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## ASSASSINATION IN ISRAEL; Yitzhak Rabin, 73, an Israeli Soldier Turned Prime Minister and Peacemaker

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Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel, who was shot dead yesterday at age 73, was a soldier turned statesman who led his country into uncharted territory to make peace with the Palestinians and put an end to the wars, bloodshed and terrorism that had plagued his country since its founding.

It was General Rabin, the Commander in Chief of Israel's armed forces in 1967, who had led the lightning strike that captured broad swaths of Arab territories. Twenty-six years later, on Sept. 13, 1993, it was Prime Minister Rabin who reluctantly extended his hand to Yasir Arafat, leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, to put a symbolic seal of approval on an accord that would lead to the return of much of that territory and to Palestinian self-rule on the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In an extraordinary ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House, one that few had ever expected to see, Mr. Rabin came face-to-face with Mr. Arafat - the man who had been reviled for decades by Israelis as the mastermind behind one attack after another on their people, the man with whom the following year he and his Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, would share the Nobel Peace Prize.

"The time for peace has come," Mr. Rabin declared. "We, the soldiers who have returned from battles stained with blood, we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes, . . . we who have come from a land where

parents bury their children, we who have fought against you, the Palestinians -- we say today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough."

Speaking as much to his own people as to the astonished world that was watching, Mr. Rabin explained in mournful tones how painful and how necessary it was for Israel to take this step.

"It's not so easy -- either for myself as a soldier in Israel's war nor for the people of Israel. . . . It is certainly not easy for the families of the victims of the war's violence, terror, whose pain will never heal, for the many thousands who defended our lives and their own and have even sacrificed their lives for our own. For them this ceremony has come too late."

But he said Israel was not seeking revenge. It was seeking peace.

The tragedy was that some of Mr. Rabin's own people were seeking revenge. As Mr. Rabin came closer to achieving his goal of peace, a wide schism opened within the Israeli populace. Much of the bitterness of those opposed to making peace with Israel's historic enemies was directed at Mr. Rabin, and he became the soldier who paid the ultimate price to make peace.

He had been unrelenting in his drive to institutionalize that peace. Only a month ago, Mr. Rabin took part in another White House ceremony to mark the beginning of another withdrawal from the West Bank. This time the handshakes with Mr. Arafat were less reluctant and the peace process was well established.

#### A New Generation Brings a New Vision

Mr. Rabin was the only one of Israel's eight Prime Ministers to have been born in the land of Palestine, a Sabra who had not experienced the long history of attacks on European Jewry and the horror of the Holocaust. With his election, Israel turned over its leadership from the fathers to the sons and he appealed for a new vision. On taking office in 1992 for his second term as Prime Minister, Mr. Rabin said it was time for Israel to jettison its siege mentality.

"No longer is it true that the whole world is against us," he said. He accepted his election as a mandate to make peace. One of his first steps was to put a freeze on all new construction in the occupied territories.

For their part, the Palestinians were ready to deal. With the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the P.L.O. was deprived of diplomatic, financial and military support. At the same time, the P.L.O. was reeling from the loss of contributions from wealthy Arab states angered by Mr. Arafat's support of Iraq during the 1991 Persian Gulf war.

To achieve agreement with the Palestinians, Mr. Rabin followed the lead of Foreign Minister Peres, a Labor Party colleague and longtime political rival.

They had fought for decades over the leadership of the party and the country, but they joined forces in the search for peace. To the opposition that branded Mr. Rabin a "traitor," the Prime Minister replied that peace must be made with enemies, not with friends.

Mr. Rabin had been at the center of the major events in his nation's history for five decades. In 1948, he fought in the siege of Jerusalem during Israel's war of independence. In 1967, as Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army for the three years before the June war, he brought to fighting strength the formidable force that rolled over three Arab armies in six days. Later, as Ambassador to the United States he helped assure Israel a steady supply of sophisticated weapons. In his first term as Prime Minister he negotiated the crucial and lasting disengagement of Israeli and Egyptian forces in the Sinai, which paved the way for the Camp David accords. And as Defense Minister, in 1986, he presided over the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon although he continued to respond with force to terrorist attacks.

#### Never Charismatic, But a Man to Be Trusted

As a boy growing up in Palestine, Mr. Rabin wanted to be an agronomist, and attended the Kadoorie Agricultural School in Galilee where he won the High Commissioner's Gold Medal as the best student in Palestine. But like many patriotic young people of his time he gave up his childhood ambition and joined the Palmach, the elite strike force of the Haganah underground Jewish army, saw action in World War II, and developed into a brilliant military tactician.

He also developed into a politician. Israelis trusted him for his single-minded devotion to the good of the country and he was repeatedly asked to accept high government positions. But he was the antithesis of the convivial party man. Taciturn, introspective, controlled, intensely private, he had almost no close advisers and reached decisions independently, often announcing them in an authoritarian manner that alienated the party leadership. He spoke in a deep monotone that made his public personality seem colorless, and even in private he was almost devoid of humor.

