



YITZHAK RABIN • 1922–1995

Short Biography

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CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY

Yitzhak Rabin was born in Jerusalem on March 1st, 1922, the firstborn child of Rosa Cohen and Nehemiah Rabin (Rubichov).

Rosa Cohen arrived to Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) in 1919 aboard the Roslan, together with newcomers representing the Third Wave of Aliyah, or “ascent” to the Homeland, as Jews refer to migration to their ancestral home. Rosa immediately joined the pioneers at Kibbutz Kinneret.

Nehemiah arrived from the United States as a Jewish Legion soldier. He was a member of the Haganah Council, and joined in defense of the Jewish quarter in Jerusalem when it was attacked in 1920. Rosa was among the volunteers, as well; they married in 1921 and moved to Haifa.

Rosa worked as a bookkeeper, but devoted herself primarily to protecting workers’ rights as part of the Histadrut. She also worked with the Haganah, the paramilitary wing of the Jewish Settlement in Palestine, during the British Mandatory period; in fact, she was in command of the city’s defense. Nehemiah worked for the Electric Corporation in Naharayim from the time it was founded.

It was while visiting family in Jerusalem that Rosa gave birth to her son, whom they named Yitzhak. In 1923, the family moved to Tel Aviv and it is there that Yitzhak Rabin spent his childhood. His sister Rachel was born in 1925. Rosa carried on with her professional work, as well as her activities in the Haganah, the Histadrut, the Tel Aviv municipality, and the city’s education system.

“The inspiring figures of my parents; the inspiration at home; a home where the sense of mission prevailed at all times, were decisive in shaping my path.”



Rosa Cohen and her children,
Yitzhak and Rachel, 1927
(Courtesy of Rachel Rabin-Yaacov)

Rosa was especially concerned with the needs of the city's disadvantaged. She was among the founders of Beit Hinuch, an elementary school in Tel Aviv for workers' children, and was involved in many facets of its educational activities. Both Yitzhak and Rachel attended Beit Hinuch, which Rabin fondly remembered as his second home.

Rosa's myriad initiatives for the urban poor, her involvement with social concerns, and her uncompromising attitude earned her the title Red Rosa.

Nehemiah was also active in the Haganah, as well as the trade union and the Histadrut. "In my childhood home," Yitzhak Rabin once said, "I absorbed a value-system that guided me throughout my life."

SCHOOL YEARS

Inspired by their vision for a Sabra, a native-born Israeli, Beit Hinuch immersed itself in shaping the next generation of the Yishuv's pioneers and its labor movement. It cultivated students who were attached to the land and were familiar with its history; youths who were willing to work its soil, defend it against assailants, and volunteer for any assignment.

Beit Hinuch had the finest teachers. It was run democratically and involved its students in school procedures. The curriculum incorporated studies of manual work, agriculture, and crafts, as well as exploring Eretz Israel on foot. They also engaged in social activities. In the higher grades, students joined the Hanoar Haoved youth movement, where they received advanced training in the spirit of the Yishuv's labor movement. These activities were inseparable from school life.

During those years, students were introduced to the doctrines of socialist thinkers, both Jews and non-Jews. Rabin showed great interest in their philosophy. He pursued his secondary studies at the agricultural school in Givat Ha-Shloshah, of which his mother was a founder. The school continued the educational tradition of Beit Hinuch in Tel Aviv. For Rabin, it was merely a stop en route to his destination – the Kadoorie Agricultural School by Kfar Tavor. Founded in 1930, it was already renowned for its high educational standards. Its singular interaction between staff and students attracted the best of the Yishuv's children. Rabin found his place.

His first days at Kadoorie, however, were overshadowed by his mother's deteriorating illness. She died on November 12th, 1937, when Yitzhak was 15. He mourned for her for an extensive period.

During the Arab Revolt against the British (1936-39), the Kadoorie school was attacked by neighboring Arabs. This event brought the students in close proximity to the 'Arab problem'. They were enlisted into the ranks of the Haganah, and trained to use weapons. Their instructor was Yigal Allon, a Kadoorie graduate. For Rabin, this marked the start of his lifelong friendship with Allon, who went on to become a commander of the Palmach, of which he was also a founder. In later years, Allon held a number of important government posts, including foreign minister, and a three-week stint as acting prime minister following the death of Levi Eshkol in 1969.

While at Kadoorie, Rabin learned how to learn. He distinguished

himself for his skills and graduated with honors, receiving his certificate from the British High Commissioner. He also won a scholarship at the University of California at Berkeley to pursue a degree in water engineering. He intended to enroll, but Allon convinced him that the security situation in the Yishuv took precedence, causing him to abandon that path. Instead, he joined his friends at Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan. It was there that he was first recruited for an operational assignment.

“At the age when loves blooms, at sixteen, I was given a rifle to defend my life and, regrettably, also to kill at the hour of danger...I thought that a water engineer was an important profession in the arid Middle East...But I was compelled to hold a rifle.”

PALMACH

In the summer of 1941, German troops arrived in the Middle East. Impending danger faced the Yishuv from north and south. The Haganah command decided to establish the Palmach, a military strike force. Yitzhak Rabin was among the first to join its ranks. During the Palmach's initial two-year cooperation with British rule, Rabin and his friends were active in Lebanon, which was then under governed by France's pro-Nazi Vichy regime. It was his first trial by fire.

Within months after the German defeat at El Alamein in World War II, cooperation between the British and the Haganah ended, as did British financing of the Palmach. It now had to secure its own funds. An arrangement with the Kibbutz movement enabled the Palmach to set-up camps in the kibbutzim, and to finance its military operations through work. The era of work and training had begun.



Right to Left: Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Netzer and Moshe Brechman, 1942
(Courtesy of Rachel Rabin-Yaacov)

The tough battle waged by the free world against the Nazis, as well as mounting reports about the fate of European Jewry, made many Palmach members consider joining the British army. The issue was fiercely debated within their camps. The Palmach command put the highest priority on establishing an independent military force for the Yishuv. Rabin sided with this decision. So did the majority of Palmach fighters. They stayed on and were joined by new recruits.

With expansion of the Palmach and its organization into battalions, Rabin was appointed deputy commander of the 1st Battalion and among those in charge of the course for squad commanders at Juara, situated in the Ephraim Mountains. Within this framework, the squad commanders developed and formulated the Palmach's military doctrine and trained its next generation of leaders.

In 1943, Rabin was appointed platoon commander. Famously known as a problem-solver in complex situations, he was already consulted by senior Palmach commanders.

In 1939, the British Government had issued a "White Paper" which failed to take into account Zionist aspirations for a Jewish state and also severely limited Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine. Jewish opposition to the White Paper was somewhat muted during the war, as they and the British were fighting a common enemy.

The end of World War II ushered in a new era. However the Yishuv could no longer pursue its wartime policy "to fight against the White Paper, as if there is no war, and fight against Hitler as if there is no "White Paper"; it was now set on all-out war against British rule. A prime motivating factor was the immigration issue: The White Paper barred Holocaust survivors from entering the country.

The leadership of Jewish Agency for Palestine, now the formal governing body of the Yishuv, tackled the legal arena of diplomacy, while the Haganah operated in the illegal arena. Intensification of British policy against the Yishuv triggered fury and brought about the first collaboration between the Palmach and two non-Haganah anti-British underground organizations – Etzel and Lehi; this became known as the Resistance Movement.

Its first joint operation, carried out by the Palmach's 1st Battalion, was to break into the Atlit detention camp, where the British detained illegal immigrants, as well as pro-Nazi Germans who were to be deported. Rabin was named deputy commander of the operation. On October 10th, 1945, the force invaded the detention camp. The overall operation numbered 200 combatants; the assault team was placed under Rabin's command. The operation was a success—the British troops were caught in their bunks asleep—and the detainees were freed. It was here that Rabin first experienced command of a military force. It was also his first encounter with Holocaust survivors; an experience that left a profound impact on him.

The Yishuv's resistance operations seriously affected the delicate fabric of its relations with British rule. They equally raised controversy within the Jewish Agency. The British resolved to put an end to Jewish resistance operations.

Beginning on June 29th, 1946, a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, later named Black Sabbath, the British launched a planned and vast-scale military campaign, which lasted for 12 days. Throughout this campaign, they confiscated masses of weapons which the Palmach and Haganah had been storing away for years. Many of

the Yishuv leaders who were within easy reach were arrested by the British. Rabin was at home because of injury in an accident. British troops surrounded his home and charged in, arresting Rabin, his father, and a guest who was staying there. The men were sent to the Raphiach detention camp. Rabin was detained for about five months. Upon his release, he immediately resumed his Palmach activities.

The Black Sabbath operation dealt a heavy blow to the Yishuv. In August 1946, the Zionist leadership convened in Paris and decided to halt the armed resistance, and pursue the diplomatic channel for establishment of a Jewish state. Haganah operations would henceforward focus on Aliyah and settlement. The Palmach invested all its resources to this end. Its members were among the organizers of illegal immigration, which became the main expression for civil disobedience. They also were among the founders of new settlements, which created “facts on the ground” by expanding the map of Jewish settlement in Mandatory Palestine. Early in 1947, Ben-Gurion accepted the defense portfolio. He was precocious in understanding that the Yishuv must get ready for war of unprecedented scale, and those in charge of security must likewise prepare for war against the Arab states.

Rabin was initially “ambivalent” about Ben-Gurion’s strategy, as he put it, particularly his preference for people who served in the British Army during the war over the Palmach’s officers, but eventually he would point to this foresight as distinctive of Ben-Gurion’s leadership, and to the order of priorities he set for the military forces as a historical decision.

At this stage, Rabin was given command of the Palmach’s 2nd Battalion. A few months later, in October 1947, he was named Palmach chief of operations.



With Yigal Allon, commander of the Palmach, 1949
(Courtesy of IDF and Security Forces archive)

“The Palmach, in its way of life, cultivated a generation of Sabras as volunteers, a generation prepared to work in order to sustain itself. It cultivated a new type of Israeli, a worthy role model for youngsters. I’m talking about the need to be satisfied with little, and that naive and true willingness, which I and my friends had, to sacrifice ourselves for the people... And I tell you, this is how I lived – with this need...”

COMMANDER IN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

On November 29th, 1947, the UN General Assembly, by one vote, passed Resolution 181, which partitioned Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. The elected leadership of the Yishuv accepted the partition plan; the Arabs rejected it. Some among Israel’s Arab population, egged on by promises and threats emanating from internal and external Arab forces, responded to the vote by attacking Jewish vehicles on the roads. The “War on the Roads” was retrospectively defined as the initial phase in the War of Independence. From its inception, the Palmach, which had long been trained for such hostilities, became the principal military force. Notably among the roads attacked as of November 30th, three days after the U.N. vote, was the road leading from the Shfelah lowlands (Tel Aviv area) to Jerusalem.

Rabin, as Palmach’s chief of operations and coordinator with Haganah headquarters, was primarily tasked with reinforcing units with weapons and personnel. He was also in charge of safeguarding the roads to Jerusalem that were being attacked by Arabs from the surrounding villages. Among other things, Rabin was responsible for organizing the convoys to Jerusalem. As such, he opposed the defensive policy established for these convoys. Instead, he urged offensive action against villages that served as bases for attackers.

During April 1948, at the age of 26, Rabin was assigned to command the Harel Brigade. Shortly after, he was one of the commanders of Operation Yevussi which was carried out prior to the British evacuation from Jerusalem and its surroundings with an aim of occupying and dominating key positions within the city. For Rabin it provided significant commanding experience. Throughout the operation the majority of the fighting force was in the city. The fate of the road leading to Jerusalem was still undetermined. Rabin returned with his brigade for the war on the road to Jerusalem.

On May 14th, 1948, the day of the declaration of the state, Rabin found himself in the company of his exhausted fighters at the commanding post near kibbutz Ma’ale Ha-Hamisha. Looking back he remembered this period as the hardest of all his years in military service, and recalled commanding young men who didn’t return from the battlefield and agonizing over a Jewish force ill-prepared for war.

When he concluded his role in the Harel Brigade, Rabin was among the Palmach’s senior commanders.

On June 11th, the first ceasefire took effect, thus opening the Burma Road to Jerusalem, which, in turn, enabled renewal of food and weapon supplies to the inhabitants of the besieged city.

