Response To Common Inaccuracy: Israel Is Not Interested in Compromise for Peace

Inaccuracy: Israel is not interested in or prepared to make meaningful compromises to achieve peace with the Palestinians.

Response
Israel is committed to pursuing a negotiated peace agreement with the Palestinians so that it may finally live in peace and security. Israel was able to reach historic peace agreements with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) in which both sides made serious compromises for the sake of normalized relations.

While Israel has made great efforts to promote serious negotiations and a final peace agreement with the Palestinians over the past two decades, peace has proved elusive primarily because there has not been a Palestinian peace partner willing to recognize Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and able to uphold peace commitments.

From 1993 through 1998, Israel and the Palestinians negotiated a series of agreements as part of the “Oslo Process,” through which Israel withdrew from population centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At the Camp David Summit in July 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered the Palestinians a final status agreement which included extensive concessions on sharing Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, establishing an independent Palestinian state in 100 percent of the Gaza Strip and as much as 95 percent of the West Bank, uprooting isolated settlements. Nonetheless, in response, Palestinian Authority Chairman
Yasir Arafat refused the Barak proposal, made no counteroffer and failed to demonstrate any flexibility or willingness to compromise on the contentious issues under negotiation, and ultimately walked away from negotiations. After the Summit, President Clinton openly acknowledged Israel’s tremendous concessions and stated that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak “showed particular courage and vision and an understanding of the historical importance of the moment.” In 2005, in the absence of a serious Palestinian negotiating partner but still interested in taking steps for improving conditions on the ground, the Israeli government unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza Strip, proving its willingness to make painful sacrifices even at a time when mutual cooperation was not an option.

In numerous statements, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has affirmed Israel’s commitment to a two state solution as a result of negotiations. In a major address at Bar Ilan University on the peace process in June 2009 he declared: “We do not want to rule over them (the Palestinians), we do not want to govern their lives, we do not want to impose either our flag or our culture on them. In my vision of peace, in this small land of ours, two peoples live freely, side-by-side, in amity and mutual respect. Each will have its own flag, its own national anthem, its own government. Neither will threaten the security or survival of the other.” In March 2013, the Prime Minister stated: “Israel remains fully committed to peace and to the solution of two states for two peoples. We extend our hands in peace and friendship to the Palestinian people.” In March 2015, following his reelection to a fourth term, he affirmed: “I want a sustainable peaceful two-state solution.” To encourage direct negotiations, in November 2009, Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered a ten-month freeze on settlement construction, an unprecedented move, since Israelis consider settlements to be an issue to be determined in final status negotiations.

Public opinion polls in Israel since the start of the Oslo process in 1993 consistently show that the majority of Israelis are supportive of negotiations with the Palestinians and are willing to make extremely difficult compromises on
borders, settlements, Jerusalem and other contentious issues. This support has been relatively constant despite Palestinian terrorism, the rise of Hamas, and widespread skepticism of the Palestinian commitment to negotiations leading to an end of the conflict and a resolution of all claims. Recognizing this great support for peace, every candidate for Prime Minister of Israel since 1993 has pledged to continue the pursuit of peace – albeit with different approaches.