Mr. Rabin was born in Jerusalem on March 1, 1922. His father, Nehemiah, who came from a poor family in Ukraine, had escaped from Czarist Russia and gone to Palestine by way of Chicago and St. Louis. In Palestine, he became a trade union organizer in the labor movement of David Ben-Gurion. His mother, Rosa Cohen, born to a well-to-do family in Gomel, Russia, was active in politics and became the dominant influence on the young Rabin. Theirs was a home where young Yitzhak was taught that public service was a duty and where, he

remembered, "It was a disgrace to speak about money."

He was 7 years old when Arabs began attacking Jewish settlements. Later, during the 1936 Arab riots and general strike, he was at the Khadouri school where he was trained in the use of arms by Yigal Allon, who was later to become his commander and his mentor. Five years later, during World War II, Moshe Dayan, then a young commander in the Haganah, invited Mr. Rabin to join the Palmach. As part of the British invasion of Greater Syria, which was in the hands of the Axis powers, Mr. Rabin was sent across the border. The youngest in his unit, it was his job to climb up telephone poles to cut the wires so the collaborationist Vichy French forces could not call up reinforcements.

In June 1945, just after the end of the war in Europe, Mr. Rabin commanded a daring raid to liberate about 200 illegal Jewish immigrants held by the British in a camp at Atlit, on the Mediterranean just south of Haifa. The exploit was said to be the prototype for a similar raid in the novel "Exodus," and Mr. Rabin the prototype for Ari Ben Canaan, the hero, played in the movie version by Paul Newman. But the shy Mr. Rabin always insisted that he was not the fictional Ari Ben Canaan.

Mr. Rabin was arrested by the British and imprisoned for six months in a camp in Gaza. Soon after he was released the British turned the problem of Palestine over to the United Nations, which, in 1947, voted for partition into a Jewish and an Arab state.

The Arabs attacked, and as hostilities intensified between the Jews and the Arabs, Mr. Allon, then the commander of the Palmach, appointed Mr. Rabin his deputy. During the 1948 Israeli war of independence, Mr. Rabin commanded the Har-El Brigade, a makeshift unit that failed to take Jerusalem for Israel but kept open the vital supply lines between Jerusalem and the sea. Later, with the rank of colonel, Mr. Rabin served on the southern front against Egyptian forces.

When Mr. Rabin disclosed in his 1979 memoir his role in forcing 50,000 Arab civilians to leave their homes at gunpoint during the war of independence, there was a furor in Israel, where officials had long denied that Arab civilians were pushed out of their lands.

In the middle of the war, on Aug. 23, 1948, Mr. Rabin married Leah Schlossberg, who had joined the Palmach and served in his battalion. They had two children, a son, Yuval and a daughter, Dalia, and three grandchildren. They all survive him.

Mr. Rabin's first venture into diplomacy came when he was sent to the island of Rhodes as part of the delegation to the Israeli-Egyptian armistice talks

in 1949.

In 1953, having finally committed himself to a career in the army, Mr. Rabin went to England to study at the British Staff College at Camberley. Back home he went on to hold a series of high posts in the Israeli Army, mainly involving manpower training, and was named chief of staff in 1964.

He became Israel's top expert on military matters. Even as he rose through the ranks, he became known as the man who who knew more than the generals. Eventually, he became a general himself, a lieutenant-general.

The Army that fought the six-day war in 1967 was essentially Mr. Rabin's army. Shab'tai Teveth, professor of history at Tel Aviv University, said, "It was the army he trained, planned, built and armed in his three years as chief of staff." But, he added, "There his glory ends."

His "glory" ended when, on the eve of the fighting, Mr. Rabin suffered a nervous collapse.

#### The Terrible Burden Of Leadership in War

In his memoir, Mr. Rabin wrote of going to see Mr. Ben-Gurion, then in retirement. He went in search of encouragement but instead got a dressing-down. Mr. Ben-Gurion, he wrote, scolded him for mobilizing the reserves after President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran. "You have led the state into a grave situation," Mr. Ben-Gurion told him. "We must not go to war. We are isolated. You bear the responsibility."

Mr. Ben-Gurion's words reverberated in his ears as he worked himself into a state of physical and mental exhaustion. He recovered in time to carry out his duties during the war, but some observers thought he was not functioning normally and was only being "propped up" so that the troops and the people would not lose confidence in their leader.

Whatever the source of Mr. Rabin's difficulties, the results achieved by his army were astonishingly clear. At the end of the war Hebrew University conferred on him an honorary doctorate. In a modest, occasionally poetic speech, Mr. Rabin said he accepted the honor not for himself but as the representative of an army of civilians who had never been trained for conquest, of battle-hardened paratroopers who had leaned on the stones of the Wailing Wall and wept at the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem. He spoke about his army, but perhaps even more about himself.