On May 31st 1948, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was established. It was one of the first laws passed by the new ‘People’s Council’. Based on an agreement with Etzel and Lehi leaders a decision was made to dismantle the underground organizations and to transfer all the weapons at their disposal to the IDF, including a shipment of arms enroute to Israel aboard the Etzel operated ship, the Altalena.

The Etzel demanded partial transfer of weapons to its people in Jerusalem, on the grounds that according to the partition plan Jerusalem lay outside the borders of the Jewish state and subsequently outside its jurisdiction. The demand was rejected. The Etzel was persistent. On June 20th, the vessel reached the coast at Kfar Vitkin. Under orders of Premier and Defense Minister Ben-Gurion, the IDF unloaded the weaponry by force, and encountered armed opposition on board the vessel. Three IDF soldiers and six Etzel fighters were killed. At Kfar Vitkin, Chief of Etzel, Menahem Begin boarded the Altlena. The ship proceeded to Tel Aviv in hope of unloading the weapons there. On June 21st, under orders of its commanders, it was grounded on a rock opposite Tel Aviv.

Rabin was on leave on that particular day and dropped in for a visit at the Palmach headquarters in Tel Aviv. By sheer coincidence, at the same time, it was attacked by Etzel fighters who had deserted their IDF's camps. Palmach commander Yigal Allon assigned Rabin to defend the headquarters.

Premier and Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion denounced Etzel's refusal to hand over the weapons, calling it insubordination.

In this spirit, he ordered full force deployment against the illegal act. Palmach headquarters was under fire several times. The assailants were deterred under Rabin's command.

At the same time, IDF forces clashed with armed forces aboard the ship and on shore. During the two-day clash, 16 Etzel fighters and 3 IDF soldiers were killed. The bloodshed between Jews became a national trauma.



Lieutenant Colonel Yitzhak Rabin, chief of the school for battalion commanders, 1949
(Courtesy of IDF and Security Forces Archive).

Throughout his long political career, Rabin was frequently asked about this episode and his role in it. He never wavered from his standpoint that Ben-Gurion was right and that via his actions had put into practice the authority relations between the military and political echelon in the state of Israel.

During the ceasefire, an Israeli force got ready to occupy the Arab towns of Lod and Ramleh. The operation was launched on July 9th. Immediately after the ceasefire, Palmach chief Yigal Allon chose Rabin as his deputy and operations officer. When the towns were captured Ben-Gurion ordered deportation of its residents.

The sight of the refugees being driven out of their homes with their belongings left a harsh impact on IDF soldiers and exposed the profound tragedy of Israel's Arabs in this war, which in their consciousness endures as Nakba , the Catastrophe.

After ten days of fighting, the second ceasefire came into effect. On July 19th, amid family and close friends, Yitzhak Rabin married his girlfriend, Leah Schlossberg.

At the end of the first ceasefire, the IDF shifted from defense to offense and deployed its forces on the northern, central and southern fronts. In August 1948, Yigal Allon was appointed commander of the southern front and appointed Rabin his deputy and operations officer of the southern command.

In this capacity, Rabin was tasked with planning the big campaigns against the Egyptian army. When peace talks in Rhodes began, Rabin was dispatched as Allon's delegate to the armistice negotiations with Egypt. It was his first political assignment.

Though Rabin was an active participant in negotiations, he requested to return to Israel before any agreements were signed. He was disinclined to be among the signatories. For one, he was not wholeheartedly behind their provision for withdrawal; for another, he was keen to take part in the imminent Operation Uvdah, which he had planned. On the southern front, Rabin demonstrated his skills as planner, staffer and significant contributor to the process of developing the IDF.

Already at the onset of the operation's preliminary stages, Ben-Gurion decided to dismantle the Palmach. It was poorly received among the Palmach members, who considered it a political move and an attempt to transfer the war operations to Ben-Gurion's associates and veterans of the British army. Though he did understand Ben-Gurion's motives, like many of his friends, Rabin also had difficulty with this decision. The order to dismantle the Palmach was officially issued on November 7th, 1948. It aroused public controversy. The response within the Palmach was: "The nigger did his share, the nigger can go". On October 14th, 1949, a Palmach convention was held in Tel Aviv. Individuals donning uniforms were forbidden from attending. Rabin, like many others, violated the army's command and participated. He was court-martialed and reproached.

Ben-Gurion never forgot this incident. Later, when Rabin was the leading candidate for chief of staff, Ben-Gurion suspended his appointment for several years. In July 1949, upon signing the armistice agreement with Syria, the War of Independence ended. Rabin was 27 years old and forced to make decisions

about his future. Many of his close friends left the military in protest against Ben-Gurion's decision to dismantle the Palmach. Likewise Yigal Allon, his commander and friend, embarked on a new chapter. After a brief period of indecision, Rabin chose to persevere in the military. His motive, he said, was his commitment to Israel's security. With that purpose, he proceeded to persuade many of his friends to follow suit.

IDF

Late in 1949, Haim Laskov, then head of the Training Branch, asked Yitzhak Rabin to serve as head of the IDF course for battalion commanders. Although a veteran of the British army, Laskov regarded the Palmach as a vital resource for the IDF's future. To that end, he secured Ben-Gurion's approval to open the door to its senior commanders, hoping they would imbue the next generation of commanders with the Palmach spirit. Somewhat surprised, Rabin accepted the offer, and used it as leverage among his friends. They donned IDF uniforms and eventually formed its nucleus of senior commanders.

On March 19th, 1950, Leah and Yitzhak Rabin celebrated the birth of their first child, Dalia.

In 1951, Rabin was appointed general staff chief of operations. As such, he took part in setting up the IDF reserve corps, and was general staff head of training, with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He helped consolidate the IDF doctrine that fighting should be transferred to enemy territory whenever Israel is attacked.

The winter of 1951 was particularly rainy, flooding the Maabarot, the temporary dwellings assigned to new immigrants. The IDF was asked



Following a parachute landing, 1954
(Courtesy of the ID and Security Forces Archives)

to provide relief efforts; it did so under Rabin's command. This incident, as well as other tasks assigned to Rabin relating to the assimilation process of mass immigration, provided the future prime minister with a valuable educational tool and served as an example of the IDF's unique status as the people's army.

In January 1953, Rabin, for the first time since graduating from Kadourie, resumed formal studies when he was sent by the IDF to the British army staff college at Camberley.

He spent six months in England with his family. While there, he gained a new perspective of the British, his former adversaries. Additionally, he improved his English, which greatly benefited his future career. Upon their return to Israel, the family settled in Tzahala. Rabin accepted then Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan's offer to head the IDF training branch, and was promoted to the rank of major general. He organized drills and maneuvers, strove for offensive-oriented training, and founded the Command and Staff College.

In April 1955, the Rabin family celebrated the birth of their son Yuval. A year later, in April 1956, Rabin was appointed chief of northern command. This appointment marked his transition to a commanding role.

During his three years as chief of northern command, Rabin primarily was occupied with securing the Syrian border. He ascribed Syria with full responsibility for terrorist operations launched from its territory. One of the contested issues between the two countries was Israel's right to use the demilitarized zones it had cultivated since the ceasefire. Rabin regarded it as Israel's right.

Other matters of contention were attempts by the Arab League to divert the sources of the Jordan River, and to sabotage Israel's fishing rights in the Sea of Galilee. Under Rabin, the IDF took harsh measures to defend these rights.

He was also preoccupied with protecting Israeli territory in the north, and had close ties with settlements located there that were under constant bombardment, forcing their residents to spend long hours and sometimes days in shelters. He had a special connection with Kibbutz Manarah, located along the northern border, because his sister Rachel was one of its founders. He likewise attended general staff meetings and was among the decision-makers in the process of restructuring the IDF and its equipment.

Together with his fellow staffers, he participated in discussions concerning the fedayeen activities against civilians in the south, and firefights along the Egyptian border, which at times resulted in the deaths of Israeli soldiers. Although involved in preliminary decisions about the 1956 Sinai Campaign, his engagement with the northern border kept him out of the battlefield.

Early in April 1959, Haim Laskov, then chief-of-staff, unexpectedly appointed Rabin as his chief of operations. The hasty appointment followed the failure of Rabin's predecessor in the post to organize a reserves call-up drill. After almost two years at this job, it seemed to many that Rabin was the obvious candidate to succeed Laskov as chief of staff. Ben-Gurion thought otherwise. He nominated Tzvi Tzur, a veteran of the British army. Many thought that this was Ben-Gurion's punishment to

Rabin for violating a October 1948 order to steer clear of the Palmach convention. Rabin considered retiring from the IDF. However, after being assured that he would be the next chief of staff, he complied with Ben-Gurion's request and stayed on as chief of operations.

In January 1961, Rabin was promoted to deputy chief of staff, which he fulfilled in tandem to his role as chief of operations. Two years later, Ben-Gurion resigned and retired to Kibbutz Sde Boker. Before leaving the prime minister's residence, he kept his promise and made a recommendation to his successor Levi Eshkol to appoint Rabin as next chief of staff. Rabin's reputation as commander, his role as a partner in shaping Israel's defense policy, his experience in myriad staff roles, and as chief of northern command, destined him for this role. This sentiment was shared by the senior command and the general public.

On January 1st, 1964, Yitzhak Rabin became Israel's seventh chief of staff; the first to emerge from the Palmach.

CHIEF OF STAFF

Rabin's tenure was marked by the rapid military growth of Arab states, and their growing arsenal of Soviet weapons. His primary task was to prepare the IDF for major war.

He was occupied with arming the IDF with American weapons and advanced technologies in preparation for a joint operation. In tandem, he drafted operational plans that would continually serve the IDF.

All these actions were put to the test during the June 1967 Six-Day War and played a decisive role in Israel's speedy victory.

The tension in the north continued to preoccupy him as chief-of-staff, par-



At a Golani exercise, 1969
(Courtesy of IDF and Security Forces archive,
photographer: Abraham Vered)

ticularly after the Arab League's continuing attempts to divert Israel's water sources. Rabin rejected reprisals requiring occupation of Syrian territories. Rather, he instructed the IDF to disable mechanical equipment deployed from Syria for diverting water. To this end, he authorized - for the first time - air force interventions, in addition to the artillery and tank operations already taking place in this area. In parallel, he continued the campaign against Fatah - the military arm of the PLO, established in 1964.

Rabin believed that a state must be held accountable for all hostile operations launched from its territory. Thus, he held Syria responsible for terrorist operations originating from its territory, and harshly criticized its regime for not preventing those operations. In February 1966, Hafez al-Assad rose to power in Syria. Like his predecessor, he continued to support the PLO, and enabled it to launch terrorist operations against Israel from Syrian territory.

As chief-of-staff, Rabin was reluctant to authorize Israeli reprisals against militias amid civilian populations.

He strayed from that inclination in November 1966, when he authorized a reprisal attack against Jordan, in spite of the fact that Jordan was an ally of the United States. The target was Samu'a, a village in the southern part of Mount Hebron, which served as a launching point for terrorists responsible for killing Israeli citizens. The operation was intended to be limited, but quickly spiraled out of control. Twenty-three Jordanian civilians were killed, and hundreds of houses were bombed. This action had political consequences. The U.N. Security Council issued a condemnation, with the support of the United States. The operation also was severely criticized in Israel.

Rabin was cognizant of the possibility of war between Israel and the

Arab states. However at this point, despite the fact that the Syrian border was on fire, the prospect of war seemed remote.

On April 7, 1967, as a result of Syrian shelling of tractors at Tel Katzir, there was considerable escalation on the Syrian front. Exchanges of weapons fire ensued, aircrafts were introduced, and six Syrian MiG fighter jets were shot down by the IDF. In subsequent press reports, Rabin's proclamations against Syria were harsher than ever. The fear of war mounted due to an increase in Soviet arms shipments to Egypt, and Syria and Egypt's declaration that it would carry out its military pact with Syria in the event of an Israeli attack. Following false reports about IDF preparations for an offensive against Syria, which was leaked by the Soviets to Egypt, the Egyptians began to escalate their measures.

On May 14th, Egypt's army embarked on a redeployment of its forces. War broke out on June 5th. The period between May 15th to June 5th was, in retrospect, embedded into Israel's consciousness as the "the days of waiting."

