THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

YITZHAK RABIN: SOLDIER, LEADER, STATESMAN

A SPECIAL EVENT TO LAUNCH A RABIN BIOGRAPHY
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Introduction:

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President
The Brookings Institution

Featured Remarks:

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42nd President of the United States

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Daughter of Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good afternoon everybody. Welcome to Brookings and welcome to a truly special event. We're going to be celebrating a heroically consequential life and we're going to recall a tragically consequential death.

Gathered here, including in this audience, are a number of people who have devoted decades of their lives to peace in the Middle East. First, and I would say foremost, there is our keynote speaker. No American president has worked harder for Peace in the Middle East than Bill Clinton, both in office and out. He will speak to us about his friendship and his partnership with Yitzhak Rabin, the only leader of Israel who gave his life to the pursuit of peace.

Then we will have a panel moderated by my colleague Martin Indyk. He too has been committed to the cause of Middle East peace, from his University days to his government service, as a policy maker, an envoy, and here at Brookings. When Martin was the American ambassador in Israel Itamar Rabinovich was Israel's ambassador here in Washington. He contributed mightily to the cause that we are talking about today, as an advisor to Prime Minister Rabin, as a negotiator with Syria, as a thought leader, and as an author, and a distinguished Fellow of the Brookings Institution.

We are particularly appreciative to have Dalia Rabin with us as well. On that awful Saturday, November 4, 1995, Martin joined Dalia and her mother at the hospital in Tel Aviv where her father had died. Meanwhile, back in northwest Washington Itamar and his wife, Efrat, were sitting silently with friends who spontaneously came to their residence to share their sorrow. My wife and I were there. It was an indelible and powerful experience and memory. I have no doubt that President Clinton remembers vividly where and when he learned of the martyrdom of his friend and his fellow peacemaker, and when he said, so memorably, Shalom Haver.

After the president has spoken Martin, Itamar, and Dalia will discuss Mr. Rabin's life and achievements as a soldier, leader, and statesman, the three words that are the subtitle of Itamar's latest book.

Mr. President, thank you for being here and welcome back to Brookings. (Applause)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. First, I'm honored to be back at Brookings and I'm honored to be with my lifetime friend, Strobe. Our relationship really took off when we were roommates in England 100 years ago (laughter). And he said he had to make a flight one day, as I remember, to Denmark where he received the tapes of Nikita Khrushchev's secret memoirs and came home and started translating and editing them in his little room in the house we shared. I used to get up every day and make him breakfast. And back then we had antiquated technology where he would have to listen to Khrushchev talk on the tape, type it all in, and then try to organize it so it flowed well. I knew then that I was overmatched, but I learned a lot about Russia.

I want to thank Itamar for writing this book. I read it all yesterday and today carefully. And, first of all, it's amazing that so much ground could be covered in so few pages, and as nearly as I can determine with scrupulous accuracy and a fine feel for the relative weight of the evidence. I want to thank Dalia for her friendship and for keeping her father's legacy alive in the finest possible way.

These things are still difficult for me to talk about. The day that Yitzhak was killed was maybe the worst day I had in the White House. I remember when I learned he had been shot I went upstairs for a while, talked to Hillary, and we lived some of our more amusing moments with him, including his complaining that she was so bossy; she made him go outside on the porch to the Truman Balcony to smoke. And then I went down and idly messed around on my putting green. And when Tony Lake walked out of

the Oval Office toward me I knew that he had died just by the set of his shoulders and the way his face was.

I remain convinced that had he lived we would have achieved a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinians by 1998 and that we would be living in a different world today. But I never thought it would be easy, as evidenced by Itamar's book. I think just even had the agreement that they reached looked something like the agreement that Prime Minister Ehud Barak agreed to that Arafat never accepted, that there would have been a lot of blood, gore, turmoil in Israel to implement it. Even if the people had voted for it. Because, as we have seen, as the world has grown more interdependent, these identity conflicts have grown more intense.

So I don't want to do what old guys like me always do and sugar coat the past and say it would have all been wonderful if only this, that, or the other thing. It would have been very hard, but it would have been done because of him, because of the hold he had, the trust he inspired. Not only among Israelis, but among his adversaries, or at least those who were on the other side of the negotiating table. Arafat was virtually in awe of him, which always kind of tickled me in a good way.

So what I ask you to think about when you hear this -- and we have ambassadors here from all over the world, some of whom come from areas which have known and still know great ethnic, religious, and ideological conflicts -- is to realize that the whole history of humankind is basically about the definition of who is us and who is them, and the question of whether we should all live under the same set of rules. And most of the time it's a close fight, and a lot of the time throughout history the people who wanted an us and them divide have found more political success and meet the deep psychic needs people have to feel that their identity requires them to be juxtaposed against someone else, that when somebody is telling you to share the land, share the

power, share the future, they're asking you to do something that when push comes to shove you might not do yourself. Once you get in an "us and them" world then of course nobody should live under the same set of rules. We should have a better set of rules that work more for us than for somebody else. And all over the world today that's what we're trying to come to grips with without easy answers.