"Our Sabra youth, and most certainly our soldiers," he said, "do not tend to be sentimental and they shrink from any public show of feeling. But the strain of battle, the anxiety which preceded it, and the sense of salvation and of direct

confrontation with Jewish history itself cracked the shell of hardness and shyness and released wellsprings of emotion and stirrings of the spirit."

In 1968, Mr. Rabin was appointed Ambassador to the United States, where he became known as an effective advocate for Israel and a master at procuring sophisticated American weapons. In his five years as Ambassador he developed a close relationship with Henry A. Kissinger, President Richard M. Nixon's national security adviser and later his Secretary of State. Mr. Kissinger called on him for intelligence about troop movements in the Middle East and even consulted him on Vietnam.

Shortly after he returned to Israel in 1973, Mr. Rabin entered national politics for the first time. Then, on Yom Kippur, while the country was in the middle of an election campaign, Syria and Egypt launched a surprise attack. The country's leaders -- Prime Minister Golda Meir and her Minister of Defense, Mr. Dayan -- were held responsible for the country's lack of preparedness in that October war, but the Labor Party won enough votes to form a new Government. Mr. Rabin won in his first attempt at election and was given the post of Minister of Labor.

But within a month of forming her Cabinet, Mrs. Meir resigned and the party turned to Mr. Rabin, who had been out of power at the time of the war and was therefore untainted by the heavy casualties.

#### Diplomatic Departures, And a Final Legacy

In 1974, Mr. Rabin became Israel's fifth Prime Minister and, at 52, its youngest. "The time has come," he said, "for the sons of the founders of the state to take over their role."

Mr. Rabin became the first Israeli Prime Minister to make an official visit to West Germany. He also said he met secretly with King Hussein of Jordan six times in an unsuccessful effort to open peace negotiations with him. His Government weathered the Arab oil embargo and the skyrocketing prices of oil, and negotiated a second Sinai disengagement with the Egyptians, but only after incurring the wrath of Mr. Kissinger when it turned down one of his early proposals. The Secretary of State returned to Washington in March 1975 and persuaded President Ford to undertake a "reassessment" of American policy toward Israel, a move seen as a threat to withhold arms shipments. Mr. Rabin had been ready to negotiate what he called "a piece of land for a piece of peace," but he believed the plan Mr. Kissinger brought back during his shuttle trips between Cairo and Jerusalem demanded maximum Israeli territorial concessions in exchange for minimal Egyptian political concessions.

Mr. Schiff, of the newspaper Haaretz, said that Mr. Rabin had been "absolutely right to say 'no' to the Americans," and in doing so to win in the long run. "It caused a rift between the Egyptians and the Syrians. This was as important a cornerstone on the road to Camp David as the Yom Kippur War."

Five months later he accepted what he called a "risk for peace" and signed an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement.

During his term as Prime Minister, Mr. Rabin faced down terrorists who hijacked an Air France plane en route from Tel Aviv to Paris. At first, he was seen as weak because he waited several days before dispatching an assault group to Entebbe, Uganda, where the plane and almost 100 Israeli citizens were being held hostage. When he finally approved a military operation and, when the daring raid succeeded, he was hailed as a hero.

But in 1977, his image was damaged when an Israeli newspaper disclosed that he and his wife had violated currency laws by maintaining bank accounts in the United States after he had returned home. At first he lied about how much money was in the accounts and, finally, he was forced to step down, opening the way for the victory of Menachem Begin and the Likud party. Mr. Rabin accepted responsibility for the bank accounts, which had been used mainly by his wife.

The Rabins paid a fine imposed by an Israeli court, but six months after Mr. Rabin resigned, the currency regulations were rescinded.

Mr. Rabin bounced back from the scandal not because he was a skilled politician, but because he was not a politician at all. He returned to government as Minister of Defense in a Labor-Likud national unity coalition that presided over the Israeli pullout from Lebanon. His was the policy of the "iron fist," promising swift retaliation for guerrilla raids against Israelis withdrawing from southern Lebanon.

Sitting in his office at the Defense Ministry one evening in 1987, he looked back at his life with satisfaction tinged with disappointment. His disappointment, he said, was in what he saw as a loss of national spirit, the failure of the creators of the state to pass on their sense of commitment. Of his most satisfying moment he had no doubt -- the liberation and unification of Jerusalem in 1967.

But there was more, a legacy delivered that day in 1993 when he led the country to come to terms with the Palestinians, "to live together on the same soil in the same land."

He acknowledged the risk. But in going to Washington to endorse the agreement, he said, "We have come to try to put an end to the hostilities so that

our children, our children's children, will no longer experience the painful cost of war."

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