THE DAYS OF WAITING

The status quo was disrupted by Egypt. In a series of unilateral initiatives, Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser ordered deployment of his country's forces in the Sinai, and demanded the withdrawal of a U.N. peacekeeping force that had been in place since the end of the 1956 Sinai Campaign. Nasser argued that the moves were meant to prevent an Israeli attack on Syria. War loomed. At this point, Rabin ordered the mobilization of reserves.

On May 18th, the U.N. complied with Nasser's demand and evacuated its forces from the Sinai.

As a result, Egypt followed through with actions suggesting its intention to close off Israeli shipping lanes in the Straits of Tiran; the IDF regarded this as a red line.

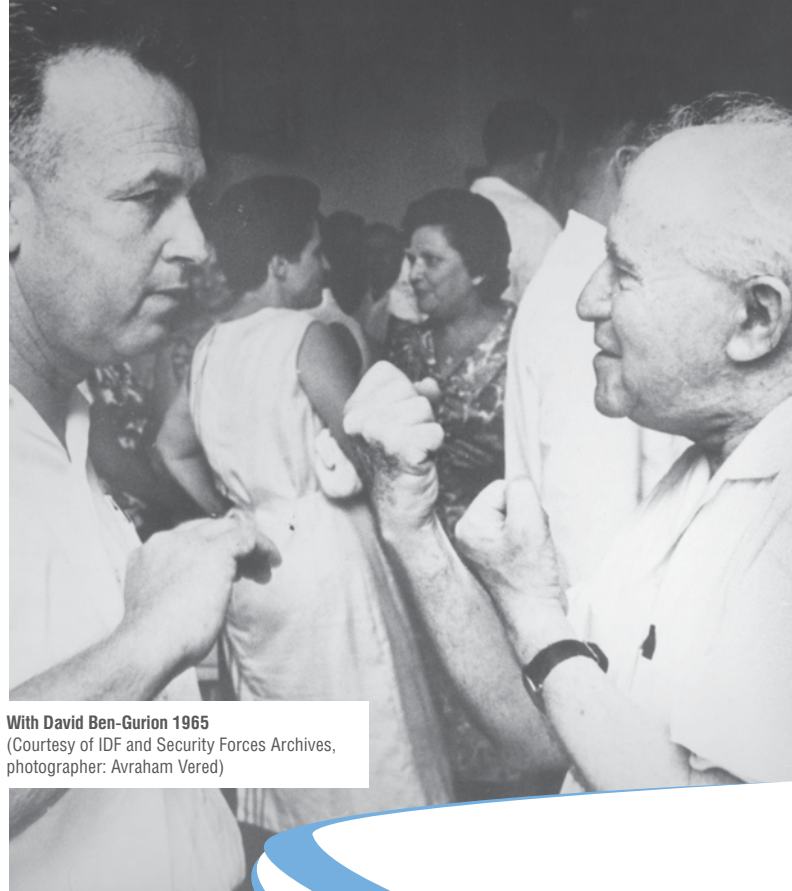
In his fourth year as chief-of-staff, Rabin expressed confidence in the power of the IDF. Under his command, the army was ready for battle. The reservists waited in the camps.

The waiting period enabled continuation of training, but crippled Israel's economy. The public became increasingly anxious. General Staff urged preliminary measures. Rabin understood that the government must be given time to pursue diplomacy, however, and so he resisted pressures for a pre-emptive strike. The senior officials he consulted, among others David Ben-Gurion, undermined his confidence in the IDF's ability to enter battle without the backing of an international power.

Ben-Gurion also criticized the mobilization of reservists.

The decisive turning point came on May 23rd, when Egypt declared the Straits of Tiran and Suez Canal closed to Israeli shipping. It was the point of no return.

Rabin was torn. On the one hand, he recognized that exhausting foreign diplomacy was essential to prevent war and his obligation to obey decisions of the political echelon. On the other hand, he was clearly aware of the advantages of a preemptive strike, and he was under heavy pressure from his colleagues at General Staff to act immediately. Rabin was conflicted and distressed. He worked and smoked incessantly, and felt worn out. The turmoil caused him to take refuge in his home to think things through. Driven by his sense of responsibility,



With David Ben-Gurion 1965
(Courtesy of IDF and Security Forces Archives,
photographer: Avraham Vered)

he summoned Ezer Weizman, then chief of operations, to his home and uncharacteristically shared his deepest feelings and concerns. Although convinced that he had done the best job possible, he felt that he shared the blame for the worsening crisis. Weizman expressed his confidence in Rabin and his ability to carry out the necessary tasks, and helped convince him to return to his post.

After 24 hours of rest, Rabin did exactly that.

On May 30th, 1967, as diplomatic contacts continued, a bilateral defense agreement was signed between Egypt and Jordan. The Jordanian army subsequently joined the military coalition against Israel. The Soviets, as well as the Americans, tried to prevent war, and called on Israel to continue its diplomatic efforts. General Staff, on the other hand, intensified its pressure to go to war.

The public increasingly sensed that a grueling war was at hand.

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, who was never considered an authority on security matters, was pressured to resign his portfolio as defense minister. He did so with a heavy heart.

Under public pressure, and against Rabin's better judgment, Moshe Dayan was appointed to head the ministry. The opposition, headed by Herut leader Menachem Begin, who was updated and kept in the loop throughout this process, decided that a national unity government was imperative, and so brought his coalition Gahal party into the government (Gahal was an alliance between Herut and the Liberal party). This development accelerated the IDF's plans for a pre-emptive strike. On June 4th, 1967, the government authorized the IDF to launch its offensive.

SIX-DAY WAR

On June 5th, 1967, the Israel Air Force launched its pre-emptive attack. In an operation involving almost all of the IDF's fighter planes, the IAF attacked the airports and air forces of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, causing devastating results. Rabin followed the large-scale offensive from air force headquarters. The air strike paved the way for the armored forces and infantry to head for the Sinai. Rabin commanded the campaign from IDF supreme command field post — the Bor (Hebrew for pit) — the undercover chief command building, and toured the various combat areas. Seeking to avoid personal publicity, he stayed away from events being covered by the media, the exception being his visit to the Old City in Jerusalem.

Within a few days, the Egyptian army was defeated, and withdrew across the Suez Canal. Following attacks by the Jordanian army in Jerusalem and its vicinity, a second battlefield opened up. Within two days, IDF forces occupied the entire West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Western Wall. The photo of Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan, and Central Command Chief Uzi Narkis (who was in charge of the operation to take East Jerusalem) at the Lions Gate immortalized the historical dimension of the war, and was circulated throughout the world. After decisive victory over the armies of Egypt and Jordan, on the fifth day of the war and on the eve of ceasefire, the IDF attacked Syrian positions on the Golan Heights. After completing the capture of the Heights and with the ceasefire taking effect, the threat hanging over the northern settlements was removed. Rabin

was satisfied that, when put to the test and in the face of attacks, the IDF's detailed plans proved successful.

When the war ended, the IDF was glorified by all. Amazement at the speed and enormity of the victory resonated throughout the world. Despite the minor changes he introduced into the war plans, Moshe Dayan, the new minister of defense, was universally hailed as the victory's hero. Many in the public felt that Rabin had been wronged. This feeling was somewhat alleviated when he received an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University at the old amphitheater on Mount Scopus. For Rabin, this event conjured up the people's heartfelt pride in their victorious chief of staff. In his speech, which received worldwide coverage, Rabin summed up the war and emphasized the heavy price paid by the defeated and the victors. He spoke in an unassuming manner and without triumphant overtones. His speech became a formative document and was imparted to every IDF soldier. It also contributed to Rabin's status within Israel's national memory as the architect of the Six-Day War.

When the war was over, Israel was transformed. The territory under its control almost tripled in size; responsibility for the fate of a million and half Palestinians lay on its shoulders. The debate over the state's borders, which had not been discussed since the 1949 armistice that ended the War of Independence, was now reopened.

“The fighters on the front lines witnessed with their own eyes not only the splendor of victory, but also its price. Their comrades fell at their sides, covered in their blood. And I know that the horrendous price paid by the enemy also touched many of them profoundly.”



Right-Left: Chief-of-Staff Yitzhak Rabin, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and Central Command Chief Uzi Narkis, at the entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem, June 1967

(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau, photographer: Ilan Brauner)

AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES

The office of Israel's Ambassador to the United States was assigned to Rabin at his request. Many of his friends were surprised. Although inexperienced in the field of diplomacy, he had clear ideas about the importance of Israel-American relations. He was convinced that his advantages would outweigh his shortcomings. During the months leading up to his departure for Washington, he worked on improving his English, and learning as much as he could about the world's foremost democracy, its foreign policy and, most particularly, the inner workings of America's relationship with Israel. His conversations with Henry Kissinger, at the time an advisor on national security to President Lyndon Johnson who was considered one of the most influential statesmen in the United States, were helpful in this regard. Kissinger enlightened him about America's chief concerns, notably the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and world supervision of nuclear weapons. Rabin was aware of his advantage as the victorious Six-Day War chief-of-staff. He was correct; Washington welcomed him with open arms.

Lyndon Johnson was nearing the end of his term as president, and was chiefly preoccupied with the Cold War and America's involvement in Vietnam. One of the sensitive issues in U.S.-Israel relations was the American demand to oversee Israel's nuclear program, and the related demand that Israel sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Israel objected to both demands. In return for Israel's refusal, the United States suspended delivery of already agreed on Phantom jets to Israel. Rabin fully supported Israel's objection to nuclear supervision, and to Israel's

insistence that it would not be the first to introduce nuclear arms to the region, assuming it had such weapons. Ever since Levi Eshkol became Prime Minister, this represented the nuclear ambiguity pursued by Israel's government. Rabin embarked on an obstinate struggle against any link between the nuclear issue and the supply of Phantom jets.

In November 1968, towards the end of Rabin's first year in Washington, presidential elections were held in the United States. Going against traditional Jewish support of the Democratic Party, and the position of the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, Rabin overtly supported the Republican presidential candidate, Richard M. Nixon, whom he considered a more agreeable ally of Israel than his rival, the Democratic Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey. For this, he relied on his former acquaintance with Nixon and Nixon's enunciated standpoints when campaigning for president.

The election campaign helped Rabin become closely acquainted with the apparatus of American democracy; with heads of major parties; with the media's power and its influential representatives. He also embarked on frequent visits to the many Jewish communities, and became acquainted with leaders of the important Jewish organizations.

Nixon won the election. Among his first nominations was Henry Kissinger to serve as the head of the National Security Council. Building on their former acquaintance, Rabin welcomed the nomination.

As ambassador, Rabin worked under Israel's Foreign Ministry, however his close relations with Prime Minister Levi Eshkol afforded him direct access to the head of government. When Eshkol passed away in February 1969, Rabin established a relationship of trust with the newly appointed prime minister, Golda Meir. This, in turn, enabled an ongoing channel of direct communication, which helped him effectively set in motion steps he saw as vital for Israel.

Rabin's success as ambassador occurred despite disagreements with the Nixon

Administration over solutions for the Arab Israeli Conflict.

"I am convinced that the weight of our relations with the United States, the strongest nation in the western world, and its Jewry will continue to strengthen."

The cold war and the Soviet's involvement in Egypt and Syria placed the Middle East at the center of United States foreign diplomacy, based on the assumption that promoting harmony between Israel and its neighbors was instrumental in reducing Soviet influence in the region. In October 1969, United States Secretary of State William P. Rogers formulated a plan for a peace arrangement between Israel and its neighbors. Aimed at comprehensive peace with Egypt and Jordan, it also included Israel's withdrawal to the pre-June 1967 lines, albeit with "insubstantial alterations required for mutual security," in keeping with U.N. Security Council Resolution 242.

Rabin questioned the plan's prospects to achieve its objectives. Since the end of the Six-Day War, he considered the territories as a bargain-



Boarding a flight to the Washington D.C. during his tenure as Israel's Ambassador to the United States, 1973 (Courtesy of the IDF and Security Forces Archives)

ing chip while concurrently dismissing withdrawal to the pre-June 1967 lines, which he regarded as indefensible borders. In December 1969, Secretary of State Rogers presented the plan to Israel's government. Despite Rabin's objection to the international border, he perceived the ongoing dialogue with the American administration vital for Israel and urged the government not to dismiss the plan outright.

Contrary to his opinion, the Israeli government rejected the Rogers Plan. Tension between the two states mounted. It dissolved only after the plan was equally rejected by the Soviets and Egypt. The Americans did not despair. They looked elsewhere for a solution to the conflict.