The thing I liked about dealing with Rabin is he never pretended the answers would be easy. He was always trying to give a sense of security to the Israelis that he knew would be unsettled by this. And, you know, I got there to the White House not long after he became prime minister, so I got to watch his tenure unfold and he was also concerned -- it's hard to believe now given the economy of Israel -- but the unemployment rate was about 11 percent when he took office and Israel was being flooded with immigrants, mostly from the former Soviet Union. They got it down to six and a half percent. And so I also watched kind of the evolution of his economic and political philosophy on domestic issues because he knew that he would never have the room and space he needed, no matter how much people trusted him on security, if the whole economic fabric of Israel was collapsing instead of rising. So it was a fascinating thing, and it was fascinating for Itamar because he was the so-called note taker, he was the highest-class note taker I ever had. (Laughter) At a lot of our meeting when it was just the two of us talking about well what are we going to do about Syria, what are we going to do about the Palestinians, what do you want me to do, can we ever get President Assad to come out of his shell and say something nice and helpful with the Israel public, and a thousand other things.

But I learned a lot, which you can see in this book, which I believe the world needs today. After we had the signing of the Oslo Accords on the White House lawn in September of 1993 he and I went alone back into the White House. I looked at

him and I said, tell me why you did this? I mean, really, you spent your whole life defending Israel and dealing with the terrorism of the PLO and god only knows how many other security threats. Why did you do this? Nobody else is there, never going to be a public conversation. He said my country is my life, beyond my family and friends, my country is my life. And he said we have to decide what it will be like if we don't share the future, including the land, with the Palestinians. Then very soon we will either no longer be a democracy or we will no longer be a Jewish State. Either decision would violate our solemn obligations. He said besides, their children are people too, they didn't do anything wrong and they deserve a chance to grow up with a sense of place, a sense of home.

So the first thing I learned from him is don't do the easy thing, do the right thing, but don't be dumb in how you do it. And don't forget that people need constant reassurance, security, and the other parts of their life have to work if you want the space to do good.

Secondly, I learned that people can change. Keep in mind, early in their careers Shimon Peres, who was normally thought of as being way to the left of Rabin and everybody else, was a big backer of the settlers, something which Itamar points out in his book. People can change through life and when you change it's important to do it the way Yitzhak did. Don't be like the reformed alcoholic who is so sanctimonious nobody can bear to be around him. Realize if you felt the way you once felt you still weren't a bad person, you felt this way, and help other people to take the same route that you took. It's a lot easier than just waiting for the demographics to work out, but it's important. And he did that.

The third thing I learned is that courage can be manifested in many ways. On the battlefield, most obviously, where untold numbers of our own veterans

from Afghanistan said they at some point stopped worrying about whether what we were doing was right or wrong and they were fighting for the lives of the people next to them. But as my friend, Maya Angelou, used to say, courage is the most important virtue because without it none of the other virtues can become real in life. It's very important for us to remember that from the time he was elected prime minister the second time, Rabin was subject to a relentless assault on his legitimacy, his personal legitimacy, by the radical right in Israel. That there were even two rabbis who purported to come up with religious justifications that would permit the murder of another Jew by a Jew if they were no longer a good Jew, much less a good Israeli. We all know that he was portrayed more than once in a Nazi uniform. But there were lots of other epithets, lots of other things to do. Delegitimize, delegitimize, delegitimize. You had to be prepared to be attacked, to win, or to lose, and maybe even lose your life. He had it.

And the third thing I learned about his was that in the microcosm of the Middle East he prefigured the battle that is now raging across the world, that you see in America, you see in the Brexit vote, you see in the Philippine election, you see in the debates being held in the Netherlands and France, all over, where people who claim to want the nation state are actually trying to have a pan national movement to institutionalized separatism and division within national borders all over the world. And nothing strikes people as unusual about that in thinking that that loyalty is more important than the loyalty to the traditions, the rules, the laws, the development of your own nation. This is a global deal. It's like we're all having an identity crisis at once. And it is the inevitable consequence of the economic and social changes which have occurred at an increasingly rapid pace. So when people study how he became prime minister the second time, how he put some of his old adversaries, including Shimon, in his government, how he then tried to relate to people and assured the Israelis that he'd let

them vote on any final peace deal, how he tried to reconcile the conflicts within -- within not only the country but within the hearts and minds of a huge percentage of his people. It is worth remembering that what happened 20 years ago is a microcosm of what is coming full blown across the world today. And these things are going to have to be worked out. He believed in the end we'd be better off sharing the future. I think if you believe that climate change is real, if you believe that technology will give terrorists more options to kill people, and basically delegitimize the whole idea of a nation state, then the idea of institutionalized internal conflict nation after nation after nation, is not the wisest strategy to pursue if you want to build a world where there is prosperity, peace, and the potential of progress for all people. Within your country you've got to try to get it so that we can have more win-win solutions instead of win-lose solutions, all the time knowing that we are programmed biologically, instinctively, to prefer win-lose solutions, us versus them. He got that.

Finally, I think somehow or another we have to find a way to bring simple, personal, decency and trust back to our politics. In Itamar's book there is basically the last public picture I think. At least the last famous public picture I have with Yitzhak. We went to a Jewish event in Washington and he was supposed to give me an award, which I thought was funny. Just sometimes they give you an award just to get you to show up, you know. (Laughter) And it was black tie, and god he hated black tie. And so he had a suit and no tie, so we had to get a tie. I think a Secret Service gave him the tie. And so the last picture we have is of me straightening and fixing his tie so he looked sort of presentable when he went out. (Laughter) And he told me the story of when he was a young man working his way up in the military, and finally achieved a position where he went to a meeting of sufficient importance where he had to wear a tie, he said I got it at the last minute and somebody had to tie it for me right before I went into

the meeting.

