

Netanyahu Ready to Offer Land for Peace

✖ Less than a week after President Obama unveiled his vision to broker peace between Israel and its Arab enemies, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed a joint session of U.S. Congress with a plan of his own.

In his 45-minute speech, Netanyahu shared his willingness to make some land sacrifices for peace with the Palestinians. But he also made it clear that he would not agree to Obama's entire vision, despite what he sees as a close friendship between America and Israel.

"Israel is not what is wrong about the Mideast," Netanyahu said. "Israel is what is right about the Mideast. Israel fully supports the desire of Arab peoples in our region to live freely. We long for the day when Israel will be one of many real democracies in the Middle East."

Netanyahu reminded Congress, among whom he said he saw many old friends, that the tyranny in Tehran brutalizes its own people, supports attacks against American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, subjugates Lebanon and Gaza and sponsors terror worldwide. In a few words, he said, militant Islam threatens the world—and it threatens Israel. Netanyahu is convinced militant Islam will be defeated by freedom and progress.

"Now the threat to my country cannot be overstated. Those who dismiss it are sticking their heads in the sand," Netanyahu said. "Less than seven decades after six million Jews were murdered, Iran's leaders deny the Holocaust of the Jewish people, while calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state."

Netanyahu pointed out that peace with Egypt and Jordan has

long served as an anchor of stability and peace in the heart of the Middle East—but those peace agreements are not enough. Netanyahu is committed to forging a lasting peace with the Palestinians. Two years ago, he publicly committed to a two-state solution: one for Palestine and one for the Jews.

“I am willing to make painful compromises to achieve this historic peace. As the leader of Israel, it is my responsibility to lead my people to peace. This is not easy for me. I recognize that in a genuine peace, we will be required to give up parts of the ancestral Jewish homeland. In Judea and Samaria, the Jewish people are not foreign occupiers. We are not the British in India. We are not the Belgians in the Congo,” Netanyahu said.

“This is the land of our forefathers, the Land of Israel, to which Abraham brought the idea of one God, where David set out to confront Goliath and where Isaiah saw a vision of eternal peace. No distortion of history can deny the 4,000-year-old bond between the Jewish people and the Jewish land.”

Netanyahu conceded that the Palestinians should enjoy a national life of dignity as a free, viable and independent people in their own state—and that they should enjoy a prosperous economy where their creativity and initiative can flourish. He also reminded Congress of the measures Israel has taken to help the Palestinian economy in the last few years. The reason there is no peace with the Palestinians, Netanyahu said, is because the Palestinians have not been willing to accept a Palestinian state if it meant accepting a Jewish state alongside it.

“You see, our conflict has never been about the establishment of a Palestinian state. It has always been about the existence of the Jewish state. This is what this conflict is about. In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition the land into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews said yes,” Netanyahu said.

"The Palestinians said no. In recent years, the Palestinians twice refused generous offers by Israeli Prime Ministers to establish a Palestinian state on virtually all the territory won by Israel in the Six Day War ... So I say to President Abbas: Tear up your pact with Hamas! Sit down and negotiate! Make peace with the Jewish state! And if you do, I promise you this: Israel will not be the last country to welcome a Palestinian state as a new member of the United Nations. It will be the first to do so."

So far, Palestine is not buying: "What Netanyahu said in his speech tonight is a clear rejection of the suggestions of President Obama concerning the borders of 1967," the Associated Press reported Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeneh as saying. "Actually, what he did is that he put more obstacles in the path of peace."

Read the full text of Netanyahu's speech to Congress.