As diplomatic contacts continued, however, Egypt had begun what has become known as the War of Attrition between IDF and Egyptian forces on the banks of the Suez Canal. The price of casualties was high.

In October 1969, Golda Meir formally met President Nixon in Washington. It was a highly successful meeting. Rabin was involved in arranging the visit, as well as the talks throughout. Its success was largely credited to him. The most significant achievement was U.S. acceptance of Israel's "nuclear ambiguity" policy. During this visit, the Americans detached the nuclear issue from military aid to Israel, and committed itself to allowing delivery of the Phantom jets.

In light of his status as a dialogue partner of America's senior statesmen, Rabin worked hard at persuading them that Israel must toughen its measures against Egypt, and that this policy would serve U.S. interests in the region. Damage to Egypt, he argued, would reduce Soviet influence in the Middle East and, indirectly, would contribute

to furthering America's quest for agreement in the reducing the arms race between the powers. Moreover, he argued that the Soviet Union was providing aid to Egypt, while the United States abstained from reinforcing Israel. Peace arrangements could only be established from a position of strength, he argued, and Israel must act accordingly.

As a member of Golda Meir's "kitchen cabinet," which often actually met in her kitchen, Rabin was among the initiators of Israel's deep-penetration raids into Egypt, which continued from January to July 1970. These attacks were meant to be lethal and they were; Egyptian civilian casualties were high. As a result, this policy was sharply criticized abroad, as well as in Israel.

Rabin remained steadfast in his convictions, however, even at the risk of disagreeing with the United States. Although conceived as an extremely hawkish military strategy, underlying it was a political motivation. Such operations were intended as a temporary phase, to be ended in time to reap political benefits.

Egypt suffered heavy losses. And then, just as he had influenced Gold Meir to act, he applied the full measure of his influence to obtain a ceasefire. In August 1970, the ceasefire came into effect. Israel, for the first time, agreed, with reservations, to accept Resolution 242, including its call for withdrawal from territories occupied in the Six-Day War, and recognition of the sovereignty and independence of all states in the region. (Resolution 242, the English language version of which is the official version, carefully refers to withdrawal "from territories" occupied in June 1967, but not "the territories." The absence of

the definite article was meant to allow for some border readjustments to enhance Israeli security.) Acceptance of 242 resulted in the withdrawal of the Gahal Party from the government and breakup of the coalition. Yet the government survived, and Golda Meir remained prime minister. Throughout this period, Rabin was frequently in Israel and attended government meetings, thereby fortifying his status as a future national leader.

In September 1970, Golda Meir arrived on a second visit to the United States, Rabin again worked effectively to organize it. This visit secured America's agreement to remove the embargo on dispatching of Phantom jets to Israel, and resulted in an unprecedented enlargement of its security aid. This achievement was largely credited to Rabin's preparatory work.

During this visit, President Nixon appealed to Rabin for Israel to lend support to Jordan's King Hussein, who at the time was struggling against Syrian and Palestinian attempts to undermine Hashemite rule. Rabin supported the request, and pressed Prime Minister Meir to accede to it. King Hussein, however, ultimately managed to repress the insurgency on his own. He mobilized all his forces and massacred Palestinian militants mercilessly. In their memory, September 1970 became known as Black September, although the civil war, as it has been called, lasted through July 1971. Israel's willingness to respond to America's request for aid to Jordan's monarch considerably strengthened cooperation between Israel and the United States, as well as relations between King Hussein and Israel.

The second half of Rabin's term in Washington was more relaxed, providing him with more time to pursue photography and tennis, his favorite hobbies. Although somewhat disappointed with the Republican admin-



Press conference, Germany, July 1975
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau,
photographer: Moshe Milner)

istration, for which he had great expectations, he sensed that many of his plans were fulfilled. He was a popular lecturer both in Jewish communities and academic forums; he attended social events and hosted events at his own residence. This routine was interrupted in December 1971 by the death of his father, Nehemiah, who spent his final years at Kibbutz Menarah, near his daughter Rachel and her children. His father's death strengthened Rabin's resolve that it was time to head home. He felt ready for the political arena.

Back in Israel, Rabin was now considered an authority on the United States. He was also knowledgeable about the Israeli political scene, because of his frequent visits home during his Washington tenure and his continuous contacts with family and friends. It was with great difficulty, therefore, that he consented to Golda Meir's request to prolong his term.

On September 29th, 1970, Gamal Abdul Nasser died. He was replaced as Egypt's president by Anwar al-Sadat. His succession to the presidency transformed the political reality in the Middle East. Sadat introduced a new style of governing, and new ideas for arrangements with Israel. Aware of these changes, Rabin regarded Sadat's ascent to power as an opportunity to escape from the political standstill. He was ready to accept an American plan for the IDF's withdrawal to inland Sinai, and the reopening of the Suez Canal. Golda Meir disagreed. His argument that such an arrangement would strengthen Israel's alliance with the United States did not change her mind. Israel's government under Meir's leadership rejected the proposal.

Rabin cautioned that its dismissal of the American plan would lead to a coerced arrangement, or even renewed conflagration. Meir's

government stood firm behind its position. He tried to open the prime minister's eyes to changes in the region reflective of the post-Nasser era. He repeatedly claimed that the United States would intensify its efforts for arrangement in the Middle East, and that Israel must integrate itself into the new processes. Still, she opposed any withdrawal. Ambassador Rabin continued to faithfully represent government positions, regardless of his reservations, but his desire to return to Israel grew ever stronger.

During this period, he frequently spoke with Henry Kissinger, now the U.S. secretary of state, and their relationship extended beyond the workplace. Their connection would help him when he became prime minister. He ended his ambassadorial term in March 1973. The election campaign for the 8th Knesset, parliament, was imminent, and Rabin again embarked on a new road.

LABOR PARLIAMENTARIAN

Although Rabin was never a member of the Labor Party, he was affiliated with the labor movement from an early age; its values inspired his upbringing and actions. He became a party member at the conclusion of his term as ambassador, and was listed as number 20 on its list under Golda Meir leadership for the upcoming Knesset elections in December.

About a month and a half before the elections, however, it became clear that Israel was heading for war, rather than an election campaign.

War surprisingly broke out at noon on October 6th, 1973, which was the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur. Israel was unprepared and stunned by the initial heavy losses being sustained (Israel lost nearly 3,000 soldiers on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts in the early stages of fighting). Rabin, for the first time, was without any military role, which frustrated him. On the fourth day of fighting, therefore, he agreed to head the Emergency Loan Fund, at the request of Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir. The fund was intended to raise money for war expenses. Its success was largely due to Rabin's efficient use of his connections.

The war, which caught Israel unprepared, shook the public and its trust in the government. When it ended, the soul-searching began. The public, long intoxicated by its sense of power following the euphoric victory of the Six-Day War, turned its indignation against the government which led the country to the brink of an abyss.

On December 31st, 1973, Knesset elections were held. Rabin took part in the election campaign. Working in his favor was his status as someone untouched by the Yom Kipur war fiasco. In the elections, Labor lost considerable power, yet managed to form a government under Meir, who continued to lead its policy. Moshe Dayan, perceived as primarily responsible for the Yom Kippur fiasco, nevertheless also remained in office. During this government, Rabin was appointed Minister of Labor. He was unaccustomed to such a role, but he quickly and vigorously learned the ins and outs, and the challenges, of his new position as a parliamentarian and government minister.

The public, meanwhile, was not pleased that leaders of the fiasco were continuing in office, and it demanded accountability. The government unwillingly nominated an official inquiry committee to investigate the



With MK Aryeh "Lova" Eliav,
February 1974
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau
photographer, Yaakov Saar)

lead-up to the Yom Kippur War. It was headed by Supreme Court Judge Shimon Agranat.

On April 1st, 1974, the Agranat Commission published an interim report. It focused on the military echelon only, to which it ascribed full responsibility. The political echelon was ignored because its investigation was excluded from the commission's mandate. The principal victim of the committee's ruling was Chief of Staff David Elazar, who was forced to step down.

Rabin publicly expressed his disapproval of the Agranat report, and sharply criticized the narrow scope of its mandate. In a democracy, he emphasized, the political echelon bears responsibility for all military actions that are carried out strictly under its instructions. Rabin was particularly outraged by the personal responsibility imposed on Elazar, perceiving him as a valiant and underestimated commander.

Beginning with the protest of one reserve soldier, Motti Asheknazy, protests quickly began to sweep through the public, especially among the recently released reservists. On April 11th, 1974, under public pressure, Golda Meir handed in her resignation. Rabin's nomination to succeed her as prime minister was a surprise to a large extent. At the same time, it was clear to Labor's heads that the party had to put at its helm someone in whom the public had confidence and who was uninvolved with the war fiasco. Rabin gained the support of a central group, specifically among Mapai veterans (the historical older faction of the Labor Party), who were closely acquainted with him and confident of his skills and leadership. Moreover, his authority was strengthened by having been chief of staff during the Six-Day War and his extremely successful tenure as Ambassador to

the United States. He embodied the opportunity to restore the Labor Party to public trust. In the Labor primary, he defeated other candidates and was elected Israel's 17th prime minister.

ISRAEL'S PRIME MINISTER

Rabin's premiership began on June 3rd, 1974. His government was comprised of a coalition of 61 Knesset members. Shimon Peres was Minister of Defense.

Committed to his electorate and Labor's values, Rabin led a policy of governmental continuity while, at the same time, demonstrating a willingness to make changes. As such, he represented a changing of the guard within the government, away from Yishuv-era leadership to a younger generation.

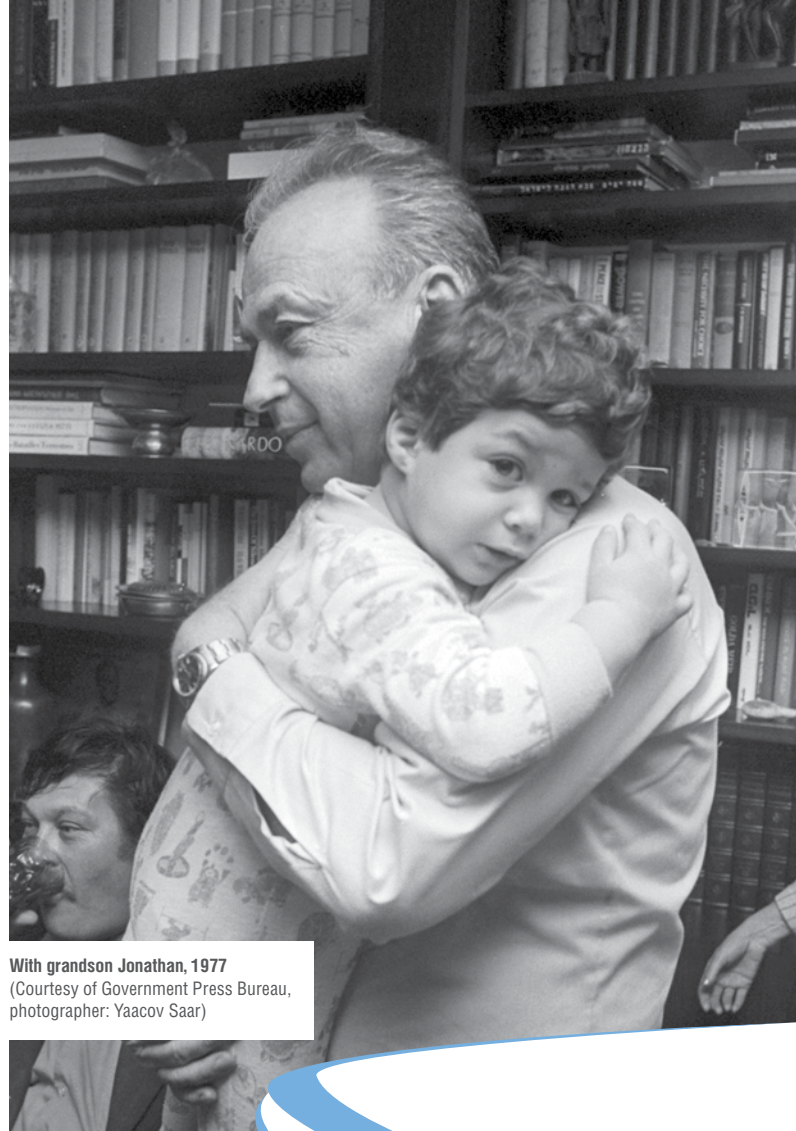
Renewal of the diplomatic initiative and progress towards peace were his main tasks. Before he took office, Israel and Syria had signed disengagement accords reached with the help of Secretary of State Kissinger that de facto terminated the Yom Kippur War with Syria. With that off his agenda, Rabin could concentrate on Israel's peace initiative with Egypt. He strove for an interim agreement based on his conviction that the gaps between the two sides prohibited full peace. Once Egypt consented to separate negotiations with Israel, discussions began under Kissinger's mediation; for Kissinger, an agreement would mean reducing Soviet influence in the region. Sadat, too, wanted such a reduction; he had pinned his hopes at modernizing Egypt's economy and infrastructure on the West, not the East.