But he was here to sign the second handover of land in the West Bank under the Oslo Accords. And I never told this story at the time, but it has now become fairly well known, but to think of this happening today, think of even trying to get two members of Congress in opposite parties to make this kind of deal. So here he's been fighting Arafat since the PLO was organized. Put a lot of Israeli boys in body bags as the result of these conflicts. Once they realized we were serious the enemies of peace got going and they killed a lot of people in Israel in 1994 and 1995. I think 30 and 40 in the two years, something like that -- 39 -- Itamar's got the numbers in this book. But I remember I kept going over there to buses being blown up and children being killed. And they were working hard to kill this peace. And we had to sign nine maps in triplicate. I was the witness. I felt like I was signing off on a wedding, you know. So Israel would sign, Palestinian Authority would sign, I'd be the witness. Nine maps in triplicate, twenty-seven signatures. We get to the middle map and there's a very important crossroads near Jericho, which had been handed over already to the Palestinians, which was marked as belonging to Israel. Arafat said no, we negotiated for that, that's really important for us to be able to be able to move around. Otherwise we won't be able to have a coherent economic and social exchange in the land we've been given. And so then Yitzhak said, no, no, it's ours, look at the map. So he said to me, Yitzhak did, he said we need your help. I said what's the problem, and he told me. And I said, you know, I went to Jericho once as a young man on a religious pilgrimage, neither of your religions. So I want you to go back in my private dining room and figure this out. Sooner or later you're going to have to do this without me. And they went alone in there and then two or three people came in and out, you know, they asked us questions. But I said, now remember the whole world Press Corps is outside and we're already 20 minutes late. I

said, you know, the always blame me for being late (laughter), but if you get much later you won't be able to blame me. Let's figure out some other excuse. And they're all there and this is a done deal. So about 10 minutes later they walked out and I said what did you decide? Rabin said, he's right, it's his. I said well what are we going to do? We were going to sign these maps and they are a matter of international law. He said I'm going to give him the crossroads Monday. I looked at Arafat and he said his word is worth more than any written contract. Can you imagine someone saying that today in the world we're living in? I want every one young person to remember this. We tend to denigrate public servants; we tend to denigrate the importance of people trusting their word. Arafat was in awe of him. That's why I know we would have gotten the deal.

So think about that, read this book. Read this book, think about your life, the country of your origin if you weren't born here, the currents going through here today, and what will happen. This is a very old story. It's as old as the holy land and much older. Ever since the first people stood up on the East African Savanna, ever since the first families were formed and the first clans were formed, ever since people encountered the other. It is a very old story. And it always comes down to two things; we've got to live in an "us and them" world or a world that we make together. But is it going to be one set of rules for us and another set for everybody else or are we going to find a way to live through the same rules so that we create a world in which we all win? Look at the distance Yitzhak Rabin travelled, as a soldier, as a diplomat here in Washington, as a prime minister. Both times he didn't have any big mandate. Both time barely enough to govern. Then like everybody else he got better at things as he did it more. Everybody who learns. But one thing I know is he had courage, not just under fire, but in his public jobs. He was smart, he was careful, he understood the insecurities which roiled through every society and every time. And instead of being paralyzed by them or trying to take

advantage of them, he tried to take account of them and bring everybody along. And in the end he made his most well-known adversary, knew there was something truly, profoundly trustworthy about him.

If you got that, in every age and time eventually the challenges we face can be resolved in a way that keeps us going forward instead of taking it to the edge of our own destruction. I loved him very much and I miss him still.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. INDYK: Please stay in your seats while the president leaves. I think we all experienced an amazing presentation by the president about his friend, Yitzhak. It was the honor of my life to have worked with both of them in the efforts to achieve peace. And my partner brother in that effort was my counterpart, Itamar Rabinovich. He was, as you know, the Israeli ambassador in the United States at the time that I was President Clinton's ambassador in Israel. And it was an amazing experience that we both had in working with these two great leaders.

Dalia Rabin had a different and very person experience as Yitzhak Rabin's daughter, through all of these days, through the good and the bad and the awful, and has done an amazing job since Yitzhak's assassination to keep his memory and his legacy alive as the head of the Rabin Center in Israel.

We're here to talk about this great book that Itamar has written, "Yitzhak Rabin: Soldier, Leader, Statesman". And I wanted to start our conversation today by asking Itamar to unpack those three words, starting, first of all, with the solider, Rabin as the soldier. There are a lot of generals in policy positions in this town today. There have been in Israel a lot of generals in positions of leadership, not just military leadership, but political as well. What was it about Rabin's experience and his capabilities, capacities as a general, as a warrior, that suited him for his role as statesman and leader?

MR. RABINOVICH: Thank you, Martin. Before I respond directly to your question let me thank you and the whole Brookings family for hosting us in this very significant event, thank the audience for coming, and confess that today I am breaking a vow I made to myself never to speak either before or after President Clinton. (Laughter) But I'll take my chance.

MR. INDYK: Our choice today.

