

Pro-Iranian activists burning U.S. and Israeli flags Wednesday at a Beirut protest against the talks.

Naoum Ismail / Agence France-Presse

'Our Land' Can't Be Traded, Shamir Says

Reuters

NEW YORK — Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir pleaded for American understanding in the hours before the Middle East peace conference opened, asking where Israelis would live if they traded land for peace.

"It's our land," Mr. Shamir told CBS News in an interview in Madrid, where the conference began Wednesday. "How could we trade with it? How could we give up this land?"

"People say something sometimes about the great Israel," he said in the interview, conducted late Tuesday. "It's ridiculous. It's a very, very small land. Why

have we to give up our small land. Where would we live? Where? On the moon?"

Asked whether the Golan Heights would under any circumstance become negotiable, Mr. Shamir said: "When we sit down with the Syrians, they are entitled to raise any question." But he added that he didn't see "any possibility" that "we can give up this tiny piece of land that is essential, essential to our defense."

Asked whether Israel might consider a freeze on building new settlements in the occupied territories, Mr. Shamir replied: "What new buildings? People are coming. We have to live there. We need new buildings. We need more, many more new buildings everywhere in our country."