Kissinger embarked on an exhausting shuttle diplomacy and imposed the full weight of his power on both sides. Negotiations went on for months. They were grueling and interrupted by crises. Rabin, aware of both the hazards and great prospects of such an accord to Israel, was willing to go the extra mile to reach compromise. Before signing on, however, he had to secure a parliamentary majority in support of the ground-breaking decision.

On September 1st, 1975, in Geneva, under the watchful eye of United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, an interim accord was signed with Egypt, the most powerful Arab state and until then Israel's most persistent external threat. Israel agreed to withdraw its forces from territories east of the Suez Canal, and to restore the Abu Rhodes oil fields to Egypt. The United States agreed to increase security and economic aid to Israel, and to non-recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians. For the first time, Egypt agreed to sign a separate agreement with Israel. At the same time, it was decided to renew a U.N. peacekeeping presence in the Sinai and to scale down anti Israel propaganda in Egypt.

The historic accord was endorsed by the Knesset with an overwhelming majority. It became one of Rabin's most prominent achievements in his first go-round as prime minister and was, in retrospect, seen as laying the ground for the full peace treaty with Egypt, signed about four years later by the Likud government under Menachem Begin.

An additional achievement of Rabin as Prime Minister was the Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Administration of President Gerald R. Ford, who had been instrumental in helping to achieve the interim accord with Egypt. In this Memorandum, the United States made



With grandson Jonathan, 1977
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau,
photographer: Yaacov Saar)

far-reaching commitments to Israel's security and economy.

In his attempts to promote talks with other Arab states, Rabin secretly conferred with Jordan's King Hussein, as well as with Morocco's King Hassan — his was the first clandestine visit of an Israeli head of government to Morocco. The Palestinian problem was still on the agenda. Terrorist operations continued. Rabin strongly opposed any negotiation with the PLO, which he regarded as a terrorist organization responsible for terror operations against Israel.

For Rabin, a solution to the Palestinian problem lay in the Allon Plan, formulated by Minister Yigal Allon in 1967. The plan, officially adopted by the Labor Party in 1973, utterly dismissed establishment of a Palestinian state in the territories, and determined that a solution to the Palestinian problem lay strictly within the framework of the Kingdom of Jordan. In the spirit of this plan, Rabin supported Jewish security settlements in the territories, yet rejected any Jewish settlement amid Arab population. He clashed on this issue with Gush Emunim, the movement that was spearheading and organizing Jewish settlement in the populated territories. The clashes were often accompanied by shrill voices. Yet, Rabin avoided overwhelming confrontation with the settlers. After hesitations, and with a heavy heart, he approved a Jewish settlement at Kadum (in proximity to Nablus). Despite his objection in principle, Rabin did not manage to prevent continuation of settlement activity within densely populated Arab areas.

The issue of Israel's Arab sector confronted him most powerfully on Yom Ha-Adama, a protest first observed by Israeli Arabs in a general strike in the Galilee On March 30th, 1976, during which

they demonstrated against confiscation of their lands by the Israeli government. Implementation of the strike emanated from the government's policy of Judaization of the Galilee and dispossession of Arab lands. During the demonstrations, passions raged fiercely and the security forces responded with live fire, killing six demonstrators and wounding many. The events fermented the Arab population at large and aroused sharp criticism equally among the Jewish public. It made Rabin reconsider the relations between the State and its Arab minority. During his second term as prime minister, he initiated dramatic change in the area based on the conclusions that he arrived at following Yom Ha-Adama.

Throughout his term of office, Rabin acclimated to the political arena as well as to internal party politics. He toured branches, met many people, and learnt about their tribulations. As a future candidate for party leadership, he consolidated a camp of supporters.

In the economic and social arena, Rabin continued in the path of the Labor party's traditional policy. His government was compelled to confront the economic deficit and inevitable cuts made in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War.

Despite these challenges, his term of office witnessed continuing economic growth and maintenance of social protection. The education budget was expanded, and many resources were invested in improving the education system. His government invested heavily in creating jobs and diminishing social gaps. Its measures won public appreciation.

At the same time, corruption scandals in the top echelons of his party overshadowed the achievements of his government, and enraged many. Expressions such as “we are fed up with you corrupted lot” unveiled a new national mood, one that reflected the residual anger of the Yom Kippur War. Rabin’s relations with Defense Minister Shimon Peres, which were tense to begin with, escalated throughout his term in office and the ripple effects often made headlines.

On June 27th, 1976, an Air France plane was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists and eventually landed in Entebbe, Uganda, where the hijackers were under the protection of President Idi Amin. Of the 230 passengers on board, 83 were Israelis; all but the Israeli and Jewish passengers were released within a few days. The Israeli Government considered a military rescue operation. Rabin consented when he was finally convinced of the prospects of its success after six intense days fraught with anxiety. The daring rescue of over 100 hostages in the early morning hours of July 4, 1976, was one of the IDF’s most spectacular operations, and completely overshadowed the bicentennial celebration then underway in the United States. It enhanced its prestige in Israel and abroad, and was one of the climactic moments of Rabin’s first term as prime-minister.

On December 10th, 1976, the first F-15 fighter jets arrived in Israel from the United States. As ambassador, Rabin had worked hard to obtain them. What should have been considered a memorable achievement ended in disappointment. Due to unexpected delays, the jets landed on Friday after sundown when the Sabbath had begun, thus, exposing dignitaries who were present with violating the Sabbath. This crisis created fallout with the government’s religious parties.



Yitzhak Rabin (right) with U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, June 10th, 1975 (Courtesy of Government Press Bureau photographer, Yaakov Saar)

Rabin decided to leverage this crisis in order to move-up elections, which in his estimations would strengthen the Labor party. On December 21st, he handed in his resignation to the president. From that point up until elections for a new Knesset, his government acted as a transitional one. A new party appeared on the scene which posed a serious challenge to the Labor Party. The Shinui (Change) movement, renamed Dash – Democratic Party for Change, brought into its ranks well-known figures, including some who had jumped ship from the labor movement.

A further obstacle standing in Rabin's way was another contest versus Shimon Peres for the party leadership. It was held on February 23rd, 1977. Rabin won by a narrow margin. While heading the transitional government, a presidential election was held in the United States, which was won by Jimmy Carter, the Democratic candidate. As in the past, Rabin had hoped for President Gerald Ford, the republican candidate, to win, but quickly acclimated himself and began preparations for a meeting at the White House.

The meeting was held on March 7th, 1977. Carter placed highest priority on promoting peace in the Middle East. His plan included establishment of a Palestinian state and Israel's full withdrawal from the territories, a plan formerly rejected by Rabin. The meeting revealed the division between Israel and the new U.S. administration.

Two months remained until elections in Israel. The divide with the American president overshadowed Rabin's status in the upcoming campaign.

Upon his return from the period in which he served as ambassador to the United States, the news publication Haaretz reported that the

Rabin family held a bank account in the United States. During that time, it was considered a violation of currency laws. Aharon Barak, the legal adviser to the government, decided to prosecute Leah Rabin, the prime minister's wife. Rabin, in turn, assumed joint responsibility and on April 7th, 1977, handed in his resignation.

He also removed his candidacy for head of the Labor Party's electoral list. He was replaced by Peres. As mandated by law, Rabin continued his term as prime minister of the transitional government until the leader of the Likud party, Menachem Begin, took office following its victory at the polls.

Rabin's decision to share his wife's violation garnered public admiration. Later, it would help him become Prime Minister for a second term.

“I cannot currently be the party's candidate for prime minister. Not because of the offense's gravity, but because I committed an offense albeit technical. I must be true to my upbringing, tradition, my creed. I must pay the price like every citizen, especially as the prime minister who must have the public's trust in order to assume another term in office.”

IN THE OPPOSITION

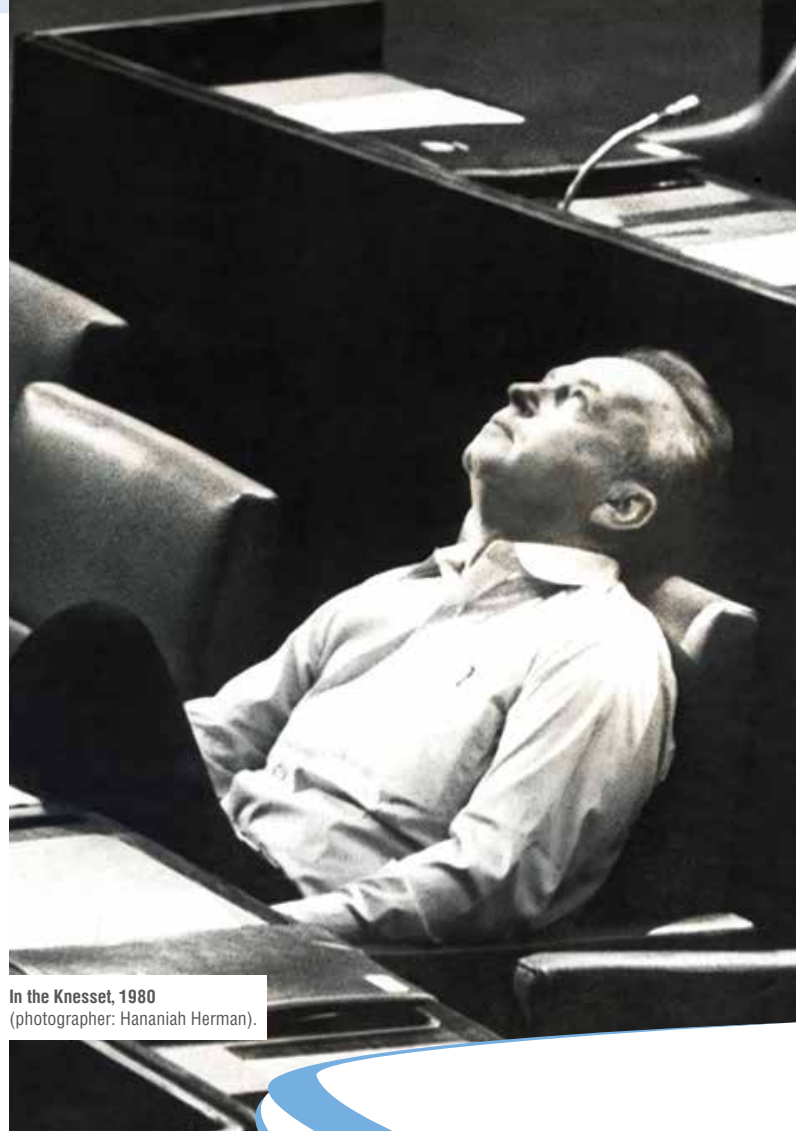
The Knesset elections, held on May 17th, 1977, were a political turnabout. For the first time since the establishment of Israel, the task of forming a government fell to someone outside Labor's orbit; in fact, it fell to Likud leader Menachem Begin. The Labor Party was in unfamiliar territory.

At this junction in his career, Rabin found refuge in a small office, assigned to him, as the former prime minister, at the Kiryah - IDF headquarters, in Tel Aviv. Friends and journalists visited frequently. He ostensibly went into political exile. However, after an adjustment period, he resumed public life, although on a scaled-back model. He was also involved in party politics; active as an MK (member of parliament) and member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

The bulk of his energy, however, went into writing his memoirs, Service Registry (published outside Israel as The Rabin Memoirs). The book, co-written with his friend, the journalist Dov Goldstein, charts his journey from childhood up until the conclusion of his first premiership. It serves as an important document that provides background about the landscape of the first Sabra to attain premiership. His personal story chronicles the two formative wars in his life, the War of Independence and Six-Day War; the evolution of the IDF; the development of the special relationship between Israel and the United States, as well as his personal perspective on Israel's political arena.