MR. RABINOVICH: So it was very important -- first of all, you know, writing this biography of a person I knew and I knew well was also a journey of discovery because I discovered and found out things that I had not known before. And one of those was how gifted Rabin was in military affairs. He had a natural gift that was discovered by his mentor, Yigal Allon, the commander of the elite unit of Israel's pre state Army, and promoted him rapidly as a deputy and chief planner, in pre statehood, in pre '48 war, and then he fought in the field and on the road to Jerusalem and in Jerusalem. And then was a very important planner. The liberation of the whole southern half of the country was actually implemented based on his plans. So at the age of 26-27, at the end of the '48 war, he was lieutenant colonel, a senior officer, highly regarded. And then between 1949 and 1967, as a senior officer, and deputy chief of staff and chief of staff, he built the IDF that had the spectacular victory in 1967. Now, that of course was the basis of his career because it established his reputation at home and internationally as a great general. And in a country obsessed with national security it of course was a very important source of authority for the Israeli public.

Secondly, one of the most enduring and painful experiences he had was fighting on the road to Jerusalem and in Jerusalem where almost half of his men were killed in action. He felt that the idea had not been properly prepared for that, equipped for that, and he vowed, literally, to devote the rest of his life for making sure that this never

happened again. So these were the two most important ways in which the military carrier shaped the next steps or further steps or phases in his life and career.

MR. INDYK: Dalia?

MS. RABIN: I want to add President Clinton mentioned that he was courageous. And I think he was really one of the most courageous generals. He was focused, he had very strong self-confidence, he was always sure about the way he chose. As a general, and later as statesman, he was already weighing all the alternatives. And when he decided something he was very, very focused on it. And this I think, these are elements that come from being a general and went further into his success as a statesman.

MR. INDYK: You, of course grew up with him. You knew him as your father, as the husband of your mother, as the grandfather of your children. Now, what was he like as a person?

MS. RABIN: He was very different from what he seemed to be at the outside. At the outside they used to think that he's very introverted and very serious. So he was introverted and he was shy, but at home he was very warm. As they used to say he was the good cop at home because my mother was in charge of educating us and he was coming late at night and being the nice guy. And he was very, very concerned about everything that happened to us, especially about our health, especially mine. I was always sick, so he always took me to the doctor. And, you know, wherever he was -- I remember once I went to see him on a Saturday and we had a road accident and I was injured. And the next day I was taken to the hospital just to a plastic surgeon to fix. And he was then the commander of the northern command and there was a lot of shelling and bombing along the Syrian border. And my mother was alone with me in the hospital and I was taken into the OR and all of the sudden I see her smiling. He appeared. With the

jeep, with all the (inaudible) and all the, you know, the communication. He was there, he came. So this is the kind of father I grew up with. I always knew that he's there for me, for us. And whenever I be in a problem, in a dilemma, he will help me sort it out and he will be there for me.

And this was the same for my kids and the whole family.

MR. INDYK: So after he finished as chief of staff and the great victory of the Six Day War, he came here to Washington to be your predecessor as ambassador of Israel to the United States.

First of all, why did he choose Washington to be a diplomat after he -- why didn't he go into politics like all the other generals?

MR. RABINOVICH: Because he was smarter. He understood (laughter) that you cannot just move from being a general to becoming not a politician but a policy maker and a leader and a statesman. He needed the preparation and he thought that the center of the world was the best place for doing that. And that's why he asked to be sent to Washington and surprised everybody, Prime Minister Eshkol, but Foreign Minister Eban was not exactly enthused. But then he spent a very formative period here. And maybe the most important relationship he had was with Henry Kissinger who took to him early on. They developed a deep friendship and mutual appreciation. But Kissinger at that point was the senior member of the duo and he mentored Rabin in the ways of Washington and in the ways of the world. And that remained an enduring relationship to date. I mean Kissinger speaks about him -- when Kissinger is asked in public about leadership he begins with Rabin.

MR. INDYK: I actually --

MS. RABIN: Another thing that I wanted to add.

MR. INDYK: Please, go ahead.

MS. RABIN: President Clinton said that people change, and leaders change. I don't think he really changed. He was very much preplanned. After the War of Independence, like Itamar said, he vowed never again. Never again we are going to face such circumstances. So I commit myself to really build a strong infrastructure of a military. And he did. I saw letters of him from '52 written, the whole scheme, for the training of the army, and he was really there analyzing what is needed and preparing the army for the Six Day War. And this year we are --

MR. RABINOVICH: Fifty.

MS. RABIN: -- 50 years for the Six Day War, and we are going to dedicate a special exhibition to how he really prepared the army for the war.

And the thing with the United States started even when he was deputy chief of staff. He chose to start buying ammunition from the United States as opposed to Peres, who was Francophile, who was French tendency. So within the army he started the relationship with the American army. And then he thought it's really the most important thing to create a strong relationship with the United States, with all the administration on the Hill, and to start preparing the area for peace. And the United States he thought will be out best ally to this peace. This he understood the day after the '67 war. He writes it in his own memoir. He says the day after --

MR. INDYK: That's why he decides to go to Washington?

MS. RABIN: Yes, he says now we have to go and think how we turn the fruits of this war into peace. He writes it in '67, the day after the war. And he thought the United States will be the right place to help us and support us, which at the end of the day it came true.

MR. RABINOVICH: Dalia mentioned the meticulous planning papers from '52 and I want to add to this point. At that point he was head of instruction at IDF.

