

Ruminations on Rabin

By Eric Rozenman

The 30th anniversary last month of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sparked two curious misrecollections.



A memorial candle lit during a ceremony commemorating the 24th anniversary of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, at the president's residence in Jerusalem on Nov. 10, 2019. Photo by Hadas Parush/Flash90.

One, by the [Jewish Telegraphic Agency's](#) Andrew Silow-Carroll, reported on a new musical and a poetry collection, asking if the Jewish world has forgotten the premier, a “champion” of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The more substantive article, by Ambassador Dennis Ross, a senior Middle East official in four administrations and now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, appeared in [The Atlantic](#) under the headline “Yitzhak Rabin Knew What Netanyahu Doesn't.”

Both essays failed to come to grips with Rabin, the leader, and his view of an eventual Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The first lamented the younger Jewish generation's ignorance of the assassinated general and prime minister as a peace activist. The second, more substantive piece conveniently omitted parts of Rabin's history that contradicted the author's policy preferences.

Ross worked closely with Rabin on what many still label the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process." Unfortunately, his *Atlantic* article ignores flaws underlying the process and some of Rabin's basic views.

In his last speech in the Knesset, four weeks before his murder by an Israeli opposed to ceding any of *Eretz Yisrael* to Palestinian Arabs, Rabin presented the Oslo II agreement for approval. He stated that Israelis could "continue to kill—and to be killed. But ... [w]e can also give peace a chance." Yet what if Palestinian Arabs would not?

A Sept. 9, 1993 letter to Rabin from Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, formally enabled the Oslo peace process. In it, the terrorist chief promised to resolve all outstanding issues through negotiations. But a year later, Arafat told a gathering of Muslim leaders in South Africa that the accords were a temporary maneuver to [undermine](#) the Jewish state, a big step in the PLO's 1974 phased plan for Israel's destruction. He urged them to join a pan-Islamic anti-Israeli jihad.

Rabin acknowledged in that last Knesset speech that "we are aware of the fact that the Palestinian Authority [the Oslo-transformed PLO] has not—up to now—honored its commitment to change the Palestinian Covenant."

That document, also known as the PLO charter, was adopted in 1964, before Israel gained the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Six-Day War. It deemed [Israel](#)

[illegitimate](#), permitted Jewish residency only for those born in British Mandatory Palestine and described terrorism as “self-defense.”

Rabin said he viewed prompt revision of the PLO covenant “as a supreme test” of Palestinian willingness and ability to make peace. “[T]he changes required will be an important and serious touchstone vis-à-vis continued implementation of the agreement as a whole.” Yet no changes were made. After Rabin’s assassination, Arafat convened a [sham 1998 nullification vote](#) by a Palestinian assembly in the Gaza Strip. Former President Bill Clinton witnessed the proceedings. But revealingly no published copy of an amended covenant exists.

In presenting the 1995 Interim Agreement, the prime minister also repeated Israel’s demand that the Palestinian side “fulfill its obligation ... [to do](#) much more against the terrorist organizations” that had launched a post-Oslo killing spree. Ross notes that he met Rabin three days before the prime minister’s murder. Oslo II gave the PLO/P.A. more control in the West Bank and, the ambassador recalls, “generated substantial backlash from Israel’s right wing. But Rabin was undaunted. He believed that he could make more [progress with Arafat](#), even though the PLO had begun allowing Hamas to build its presence in Gaza.”

Why? Ross does not say. Perhaps because Rabin believed that “one does not make peace with one’s friends. One makes peace with one’s enemies,” as *The Jerusalem Post* quoted him in 1993.

With former enemies, maybe. But not with the continued ones. The Allied Forces of World War II imposed peace on the destroyed Axis powers. In the American Civil War, the North reunified the United States and abolished slavery by laying waste to the Confederacy. In Korea, the United States and South Korea agreed with a similarly wearied China and North Korea to an indefinite, still tense, truce.