In this book, Rabin also articulated his thoughts about the process of adjusting to party politics in general, and his own party in particular. Additionally, it settled accounts with his political adversaries, particularly Shimon Peres. The book aroused great interest. Alongside favorable reviews, it had its critics, notably within his party. At this point in his life, Rabin spent more time than ever on his hobbies — photography and tennis. He also devoted time to reading, publishing articles and travelling.

From the vantage point of the opposition, he followed with amazement the historic visit to Israel of Egypt's president, Anwar al-Sadat, which he regarded as a formative event. He supported the government's peace



In the Knesset, 1980
(photographer: Hananiah Herman).

policy and the peace treaty with Egypt despite his reservations about some of its clauses, primarily Israel's consent to withdraw to modified 1967 lines. In this, he saw a precedent, obliging Israel in future agreements.

In 1980, after accepting an offer from Dov Yudkovsky, editor-in-chief of Israel's newspaper Yedioth Aharonot, Rabin, accompanied by the journalist Eitan Haber, traveled abroad for a long series of meetings with prominent leaders in contemporary world politics. Their conversations encompassed the world and its plenum, and continued through 1983. They were published in 1984, under the title Yitzhak Rabin Talks with Leaders and Heads of State. This volume shed light on Rabin's knowledge of problems, as well as current changes, in the international arena, and their consequences for Israel's future.

Leading up to the Labor party primaries, Rabin became active in supporting the candidacy of Yigal Allon, his friend and former commander, in the race against Peres for head of the party. Allon's sudden death, on February 29th, 1980, overturned his plans. With the blessing of Allon's widow, Rabin announced his candidacy. Within months, he rebuilt the Rabin camp. He was defeated in the party primaries that were held in November. In the general elections for the tenth Knesset, held on June 30th, 1981, the Likud party headed by Begin was again victorious. The Labor Party remained in the opposition.

Ending its first year in office, the second government headed by Begin embarked on Operation Peace for Galilee, which aimed to protect Israel's northern settlements. Well versed on the problems of the settlements along the northern border, Rabin supported the operation's

initial stages, and even acted as adviser to Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. However, as the war carried on and its objectives were expanded, he vehemently opposed its continuance.

He utterly dismissed the war's political goals to establish a new order in Lebanon, repeatedly cautioned against becoming mired in the Lebanese "mud" and Lebanon's "tangle," and called for withdrawal of IDF forces from Lebanon and their deployment in a demilitarized zone from which they could protect Israel's northern border.

His views were voiced in the Knesset, in interviews and newspaper articles, and at party events. In 1983, his articles and pronouncements about the war were collected under the volume War in Lebanon.

On July 23rd, 1984, elections for the 11th Knesset were held. Heading the Labor Party was Shimon Peres. Likud won by three mandates. The close race and the long-drawn-out war in Lebanon engendered a National Unity Government. In negotiations between the parties, they agreed upon a rotation of the premiership. Peres was first to assume office; he chose Rabin to be minister of defense.

MINISTER OF DEFENSE

Rabin was the obvious choice for the defense portfolio. Of all his peers in the government, he stood out as "Mr. Security," experienced in both political and security affairs. The nomination

also won public approval. His first and most urgent task was fulfillment of the Labor Party's pre-election commitment to gradually withdraw the IDF from Lebanon. A decision on the matter was made by the government on November 15th, 1985.

Accordingly, IDF forces withdrew from Lebanon, with the exception of a 15-kilometer security zone in southern Lebanon that remained under Israeli control. The SLA (South Lebanon Army), which cooperated with Israel, a UNIFIL force (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) and a relatively small IDF force were assigned to guarantee the security zone. They acted in unison to protect the northern border. In this spirit, the Good Fence policy that began with the onset of the Lebanon war, continued, allowing two points of entry for the daily passage of southern Lebanese seeking work and medical care in Israel.

The IDF withdrawal did not end the war. Still left behind in Lebanon were three captured Israeli soldiers who were being held by the terrorist organization led by Ahmad Jibril. Rabin regarded their return as a national obligation. In the bargain he signed with Jibril, the so-called "Jibril deal," 1,150 Palestinian prisoners were released in exchange for the three IDF prisoners of war. The price was heavy. Rabin was aware of it. Yet his commitment to the life of Israeli soldiers determined the matter for him. The deal was censured by the right, as well as IDF officials. Rabin, even in face of personal affronts, remained steadfast behind it.

Responsibility for the life of every Israeli soldier and civilian was one of his distinguishing marks as minister of defense.



Minister of Defense Rabin near Raphiach, 1987
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau, photographer: Maggie Allon)

Big trials still lay ahead. At the end of December 1987, a popular uprising among Palestinians living in the territories broke out; it became known as the Intifada. Rabin's initial failure to identify its uniqueness prompted his belief in a military solution and drove him to crush it by force.

After several months of struggle, he became convinced that the uprising was unprecedented and distinct. It was led by grassroots local residents rather than under instructions of the PLO leadership in Tunis. Rabin realized that it expressed authentic Palestinian national aspirations, as well as the despair of the Palestinian people at the status quo. Nonetheless, in his policy, he was determined to disable any terrorist achievements. "They will attain nothing by force, only at the negotiating table," he said repeatedly. In this spirit, he took all measures at his disposal to strike at terror operations and disruptions of peace. He used all the weapons sanctioned by law, including blockades and deportations, and prevented entry of Palestinian workers into Israel. Among his many expressions, he was quoted as saying, "we'll break their bones." Although he denied using this phrase, he admitted that his intentions were to disable terrorists and disrupters of peace. As a consequence, the left regarded his policy as immoral and futile, while the right saw it as inadequate.

He also became increasingly anxious about the decline that he identified in the ethical fortitude of the IDF. He was attentive to public opinion in Israel, which was uneasy about turning IDF soldiers into a policing force compelled to cope with a hostile civilian population, and with women and children in particular. He was equally aware of the intifada's demoralizing impact on the IDF, notably its fighting

spirit, its difficulty in performing traditional roles, and the erosion of its status as the people's army. In time, he understood that the Palestinian's readiness to endure casualties exceeded his expectations and that force alone would not procure peace. he arrived at the conclusion that there was a need to recognize Palestinian local leadership, and to embark on negotiations regarding the political future of the territories. At this stage, he still clung to his conviction that a solution for the Palestinian problem would be found in a joint arrangement with Jordan, rather than within the framework of an independent state; in his opinion, such a state would be a security hazard to Israel. He therefore supported contacts with Jordan's King Hussein and even met with him in secret.

In April 1987, Shimon Peres met Hussein in London and reached a Memorandum of Understanding. Rabin essentially supported this step, but was pragmatic enough to understand that Yitzhak Shamir, by then the Prime Minister, would reject it.

A significant change in the political reality occurred only a year later. In July 1988, King Hussein decided on final disengagement in the West Bank. This decision at once removed the Jordanian option. Rabin now had to search for another solution.

Rabin had known for a long time that the United States was in contact with the PLO in its quest of bringing them to the negotiating table. The PLO convention in November 1988 afforded a narrow opening — the Palestine National Council officially recognized the 1947 U.N. resolution on the two-state partition of pre-state Israel (181), and the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 on with-

drawal of Israel from territories occupied in the Six-Day and Yom Kippur wars. These resolutions, accepted under American pressure, paved the way for PLO-U.S. talks and recognition of the PLO as dialogue partner on Israel's future. Rabin read the map of change and understood the interests of Israel's chief ally. He reached the conclusion that Israel must take risks and embark on a peace initiative of its own.

Bound by coalition constraints and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's positions on peace, Rabin publicized his three-stage plan in January 1989. In the first stage, Israel would permit free elections in the territories, enabling residents to elect their leadership. The elected leadership would administer the Palestinian autonomy, already determined under the 1978 peace accord with Egypt, and safeguard public order in the territories. The second stage would be carried out within the framework of an international convention, which would secure world support. The third stage would be negotiations for a permanent arrangement. Under American pressure, the Shamir government accepted the proposal, with slight modifications. The plan was endorsed by the Cabinet on November 5th, 1989.

Israel's peace initiative improved relations with the United States and the free world. Prime Minister Shamir was disinclined to internalize it, however, and Shimon Peres attempted to form a narrow government under his leadership. That effort failed.

Shamir then decided to remove Peres from his administration. On March 15th, 1990, in protest and in a display of support for Peres, all Labor ministers resigned from the government and moved back to the opposition. After close to six stormy years as minister of defense, Rabin stepped down. The Shamir government remained the transitional government until up elections for the 13th Knesset.



Defense Minister Rabin during a tour of the Lebanese border, December 11th, 1985
(Courtesy of the IDF and Security Forces Archives)

IN THE OPPOSITION ONCE MORE

Determined to win leadership of his party in the upcoming elections, Rabin took his seat in the opposition. He was clearly aware that he would again be running against Peres. Joining the race also were Knesset members Israel Keisar and Orah Namir. Rabin was already backed by an increasingly growing consolidated camp, which attracted many non-Labor supporters to its ranks.

In order to garner wide non-partisan support, Rabin staunchly supported change in the electoral system for party leadership. He urged adoption of open primaries that would entitle non-registered citizens to become party members and participate in electing its candidate for premiership. The Labor party had for some time discussed this system one which gained support from many citizens disgusted with the current “arrangement committee.”

Rabin’s preparations for the primaries were interrupted by the Gulf War between the United States and Iraq, which broke out in January 1991.

Away from the decision-making centers, Rabin carefully followed the course of that war. As Israel became a target for Iraqi Scud missiles, he argued that it must adopt a policy of restraint, rather than of active intervention, and that the state had to do everything within its power to keep the Israel-Arab conflict out of a war unrelated to Israel.

He believed in the military advantage of the United States, and hoped that its eventual victory would launch a new political reality in the Middle East. He, therefore, backed Israel’s consent to America’s request for non-intervention in the war. He saw in this a way to tighten Israel-United

States understandings, partially undermined by Israel’s settlement policy which U.S. President George H. W. Bush firmly opposed, in the hope that it would subsequently lead to an increase of security aid to Israel.

As a resident of Tel Aviv, Rabin, like his fellow citizens, was under the instructions of the Home Front Command. As former minister of defense, some blamed him for the lamentable condition of the home front. He dismissed the charges. Given the tight defense budget, he argued, nothing more could be done. He noted that his office held advanced negotiations for the purchase of Patriot missiles, and that the Israel Aerospace Industries was working on the development of the anti-Scud Arrow missile.

From the window of his home, he followed the long lines of cars leaving Tel Aviv every evening, and was saddened by the eroding resilience of Israel’s home front.

The war disrupted the Labor Party primaries, without bringing them to a complete standstill.

When the war ended, Rabin was all the more convinced that, under the present circumstances, the prospects of solution for the Israel-Arab conflict were better than ever, that Israel and its citizens were ready for peace, and that they would support the peace initiative he intended to lead. Despite criticism about Israel’s inadequacy for war, his status as Mr. Security remained intact.

During the primaries, Rabin triumphed over Peres. Both were now compelled to prepare for the Knesset elections. Although avowed rivals, they were united on key issues facing the new government,

foremost of which was the advancement of peace. Both were behind the decision to set aside their contentious past, and partner together on an auspicious journey.

Rabin's peace plans were first and foremost based on changes in the global power structure following the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, which had dictated international policy since the end of World War II. For the Middle East, it entailed dramatic consequences.

The Soviet Union was chief supplier of arms to the Arab states; its collapse dealt them a heavy blow. Soviet disengagement from the region and America's overwhelming victory against Iraq, achieved in coalition with Arab and western states, left the United States the only super power in the Middle East and in a strong position to implement its plans. A solution to the Israel-Arab conflict was paramount on its agenda.

The first step in this direction was scheduling an international convention in Madrid, Spain's capital. An international convention was part of Rabin's peace plan that was already endorsed by the National Unity Government cabinet in November 1989. However, only now did the government — led by Shamir — extend its half-hearted consent.

On October 30th, 1991, the Madrid Conference began. In attendance were President Bush, Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, delegations of Arab states, and elected representatives of Palestinians from the territories as part of the Jordanian delegation. Yitzhak Shamir headed the Israeli delegation.