The man who made him head of instruction and promoted him from colonel to general, and fought to get him promoted, was Moshe Dayan). Now Moshe Dayan and Yitzhak Rabin had an ambiguous relationship. They were not fond of each other, they appreciated one another. But when Moshe Dayan became chief of staff and he wanted to transform the IDF, it was not in great shape at the time, he knew that he had to do it through instruction department and that the best person to do that for him would be Rabin. So he fought with the minister of defense to get Rabin promoted to general. And part of the story -- two points here. One is that Rabin's road to the top was never smooth. There were problems and issues along the way. He was not someone who sort of sailed through the ranks from lieutenant to general and then prime minister. And a lot of, by the way, fortuitous circumstances. It was not foretold. And the second was the whole set of relationships among this limited group, people like Dayan and Peres and Allon, Sharon, Rabin, of course, who were the military and national security elite of the young State of Israel. It happened to be a group of very gifted and very ambitious men who both collaborated and competed with one another, which makes for a fascinating tale.

MR. INDYK: Indeed. And you tell it very well.

MS. RABIN: He used to tell my mother, nothing comes easy to me. I have to fight over everything.

MR. INDYK: He was a warrior.

MS. RABIN: Yeah, he never gave up.

MR. INDYK: But he was also a strategic thinker. Tell us a little bit about that.

MR. RABINOVICH: Yes. Well, what I think was unique about Rabin was he was both a strategic thinker and a meticulous planner. Before he approved an operation, (inaudible) or the (inaudible) operation, any operation, he would check time

and again. And he would also talk to the lower levels. He excelled at talking to junior officers, to simple soldiers, both before the operation and then the debriefing after the operation. So he controlled -- he had a photographic memory. He knew the details, but at the same time he also saw a big picture. When we come to the peace process of the 1990s he understood that the big threat to Israeli national security was in the East, Iran, primarily, and Iraq. And therefore the plan was to consolidate the relationship with immediate neighbors in order to deal with the serious threats. So that was strategy. Tactics and strategy combined together in the same mind.

MR. INDYK: So let's fast forward to that Syrian negotiation that you were involved in. And what was his view of Syria in this context, in making peace with Syria?

MR. RABINOVICH: Yeah, he actually preferred to make the first deal with Syria. As you would recall, we had four partners in the negotiations, two, Jordan and Lebanon could not be the first. Either the Palestinians or the Syrians could be the first. He preferred the Syrians as they do.

MR. INDYK: As did President Clinton.

MR. RABINOVICH: Yes, because, first of all, the Israeli-Syrian conflict was simpler than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not a national conflict, but a territorial conflict between two states. Second, Syria was a state, the Palestinians were a community. Thirdly, Syria had a leader at that time, Hafez al-Assad, who was authoritative, difficult to negotiate with, but with a reputation for delivering once he made an agreement. And the Palestinians had a leader that President Clinton referred to a number of times as let's say anarchic. So the preference was strategically to make the first deal with Syria, and once of course you had an Israeli-Syrian deal the Palestinian deal would come much more easily because the Palestinians of course would feel that Israel was holding the trump cards. So that was the plan. But the way events developed,

of course, it ended up differently.

MR. INDYK: So, yes, indeed, but people in Israel today, you often hear say thank god we didn't have peace with Syria, we would have had to give up the Golan and look where we would be now. What's your answer to that?

MR. RABINOVICH: I am being asked that when I am interviewed in Israeli media and my answer is this, that had Assad made peace with Israel there would be no civil war in Syria. As you remember very well, it was not just a bilateral negotiation between Syria and Israel, it was a trilateral negotiation. And for Assad, actually making peace with the United States was more important than making peace with Israel. So he would have had to open up. It was not just about making peace, but about changing the orientation of Syria, which may have frightened him, may have been the reason that at the end of the day he did not step up to the plate. But had he made the deal, had he opened up, the pressure cooker that burst in 2011 would not have burst.

MR. INDYK: That's my answer too. (Laughter) Let's talk about the Palestinians. I'm struck by the quote that you have in the book from his speech in Knesset. I think it was October '95.

MR. RABINOVICH: '95.

MR. INDYK: In which he laid out his vision of peace with the Palestinians. This was immediately after the signing of the Oslo II Accords that President Clinton was describing. And you quote him as making clear that he would support something less than a state for the Palestinians. What was your sense of what his thinking was?

MR. RABINOVICH: My sense is that he had no illusions. I think he understood very well, as did everybody, that without a two-state solution there will not be a final status agreement, but he's also bargaining. And if he were to promise Arafat a

state before the final status negotiations began, he would have been left with very few cards. So I think that was essentially a bargaining posture, and to some extent meant to allay the anxieties of the Israeli public. Remember the Israeli public was anxious, he was violently being attacked by the opposition, and therefore the statement in '95 that the Palestinian entity would be less than a state was meant to achieve these two goals, to serve as a bargaining posture vis a vis Arafat, and to allay some of the anxieties of the Israeli public.

MR. INDYK: Is that your recollection as well, that he was ready for a Palestinian state but understood that he shouldn't come out and say that it was the objective?

