vote scheduled for Thursday on the resolution they had sponsored.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has had an acrimonious relationship with Obama, believes the United States had long planned the council vote in coordination with the Palestinians and intended to use it to "ambush" Israel on the thorny settlements issue, the official said.

"It was a violation of a core commitment to protect Israel at the U.N.," the official said.

Israel had warned the Obama administration they would reach out to Trump if Washington decided to go ahead with the abstention, and Netanyahu's aides did so when they realized the United States set on this course, the official said.

The Israeli government appreciated Trump's efforts, the official said. Members of Netanyahu's right-wing government have increasingly warmed to Trump, who has made a controversial promise to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Relations between Obama and Netanyahu were severely strained over the U.S.-backed Iran nuclear deal.

With the clock ticking down on Obama's tenure, Israel remains concerned that the resolution condemning Jewish settlements could still go ahead with another sponsoring country –- with continued U.S. support –- before the president leaves office on Jan. 20, the official said.