The Americans were quick to grasp that Shamir was stalling for time. Nonetheless, a decision was made to open peace talks between Israel and its neighbors; bilateral committees were set up with Syria and Jordan, as well as multilateral committees to deal with issues of common concern.



Defense Minister Rabin visiting an Army base, December 12th 1989
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau photographer, Tzvika Israeli)

Shamir, who arrived at the convention as if demon-driven, from the start objected to the proposals raised. He carried on in the same manner when facing a freeze sanctioned by United States government for aid requested by Israel for the absorption of a massive immigration wave from the former Soviet Union.

From the opposition, Rabin followed events in Madrid with dismay, and vigorously attacked the government's stonewalling. He believed that time was working against Israel. This belief intensified in face of the nuclear arms race of Muslim states, foremost of which was Iran's nuclear program. The time left until they obtained nuclear power was ticking and Rabin defined it as a window of opportunity for peace between Israel and its neighbors. In his article, "Exploiting the time-out," published in March 1992 in the journal Politics, he explained the window of opportunity available to Israel, defined its limits, and detailed the great challenge it provided for a government that would lead the State of Israel.

Another one of his frequently expressed concerns was absorption of the mass immigration from the Soviet Union, which he regarded, among other things, as considerable leverage to Israel's economy and strength.

The key to fulfilling the longtime aspiration for the aliyah of Soviet Jewry, and directly related to Israel's vital quest for peace, was the United States' consent to Israel's request for loan guarantees for the absorption of immigration.

The influx of Soviet immigrants aroused huge excitement in Israel. Rabin was part of this sentiment, and expressed it in the election campaign. The demographic growth and its contribution to the Israeli economy and Jewish society in Israel increased his conviction.

Another factor also weighed on Rabin at this time: the growing influence on the Arab street of radical Islamic fundamentalism, particularly in Gaza. Rabin saw this as a threat that needed to be checked.

He became increasingly convinced that Israel was now more than ever prepared to take far-reaching risks. All it needed was courageous leadership. He had confidence in his skills to tackle this role.

The primaries system endorsed by his party did not disappoint. He gained wide non-partisan support, which won him Labor's candidacy for prime minister. Under the slogan "Israel Waits for Rabin," a take-off on a popular song title from the Six-Day War, "Nasser Waits for Rabin," the Labor Party launched its election campaign for the 13th Knesset.

On June 24th, 1992, elections were held. The Labor Party, with Rabin at its helm, captured 34 percent of the vote and became the largest party in the next Knesset. Rabin became prime minister. Upon the outcome of the results, his victory address was preserved in the national memory as the speech "I will navigate."

Rabin was determined to navigate his government along a new course.

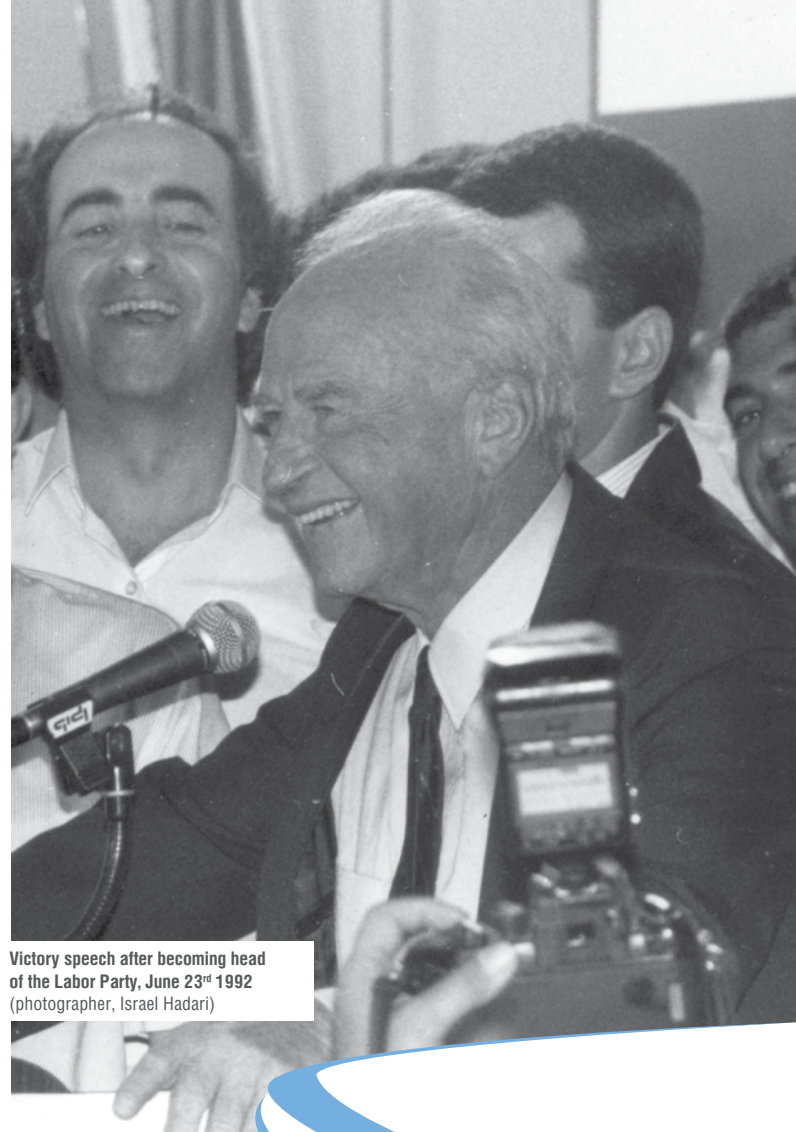
"We are in a period of danger. Unconventional weapons will make their way to the Middle East; in the next 7-10 years we must move the political process forward."

PRIME MINISTER ONCE MORE

On July 13th, 1992, Rabin began his second premiership. In this government, he also served as Minister of Defense. Shimon Peres took the Foreign Minister portfolio. Rabin's commitment to the voters was to further the peace process, and to revise the economy's order of priorities. The coalition he headed included the Meretz Party, which represented the left, and the Shas party, which represented the right. The new national budget witnessed considerable increase of funds for education, welfare, infrastructure, periphery settlements, and the Arab sector. Funding for the settlements was reduced. Additionally, there were cuts made in the defense budget. Rabin's support of privatization made him popular within the business sector. He saw Israel's most vital interest and a prerequisite for furthering peace negotiations as part of his efforts towards improving relations with the United States. Moreover, his proclaimed readiness for territorial concessions intensified the cooperation.

Determined to make changes in his first year in office, he advocated Israel's speedy integration into the world's era of reconciliation. In doing so, he led a courageous process towards peace with its neighboring states, and a solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

President George H. W. Bush, already campaigning for his second term in office, regarded Rabin as the right man for the job. In a meeting with him, held on August 10th, Rabin agreed to freeze new settlements and open political negotiations. Bush, for his part, agreed to authorize 10 billion shekel guarantees for absorption of Soviet immigration, formerly frozen by the United States in response to the settlement policy of Shamir's government. By doing this, Bush paved the way for the success of Rabin and his government's immigration absorption efforts, as well as for implementing the plan



Victory speech after becoming head of the Labor Party, June 23rd 1992 (photographer, Israel Hadari)

for changed priorities in the state. During this visit, Rabin first met the Democratic presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, who would later become the leading man of the Oslo accords.

Rabin saw a strategic goal of major importance in securing peace with Syria, and was ready for far-reaching concessions in the Golan, even at the expense of confrontation with Golan settlers, some of whom were supporters of the Labor Party. Yet the Syrian demand for Israel's immediate withdrawal without commitment to full peace brought negotiations to a halt.

The Americans kept a close watch on the talks. Their pressure on the participants eased for a while as the United States presidential campaign went into full force. Clinton won the election, bringing the Democratic Party to power. He was inaugurated on January 20th, 1992.

Rabin's first meeting with the new president was held at the White House on March 15th, 1993. Despite Rabin's sympathy for the Republican candidate, the two leaders formed a relationship of trust and friendship. Both agreed on the principal issue: the need to accelerate the peace process. Clinton was attuned to Israel's problem and Rabin's decision to open negotiations with Syria. Rabin himself negotiated with Syria, assigning Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to the multilateral talks. His readiness for far-reaching concessions in the Golan turned the settlers against him. He stood firm. Syria's demand to include arrangement with the Palestinians as a pre-condition for peace was another bone of contention.

While these talks proceeded in the limelight, the real drama was unfolding behind the scenes at Oslo.

On January 20th, 1993, Israeli academics, at their own initiative, embarked on informal talks with PLO-affiliated Palestinian representatives in Norway's capital of Oslo. Annulment of the Knesset law forbidding meetings with PLO members gave the talks official status. Notified about the secret talks, Peres immediately reported to Rabin.

As talks progressed, they were joined by Foreign Ministry officials. Despite his doubts, Rabin gave his consent. While bilateral talks with the official Jordanian-Palestinian delegation dragged on in Washington, the clandestine Oslo talks moved forward.

When it seemed there was basis for fundamental agreement, legal advisers were brought in. The United States was also informed and followed the talks from a distance, until near the very end. In May 1993, despite the crises encountered by negotiators, the talks reached an agreed formula — the Declaration of Principles. The agreement was signed only after an exchange of letters in which Israel and PLO mutually recognized each other.

On September 13th, 1993, in a festive ceremony on the White House lawn, the signing parties affixed their initials to the Oslo Accord. The Rabin-Arafat handshake, with Clinton standing behind, was the ceremony's climactic peak, and provided the event with historical dimension.

The Oslo principles determined the stages in the progress for peace. They included a five-year interim agreement, the success of which would lead to direct negotiations for permanent agreement — the agreement over the hard-core issues of Jerusalem, the refugees, and the settlements.

The signing of the Declaration of Principles represented the end of the “Jordanian option,” Rabin’s long-desired preferred solution for the Palestinian problem.

As determined by the signed Declaration of Principles, a Palestinian Authority was established in the autonomous territories. The Palestinian Authority was to assume responsibility for the life of residents until the parameters of the permanent agreement were established. Although the Palestinians were to establish their own police force, security of the territories remained in Israel’s hands. This arrangement was in accordance with Rabin’s view on the gradual progress for peace, as evidenced in the interim accords with Egypt during his first premiership.

The Oslo achievement instantly improved Israel’s international status. During a return trip from the United States, Rabin paid an official visit to King Hassan II of Morocco and received a warm welcome.

On September 23rd, the Oslo accord was submitted to the Knesset. It was endorsed a majority of 61 against 50. In protest, the Shas party withdrew from the coalition. Disagreements within the government exposed the rift and division within Israel’s society. Opponents of the accord, including the settlers, vehemently attacked it. The chasm between supporters and opponents of the accord deepened.

“I’m an old man. I served in the army for 27 years. My son served. Now my grandchildren are serving. Let’s hope that at least my grandchildren will not be compelled to fight. If there is a need, I’m sure that the fourth generation will do the same, but I feel an obligation to provide them with the chance that it won’t happen.”



On the White House lawn prior to signing the Israel-PLO treaty, September 13th 1993
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau photographer, Avi Ohayon)

PEACE TREATY WITH JORDAN

As part of its efforts to build relations with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Israel had relied for years on secret contacts between its leaders, including Rabin and King Hussein, whom Israel regarded as a friend who could bring enduring peace between the two nations.

Both Israel and Jordan were clearly aware that the post-Madrid bilateral talks had come to a standstill. They now had to pursue another path. On May 19th, 1994, Rabin and Hussein met in secret. After a relatively brief negotiation, the foundations for a peace treaty were laid down. This negotiation also began without American intervention. Both leaders understood that furthering relations with Jordan depended on progress in negotiations with the Palestinians, without which the Jordanian monarch could not enter open negotiations. Implementation of the agreement with the Palestinians continued. So did terrorist attacks. In April 1994, a car bomb exploded in Afula; a week later, in Hadera. There were 13 civilian casualties from both explosions.

Terrorist attacks intensified the sense that the Palestinian agreement provided no safeguards for the personal security of Israel's civilians. They also eroded the enchantment of the agreement's supporters. Its opponents led by the Yesha (Judea, Samaria & Gaza) Council, clamored loudly. Their abusive rhetoric frequently silenced the voices of hope aroused by the peace process. Moreover, incendiary remarks issued by extremist rabbis reinforced the inciters. The legitimate, democratic protest against the government's policy frequently crossed red lines of civil discourse and became a dangerous personal hate campaign.