MS. RABIN: I don't know. He was very prudent and very pragmatic and very realist. And he thought that we should start doing something. But on the other hand he was very much aware of what's going on in the streets of Israel. We were watching the news every night and it was terrifying. Not that he was afraid of them, not that he ever thought, imagined that somebody is going to kill him, but the growing waves of terror and the numbers of casualties were not playing in favor of the process. In this respect I think that Arafat was a disappointment. He I think -- I don't know, I was told that he was not able to, but the agreement that he will handle Hamas and try to stop the waves of terror. And he was not bringing this goods. This is why they decided to deal with him, because he was supposed to bring the goods. And the waves of terror were really frightening and really concerning most Israelis. And I think he thought that he will be able to move forward, but he was very cautious. And the whole concept of Oslo I think was, if I understand it well, that you're going in phases and you move one phase forward and then you check backwards, and you make your cons and pros. And then you decide how you go forward in spite of the fact that there were written phases that we had to do. I

don't know whether he had. I think he understood at the end of the day we'll have to separate. His idea was of a peaceful separation, incorporation, and reconciliation, words that disappeared from the arena. Nobody is talking about a peaceful agreement, nobody is talking about reconciliation, though underground there are some activities, and cooperation. Though, if you check, the only channels that exist between Israelis and the Palestinians military-wise are those from Oslo.

MR. INDYK: Yes. I remember his speech here after the signing of the Oslo II Accords in which he said, in front of Arafat, what we need, Mr. Chairman, he said, was separation not out of hatred, but out of respect.

MS. RABIN: Right.

MR. INDYK: Jerusalem. I remember your mother, after Yitzhak had been assassinated --

MS. RABIN: You remember this story about her?

MR. INDYK: Well, tell us.

MS. RABIN: She was very sick. She already had cancer and she was dying. And she was in the hospital. And Avi, my ex-husband, was here in New York and spent some time in an office with together with Ariel Sharon. They were together with (inaudible). And he calls me, it was Friday afternoon, he calls me, I was with her at the hospital, and he tells me Arik wants to talk to your mother. And it was on a cell phone. I said, Avi, she's hardly breathing, she cannot talk. She said bring me the phone, I want to talk to Arik. And she takes the cellular phone and she said, Arik, do you think Yitzhak would give up Jerusalem? This was a day --

MR. INDYK: It was a question.

MS. RABIN: -- and a half before she died.

MR. INDYK: And, you know, he fought for Jerusalem. He lost in a

sense --

MR. RABINOVICH: Yeah. Actually, Martin, I remember you and I appeared together in the Embassy of Israel. You were then not the ambassador, but International Security Council, the director for Middle Eastern Affairs. We appeared before an Orthodox Jewish audience and they spoke derisively about Rabin and Jerusalem. Before I could say something you looked at them and you said to them how dare you speak derisively about Yitzhak Rabin and Jerusalem and Yitzhak Rabin fought in Jerusalem in 1948 and liberated it in 1967. And there was silence, silence in the hall.

So, yes, Jerusalem was a very sensitive issue and I think there was a strong commitment. But look, before he became prime minister he spoke in the election campaign against the coming of the Golan. And he was willing under certain terms to do it. He certainly did not -- he spoke against Arafat and the PLO and never thought about shaking hands with Arafat and he ended up shaking hands with Arafat. So who knows? Had he lived, had he been reelected in 1996, had final settlement negotiations with the Palestinians begun and proceeded, who knows how it would have gone. There's no telling.

MR. INDYK: Right. So we're going to go to the audience for questions, but I just want to ask you both this last question. Itamar, you write in the book at the end, very interestingly, about the two narratives of Rabin's legacy. How should he be remembered?

MR. RABINOVICH: I think he should be remembered as a person I think. You know, I did not write a hagiography, I wrote a biography. Of course, with a lot of sympathy, but also with a critical eye. And Rabin had some flaws and he made some mistakes all along the way, and they're all pointed out in the book. So it's not a blind admiration, but I think he was a great man. I think his life replicated Israeli history during

a very, very crucial time. And I think he should be remembered first and foremost as a human being, as a leader, as a person who was what you call a native son, whose life really reflected not just the history of the country, but the landscape of the country.

Secondly, I think he should be remembered as a leader and a statesman. And I think that this is a commodity that is scarce in the world now, as I think President Clinton mentioned a couple of times. I think a statesman, there are three elements that make a statesman. A statesman need a vision about where he or she wants to take the country, they need courage in order to implement a vision that is not necessarily popular, and thirdly, they need the authority with their own people in order to carry their people with them. I think he in his second term had all three. That's what made it such a great term. And this I think is how he should be remembered.

MS. RABIN: I want to say, because I deal with this exactly at the Rabin Center. The Rabin Center is a national institute, government supported. And I insisted on having a government supported institute because he was a prime minister and a minister of defense and he was assassinated by a Jew motivated by religious ideology, and I think the state of Israel should be responsible for his commemoration. But you can imagine that it's not easy to maintain such an institute supported by the government and raise the flags that we would like to raise.

So how do we want him to be remembered? So there is his life and there is the assassination. And I think we deal with both because you cannot ignore the assassination, which made the whole institute a different memorial institute in Israel. This assassination is one of the most dramatic events that happened in Israel's modern history. Because a guy decided to shoot the prime minister in the back, a democratically elected prime minister, because he didn't like his policy. And this was shooting democracy in the back. President Clinton was talking about -- oh, Strobe, you asked

President Clinton before, is democracy not strong enough. So this was one of the faint moments of Israeli democracy, and we have to remember it and we stand as a reminder of this event.

But on the other hand, Yitzhak Rabin was so much more. Actually, he was different, he was not his assassination. He was the leader, he was committed to the good life of the Israeli people. And the peace process was a platform to make Israel a good place to live in and to be able to invest in education and research and infrastructure and industry. Whatever he did he changed the priorities. So we all the time are, you know, between the two pose of memory, but he should be remembered for what he did more than the assassination.