In his final Knesset address, Rabin also claimed that “the Palestinians were not in the past, and are not today, a threat to the existence of the State of Israel.” Not on the battlefield, perhaps, as the latest war in the Gaza Strip indicates. But Palestinian Arab nationalism, embodied unchanged in the PLO covenant, supercharged by the genocidal Islamist triumphalism of Hamas’s charter, rests on and demands negation of Zionism—of Jewish national liberation—and erasure of the Jewish state.

That negative Palestinian identity, of supposedly indigenous Arabs oppressed by “colonial-settler” Jews, legitimizes anti-Israel, anti-Jewish incitement and violence from Iran and surrogates like Yemen’s Houthis, Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Hamas. It inspires mass marches in Europe and assaults on the streets of New York City and Washington, D.C.

The Hamas-initiated wars with Israel in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, 2021, and this most recent one from 2023 to 2025, and incessant anti-Israeli, antisemitic propaganda from the P.A. and its continuing “pay-for-slay” bounties to terrorists, all in violation of Arafat’s Oslo commitments, contradict the premise that there is a Palestinian leadership willing and able to make peace.

Or a Palestinian public. A week before Ross’s *Atlantic* musings a poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Research showed that [53% of Palestinian Arabs](#) think Hamas’s decision to launch the border invasion and massacre in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, was “correct.” Some 54% blame Israel for the suffering of Gazans, and 24% fault the United States. Only 14% blame Hamas.

Yet Ross (and those anthologized in the poetry collection and producing the musical) still believe that after its 2005 unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and continued propping up of the P.A. in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) to counter a more popular Hamas, “Israel has to make some

concessions to Palestinians” to enhance prospects of an Israeli-Arab anti-Iran regional coalition. Ross implies Rabin or someone like him would be able to lead the way now.

My recollections of the prime minister, who previously served as defense minister and military chief of staff, suggest otherwise. In Israel in 1980, I heard Rabin reiterate his security concept to several hundred English-speaking Labor Party supporters. He said, “If I am prime minister, no future chief of staff will face what I faced on June 4, 1967—an Israel nine miles wide north of Tel Aviv, enemy artillery a few miles from the Knesset in Jerusalem, Syrian guns overlooking the Galilee.

“We will not come down from the Golan Heights, we will not leave the Jordan Valley, we will not retreat from Jerusalem.” Furthermore, Israel would retain the Gush Etzion settlement bloc in Judea south of Jerusalem and widen the coastal waist above Tel Aviv into Samaria. About a decade later, I heard him say much the same to a small group of visiting Americans in his office as defense minister in Tel Aviv. And once more to a larger group of U.S. supporters in Washington, D.C., in the early 1990s.

In his final Knesset speech, Rabin vowed that the Palestinian entity would be “less than a state ... The borders of the State of Israel, during the permanent solution, will be beyond the lines which existed before the Six-Day War. We will not return to the 4 June 1967 lines.” Specifically, united Jerusalem would be enlarged (much opposed internationally) to include Ma’ale Adumim and Givat Ze’ev. Gush Etzion and other settlement blocs also would be annexed.

Ross says Rabin’s critics, from current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu down, “have never offered a workable alternative” to the Oslo process. He does not observe that, more to the point, Palestinian leaders never have. None has told his people, in Arabic, it’s time to give peace with

Israel and the Jews a chance.

But to avoid Rabin's feared binational state resulting from Israel annexing Gaza and the West Bank, Oslo did contain a seed: Area C, nearly 70% of Judea and Samaria but with few Arab residents, stayed under full Israeli control pending a final agreement.

Thanks to [Palestinian rejection](#) of "two-state solutions" in 2000, 2001 and 2008, Area C still remains under full Israeli control. Start there. As Rabin himself noted, the Jewish people are the "lawful owners" of the land of Israel.

First published at the [Jewish News Syndicate](#)