As stipulated in the 'Gaza & Jericho first' agreement, Arafat visited Gaza and was welcomed with jubilant cheers. The newly formed Palestinian

police force was supposed to guarantee peace, but did not succeed in preventing further terrorist attacks. Rabin intensified his efforts to restore personal security to Israeli civilians, and was attentive to public reaction. The option of suspending talks, even temporarily, was raised, but rejected by Rabin. Despite his concern, he was convinced that furthering the process would also restore security. Negotiations with Jordan continued.

Throughout July, contacts with Jordan were pursued intensively. On July 25th, 1994, a Joint Memorandum was signed at the White House by Rabin, Hussein and Bill Clinton. On this occasion, both Israel and Jordan announced the end to warfare between the two nations. With regards to the problematic issue of Jerusalem, both agreed it would remain open to negotiation with the Palestinians. True to his stance that Jerusalem must remain under Israel's sovereignty, Rabin proceeded to expand its surrounding Jewish neighborhoods, among others Maale Adumim.

On October 26th, 1994, the Peace Treaty between the State of Israel and Kingdom of Jordan was signed at a festive ceremony by the Arava crossing. The treaty determined the borders between the two countries, and left the Jerusalem question open to negotiations with the Palestinians, while providing Jordan with preferential status in the holy places. It won wide support and was endorsed by the Knesset, supported by all the parties, with the exception of the Moledet faction.

Equally, it was an important layer in building of ties with Arab and other Muslim countries.

The treaty revived the flagging spirits of the public at home, and



Ceremony held at the Arava Crossing marking the signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, October 26th 1994

(Courtesy of the Government Press Office, photographer: Yaakov Saar)

was embraced with enthusiasm abroad. Rabin was invited to the world's capitals, and received the support of their governments for continuation of the peace process.

Overshadowing the elation were the ongoing suicide bombings — the explosion of the number 5 bus at Dizengoff Center in Tel Aviv, the double terrorist attack at the Beit Lid junction & the Elite junction in Ramat Gan, and the explosion of the Number 26 bus line in Jerusalem that killed many and wounded hundreds. Public fury intensified, as did disenchantment within the pro-peace camp. Its followers began to question the peace process.

Within 24 hours of Arafat's return to Gaza, opponents of the agreement held a mass demonstration at Jerusalem's Zion Square in the presence of Likud leaders. Most notable were Ariel Sharon and Binyamin Netanyahu, who attacked the legitimacy of the elected government's policy from the podium. The speakers, frequently careless of their language, thundered against the Oslo Accord and its initiators. While under fierce attack at home, recognition of Rabin's enterprise was at its peak abroad. On December 10th, 1994, the ceremony for the Nobel peace prize was held in Oslo. It was awarded to Rabin, Peres, and Arafat. Their nomination was interpreted as a call to the peacemakers to forge ahead and bring the difficult quest to fruition.

Good wishes and blessings poured in, but overshadowing the event was the despair and heavy mourning back home over the victims of terror.

For Rabin, the journey to Oslo and receipt of the Peace Prize was merely a brief respite in his course of action. Knowing he had only a year until new elections, he saw peace with the northern enemy, Syria, as the consummation of his mission. He hoped that the progress achieved with the

Palestinians and the signing of the Jordanian peace accord would have the ripple effect of restarting negotiations with Syria that were frozen in the summer of 1993.

The settlers opposing the peace process were now joined by those opposing concessions in the Golan Heights. At its helm was the Third Way, a new movement that led the struggle against withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Among its founders were Golan Heights settlers, who were combatants who took part in the conquest of the area in the Six-Day War, as well as some close friends of Rabin from his Palmach years. As chief of staff of the Six-Day War, and past supporter of Jewish settlement in the Golan Heights, Rabin now clashed with the settlers. He occasionally used inflammatory language during verbal exchanges. Despite his readiness for compromise and the intensive shuttle campaign of the U.S. administration, no agreement was reached. Security arrangements and the process of normalization undermined the enterprise.

In early July 1995, it was already clear that this negotiation would not yield the anticipated results. With elections coming up, Rabin was running out of time. He was focused on meeting the deadline for implementing the Declaration of Principles. Talks were held both overtly and covertly. The negotiators dealt with the details and appealed to America for assistance, as well as to Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Hussein. Each stage was submitted to Rabin for his approval.

The most difficult aspect lay in the sensitive regions of the West Bank, with Jewish settlement blocks. Throughout the talks, terrorist



With pupils in the Ta'anach District,
May 1995
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau,
photographer: Avi Ohayon)

attacks continued. From January until August 1995, 40 civilians were killed by Palestinian suicide bombers. Rabin was caught between his commitment to end the bloodshed and successfully continue the peace process on the one hand, and pressure to suspend talks on the other. He repeatedly pressed Arafat to accelerate his war against terror, which threatened the quest for peace. He listened to the defamatory remarks at home that intensified to the point of outright incitement. Wherever he went, his opponents followed, denouncing him and his policy. The transition from verbal abuse to action was a short leap.

Throughout this time, negotiations continued under the shadow of terrorist attacks. Understandings were reached on the substantial issues.

On September 28th, the Oslo II accord, which had been negotiated in the Egyptian resort town of Taba, was festively signed in Washington. Representing Israel were Rabin and Peres, representing the Palestinians were Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas. The leaders once again faced the flashing cameras on the White House lawn. The accord was signed in the presence of President Clinton. The presence of Hussein and Mubarak lent the event the significance of taking a big step towards reconciliation between Israel and its neighbors. Based on the Taba accord, negotiations would continue and within three years a permanent arrangement would be signed. The assumption was that by the end of three years the major unresolved issues would be settled.

The accord was essentially another interim arrangement for three years. The more challenging issues were left for the next phase. It was clear to both sides that negotiations were to be more difficult than the predecessor talks. At stake were issues lying at the core of both Jewish and Palestinian history.

At the end of the first phase, the IDF was to withdraw from six out of the seven large cities in the West Bank, which was subdivided into three categories: territories A, to be immediately placed under Palestinian responsibility for internal security and public order; territories B, where security would remain with the IDF; territories C, remaining under Israel's both civil and security control.

In practice, this meant that Israel transferred a third of the West Bank to the Palestinians. For the Palestinians, the agreement implied recognition in establishment of a Palestinian state, a term unmentioned in the accord. The problematic issues of Jerusalem and the refugees were deferred to the next stage of negotiations.

As the Taba accord neared a vote in the Knesset, its opponents tried to block the move. They organized protests and rallies against the accord and its initiator, Rabin. The seditious rhetoric amid demonstrators became increasingly violent in tone and gained rabbinical support. On October 2nd, an ancient Jewish ritual, "pula dinura," (literal, lashes of fire) was organized in public, labeling Rabin as cursed and an outcast.

There were some among the protestors who interpreted this ritual as permission to murder the prime minister, who was now classified as a "rodef," a person pursuing another with the intent to kill; in Jewish law, a rodef must be stopped before he can carry out his crime, even if it means killing him.

On October 5th, 1995, the evening before the scheduled Knesset vote on the Taba accord, its opponents rallied in Jerusalem's Zion Square. During the mass rally, leaders of the opposition spoke from the balcony of one of the houses overlooking the square.

Harsh statements were delivered against the accord and its legitimacy. Defamatory remarks were issued by some of the extremists. Posters of Rabin in a Nazi uniform were displayed. Nobody silenced the extremists. Even those accustomed to the disparaging style of speech felt that the lines had been crossed.

Rabin saw and heard the voices, but remained undaunted. He was convinced that he stood at a historical junction, and that this was the time for determined leadership confident of its way. His supporters, sensing the explosive climate, pleaded with him to enhance measures for ensuring his safety. He dismissed the idea of wearing a bullet-proof vest.

Under mounting tension, Oslo II was submitted to the Knesset on October 6th, 1995. It was approved by a narrow margin of 61 against 59. Among its supporters were five Arab Knesset members. From the camp of the opposition emerged voices undermining the legitimacy of a decision reached by a non-Zionist majority.

“Not only are our countries making peace with each other today, not only are our people shaking hands in peace here at the Arava. You and I are making peace; our peace, the peace of soldiers, the peace of friends.”

NIGHT OF THE ASSASSINATION

October was the first month of trial for the Taba accord. Its opponents, the loudest belonging to the extremist movements outside the consensus, ignited thier passions and attempted forceful action, notably in places where Rabin was present.

The judicial system had difficulty finding a comprehensive solution for this situation. Slurs and libel became an inseparable part of the discourse.



In the White House with President Clinton and Eitan Haber, October 10th, 1995
(Courtesy of Government Press Bureau photographer, Avi Ohayon)

Rabin was aware of all that was transpiring. He derived great encouragement from the reception given in his honor on October 25th at the White House. He was welcomed with open arms.

He was greeted with jubilation when arriving to the celebrations marking 3000 years since the establishment of Jerusalem. Jewish people from throughout the world gave his enterprise their blessing.

The peace camp in Israel sensed that it had long withheld proper public expression for its support of the prime minister's moves, thus leaving the streets to the rabble-rousing opponents. Its followers were determined to provide a platform for those who supported the government's moves. Organizations and individuals from all sectors of Israeli society collaborated and decided to organize a rally in support of Rabin and his policy.

When first informed about the rally, Rabin was unenthusiastic. He eventually agreed to deliver a speech.

The rally was held on November 4th, 1995, at Kings of Israel Square in Tel Aviv, under the platform "Yes to Peace, No to Violence."

As evening set in and the Sabbath concluded, people flocked in masses to the square. They came from all over — from the urban and rural sectors, the big cities and the periphery, parents together with their children, members of youth movements and the business community, artists and intellectuals. It was a cross-section of Israeli society which, regardless of party allegiance, was united in the quest for peace.

As Rabin arrived and stood on the stage, he was overwhelmed by the sight of the cheering crowd. For the first time in a long while, he saw

that the camp supporting peace ranged far and wide. His face lit up by the tide of sympathy that the public bestowed on him and his daring enterprise.

When the rally ended, as Rabin was making his way to a waiting car, a Jewish assassin fired three bullets into his back.

Doctors at the hospital tried to save Rabin's life. Their efforts failed.

On November 4th, 1995 at 11:14 PM, the heart of the Prime Minister stopped beating.

His dream for peace, however, lives on.

"Violence erodes the basis of Israel's democracy. It must be denounced, stigmatized, isolated. It is not the way of the state of Israel."

שיר לשלום

תנו לשמש לעלות
לבוקר להאיר
הזקה שבתפילות
אותנו לא תחזיר
אל תגידו יום יבוא
הביאו את היום
כי לא חלום הוא
ובכל הכיכרות
הריעו דגן שלום

פזמון חוזר 3X פעמים

תנו לשמש לעלות
לבוקר להעיר
הזקה שבתפילות
אותנו לא תחזיר
מי אשר כבה נרו
ובעפר נטמן
בכי מר לא יעירו
לא יחזירו לבא
איש אותנו לא ישיב
מבור תחתית אפל
כאן לא יועילו
לא שמחת הנצחון
ולא שירי הלל

פזמון חוזר

לנו דגן שיר

Bloodied lyric sheet featuring the words to the Peace Song that was found in Yitzhak Rabin's pocket after he was assassinated, November 4th 1995
Courtesy of the Government Press Office,
photographer: Yaakov Saar

This short biography complements the exhibition featuring Yitzhak Rabin's life story located in the **Israeli Museum** at the Yitzhak Rabin Center in Tel Aviv.

It delineates the important chapters in the life of the prime minister. It portrays his standpoint on political and security matters and how they relate to the myriad roles he held as well as how they connect to the changing political agenda in Israel and the world.


Yitzhak Rabin, the first Sabra that became prime minister, symbolized the revival of the Jewish people in Israel. Reflecting the State of Israel's dependence on its might while recognizing its limitations; seeking ways, even at the painful cost of giving up land, in which Israel can coexist in peace with Arab nations and the Palestinian people.

Yitzhak Rabin paid with his life for the bold compromises he made in exchange for peace.



מרכז יצחק רבין
The Yitzhak Rabin Center

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www.rabincenter.org.il 

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