MR. INDYK: Let's go to your questions. Please wait for the microphone, identify yourself, and please ask a short question. We don't have a lot of time.

Marvin Kalb.

MS. RABIN: Marvin. I know him.

MR. INDYK: Marvin who used to report on Rabin and Kissinger.

MR. KALB: No, I just really wanted to start with the briefest of preambles, and this is to say that Yitzhak Rabin was my friend, a terrific source (laughter), a wonderful symbol of what Israel was.

My question is, taking into account everything that Rabin represented and understanding the politics of Israel today, can one realistically hope for a return to that kind of Israel or are we really moving off in a totally different direction now?

MR. INDYK: Itamar?

MR. RABINOVICH: Hope springs eternal. (Laughter) Well, first of all, we have to realize that the country changed, it's now a country of eight million people. The demography -- even if you look at the past 20 years, I mean massive changes. So

it's not the same country. But not just from my work on this book, but from my other works in history, I'm a great believer in the power of leadership. And I think that -- without naming names -- I think that if the right leader is found and elected, Israel could shift back to some of what the Rabin period represented.

MR. INDYK: But as you respond to Marvin's question, Dalia, address this question, Yitzhak had a combination. He was mister security as well as a seasoned politician who became a statesman. Do you still need that combination? Is that what's necessary?

MS. RABIN: Yes, I think it is still necessary to gain the trust of the voters. Remember, in 1992 in the election there was such a small majority. And since 1992 -- to the left -- and it was just about not to happen, and Israel has become much more an extreme right. And as Itamar said, the demography has changed. But we still, in our positions and our upbringing and where we come from, we cannot give up hope for going back to what Israel was in its better days because what you see today in Israel is not so comforting. And I said that I cannot afford to give up, and I'm doing my best. And I wanted to say that before, that Itamar's book is very, very important to preserving the legacy of my father. And we are standing as gatekeepers to remind what was really happening. Because in Israel there's a tendency to change the past and today you have to stand up and be a gatekeeper, not let them change the past. And Itamar's book is one of a very, very significant tools to do it. And I was -- I had the privilege of being not a partner, but to escort Itamar in its process of writing. And it was a very great and exciting experience for me.

MR. INDYK: Okay. Rob Danin.

QUESTIONER: First of all, Itamar, congratulations, really, on an excellent work. This is a question really for both of you. One of the striking things in the

book is you really highlight the schism that exists early on in the state between those of the Palmach and those who had been trained in the traditional armies of the west, the Jewish Brigade in Britain and elsewhere. And you seemed to imply that this was kind of at the heart of the schism between Rabin in Peres. My question for you -- maybe, Dalia, you were too young to know this -- but I mean is that really what -- was that the origin of really the later schism and the later tension with Peres? And at what point did Rabin stop being a man of the Palmach and become a man of the IDF? Because he paid so dearly for it personally, as you really well detail.

MR. RABINOVICH: The last point is easiest. The Palmach was disbanded by Ben-Gurion at the end of the war. Ben-Gurion himself eased out many of the senior officers of the Palmach and others left in protest. Rabin was actually the most senior officer of the Palmach who stayed in the area. And that was a posed a statement. He then ceased to be Palmach and became IDF. But if I may take a moment, that's a significant moment. When the Palmach was disbanded by Ben-Gurion, the Palmach veterans had their rally in Tel Aviv. And the chief of staff of the IDF ordered that no officer in active service should attend the rally. And Rabin intended to attend the rally because loyalty to his friends was very important to him. Ben-Gurion did not want him to go because it would have meant something, and also Ben-Gurion liked him and knew that this would hurt his career. So Ben-Gurion invited Rabin home and kept him and kept him and kept him (laughter), and then Rabin stood up and said he has to go. And Ben-Gurion said don't you want to stay and have dinner with Paula and me. Well, those who knew Paula's kitchen would understand the magnitude of the attraction. (Laughter) But he said no, I have to go. He went to the rally and was then reprimanded by the chief of staff, and his promotion was held up by Ben-Gurion, promotion to chief of staff, at least one round.

Now, about Rabin and Peres. As I mentioned earlier, these personal relationships among the 10 sort of prominent members of that national security establishment -- and since Dalia mentioned the call from Ariel Sharon to Leah Rabin on her deathbed, Ariel Sharon was in the desert when Rabin became chief of staff. He was colonel, head of a minor base. And Ben-Gurion told Rabin I'll make you chief of staff, and among other things I ask you to look after Sharon. He's a problematic character but he's a great general. And Rabin called Sharon and said to him, I'll send you to the Northern Command as number two and if you behave for a year you'll be promoted to general. He behaved well, he was promoted to general, he did extremely well in '67. And, you know, the rest is history.

MS. RABIN: Is history.

MR. RABINOVICH: So until the incitement that preceded the assassination Sharon was very loyal to Rabin, despite the huge differences. Now, Peres-Rabin is a saga in itself.

MS. RABIN: Everything you (inaudible).

MR. RABINOVICH: First and foremost, it had to do with personalities. You know, Peres knew from a young age that he wanted to be prime minister. Rabin, as Dalia said, was an incrementalist. You know, when he was an officer, he wanted to be a general, and when he was a general he wanted to be ambassador, and when he was ambassador he wants to be cabinet member. And he didn't plan on becoming prime minister until the battle of '73. So very, very major difference between a very ambitious determined politician who wants to get to the top and someone who moves leisurely.

