

MEMMO

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Remembering Yitzhak Rabin: Soldier, Statesman, Peacemaker

Twenty years ago—on Nov. 4, 1995—Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist opposed to Rabin's peacemaking efforts. As we honor the legacy of Yitzhak Rabin, we remember a man who led his country in times of war and on the path to peace. The life of Israel's first native-born prime minister, spanning service as a soldier, general, politician, prime minister and ultimately as a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, exemplifies the Jewish state's ongoing quest for security and its passionate commitment to peace.

Rabin the Soldier

"Only one who has seen worlds destroyed and families devastated knows just how important peace is to us. Nevertheless, as the son of the Jewish people that was exiled from its land and in that exile lost millions of its sons and daughters in pogroms, in the Holocaust; as the son of a people to whom the picture of the child with raised hands in the Warsaw Ghetto returns at night, I ask for your understanding and undivided attention: For us peace, important as it is, cannot prevail without security. Israel will be forthcoming in its quest for peace, but it will not compromise on its security."

– Yitzhak Rabin, Address to the AIPAC Policy Conference, March 15, 1994

- Yitzhak Rabin was born in Jerusalem in 1922. An excellent agriculturalist, Rabin chose instead to pursue the life of a soldier in order to defend the Jewish people and establish a Jewish state. In 1941, he joined the Palmach – an elite fighting force of the Haganah, the Jewish army during the British Mandate period.
- In October 1947, Rabin was named the Palmach's Chief Operations Officer and soon thereafter joined the newly-formed Israel Defense Forces (IDF). During the War of Independence, he commanded the campaign to reopen the only road into Jerusalem and end its siege.
- Rabin became the IDF chief of staff in 1964 when Levi Eshkol became Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Due to Eshkol's limited military experience, Rabin had both significant responsibilities and freedom of action. Under his leadership, the IDF defeated Egypt, Jordan, Syria and several other Arab states in the Six-Day War. Rabin was Israel's Minister of Defense for a total of nearly nine years, earning a reputation as being effective on security issues.



On Oct. 26, 1994, King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed a historic peace treaty between their countries in the presence of U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Rabin the Statesman

“We say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough. We have no desire for revenge. We harbor no hatred towards you. We, like you, are people who want to build a home, to plant a tree, to love, live side by side with you in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men. We are today giving peace a chance and again saying to you in a clear voice: Enough.”

– Yitzhak Rabin, signing the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, Sept. 13, 1993

- In 1968, Rabin became Israel’s Ambassador to the United States, a post he held for five years. His contributions to deepening U.S.-Israeli relations were significant, and played a central role in solidifying the special relationship between Israel and the United States.
- On June 3, 1974, Rabin succeeded Golda Meir as Prime Minister of Israel. His premiership perfectly embodied his belief in both the pursuit of peace and security. In his first term he paved the way for a future peace agreement with Egypt by negotiating an interim accord, mediated by the United States, signed on Sept. 1, 1975. Rabin also held secret meetings with Jordan’s King Hussein and made the first ever secret visit by an Israeli prime minister to Morocco. He also over saw the famous hostage-rescue operation in which the IDF freed Jewish and Israeli hostages held by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) at Uganda’s Entebbe airport.
- Rabin began his second term as Prime Minister in 1992, marking the first Labor-led government in fifteen years. After first trying unsuccessfully to engage Syria in a negotiated settlement, he then focused on negotiating a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Rabin the Peacemaker

“Peace entails difficulties, even pain. Israel knows no path devoid of pain. But the path of peace is preferable to the path of war. I say this to you as someone who was a military man and minister of defense, and who saw the pain of the families of IDF soldiers. It is for their sake, and for the sake of our children and grandchildren, that I want this government to exert every effort, exhaust every opportunity, to promote and to reach a comprehensive peace.”

– Yitzhak Rabin, final speech at Tel Aviv peace rally, Nov. 4, 1995

- On Sept. 13, 1993, Prime Minister Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords in a ceremony presided over by President Bill Clinton on the White House lawn. The Accords set out the foundation for a permanent status agreement that would include a Palestinian entity alongside of Israel. For his role in the Oslo Accords, Rabin won the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize together with Chairman Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.
- In response to Palestinian terror following the Oslo Accords, Rabin said, “We have to fight terror as if there were no peace talks, and we have to pursue peace as if there were no terror.”
- On Oct. 26, 1994, Jordan and Israel put 46 years of war behind them to sign a bilateral peace treaty, the second such agreement between an Arab nation and the Jewish state. King Hussein and Prime Minister Rabin, joined by President Clinton, met at the Arava border crossing between the two countries to sign the historic document.
- On Nov. 4, 1995, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist opposed to the signing of the Oslo Accords while leaving a peace rally themed with the slogan “Yes to Peace, No to Violence.” His funeral in Jerusalem was widely attended by Israelis and foreign dignitaries, to include President Clinton and many leaders of the Arab world, who came to pay tribute to this soldier, statesman and peacemaker.



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