Second, Rabin was cautious, analytical, but Peres was a man of imagination and boldness. Some ideas were fantastic and some ideas were fantastic. (Laughter)

Thirdly, both were very -- I don't wish to underestimate. I mean I worked for both of them. Peres was a very gifted man with many positive qualities, but very different, very different from -- he was Ben-Gurion's aid. Now, he was Minister of Defense, Rabin was in the IDF, famous Pentagon versus GHU, (inaudible) European orientation, American orientation, nuclear ambiguity versus conventional. You know, many issues. And then in '74, when Gold Meir was forced to resign, the labor party brass wanted Rabin. Peres was determined to compete against him and, you know, Rabin --

MS. RABIN: This was the point he couldn't get over.

MR. RABINOVICH: Yeah. And then when Rabin defeated him he still had to make a Minister of Defense because otherwise he would have had no majority for his government. So, you know, the interesting thing is that the rivalry was always constrained by common sense of some responsibility for the major issues, some sense of partnership, and they found a way of -- they both understood that they were, what I call them in the book, the Siamese Twins of Israeli politics. They could not be separated and they willy-nilly found a way of working together. No love lost, but working together.

MR. INDYK: I'm looking at Tom Donilon here. He and I were put through this excruciating experience in which Prime Minister Rabin would tell our boss, Christopher, the Secretary of State, you're going to see Peres, the Foreign Minister, don't talk to him about the peace process. (Laughter) and so the Secretary of State would sit with the Foreign Minister and have to make up some stories about the peace process because Rabin wouldn't let us talk about it.

Let's take another question.

MS. RABIN: I wanted to add something about the Palmach. My father, in spite of being very, very loyal to the Palmach, he supported Ben-Gurion's decision to dismantle all the undergrounds, because it was (speaking foreign language) Palmach

and he said that there are no more militia's, there will be one Israel defense force. And my father supported this decision and his friends from the Palmach held it against him for a long time, in spite of the fact that he was the only one first joined the IDF and then he brought them all in later. And he always used to say that the core of the IDF was the Palmach people. And I don't think it has to do anything with Peres.

MR. AL-OMARI: Thank you. Ghaith al-Omari from Washington Institute. And I want to expand maybe on the first question again. Look, Rabin for me is a model of peacemaking as we were used to it in the past. Larger-than-life leaders who had the credibility, the history, and all of that, who through courage and force of will change history. But they were the product of a very specific historic moment. If you look now in the region do you see such leaders emerging again, do you see the circumstances allowing for such leaders to emerge again? Or should we start looking at peacemaking through a different prism and a different model that is not really centered around the qualities of the leader, but in a more structural way?

Thank you.

MR. INDYK: It wasn't just Rabin, of course. It was Sadat, Golda --

MS. RABIN: Yes.

MR. AL-OMARI: Hasin, people like that.

MR. INDYK: Hafez al-Assad. And King Hussein.

MR. AL-OMARI: Yes.

MS. RABIN: Sadat and Begin.

MR. RABINOVICH: Begin, yeah. I would say right now you're right. I mean you look around the region, you don't see that leadership. And therefore I think we have to -- for this moment I think we have to lower our sights. I think the kind of major breakthroughs of the Sadat-Begin Agreement or the Oslo Accord is not feasible at this

time, but what is important at this time is to make sure that the option of a two-state solution is not eliminated. And this can be done through a series of less dramatic measures. This I think can be accomplished without the kind of heroic leadership that you mentioned.

MR. INDYK: Yes. Over here, up front.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Along with many other people here, from my government post in the '90s I had an opportunity to support President Clinton in his efforts and I recall his dedication and his mastery of detail.

Leaving aside the crazy politics we have at the moment, and addressing this question, what do you think Israel needs from the United States now to move in the direction that Rabin wanted to move?

MR. RABINOVICH: Well, we need the United States back fully in the Middle East. I think that from our perspective it was a mistake to pivot -- to use the term -- away from the Middle East. I think it was a mistake in 2012 not to become more active in Syria. It has since been used, fully exploited by Putin, who made himself the key actor in the Syrian crisis and with projection to the larger Middle East. And I think not just Israelis, I think Egyptians, and Saudis, and others want to see a full-fledged involvement of the United States in steering the diplomacy and the strategy in the region. You know, Israelis often times ask is so and so as a candidate for president or for this or that position good for us. My only sense is that person should first and foremost be good for America. We need a well-functioning United States in order to lead the world, including being fully active in the Middle East.

MS. RABIN: I agree.

MR. INDYK: What would Yitzhak have made of Donald Trump do you think? (Laughter)

MS. RABIN: This is so fantastic (inaudible) Martin, that it's irrelevant.

MR. INDYK: All right, you don't have to answer. (Laughter) Yes, last question please, down the end there.

MR. KURTZIG: Thank you very much. Michael Kurtzig, who worked on the Middle East with the Department of Agriculture. Just a quick comment. In 1992 I recall the prime minister talking to us at the National Press Club and said to us the danger is not Iraq, watch Iran. That is the big problem. Would you discuss for a moment the relationship between him and King Hussein, who was always considered a very -- it seemed to me a close friend of Israel and the one who will promote peace? Do you comment on that in the book?

Thank you.

MR. RABINOVICH: What President Clinton said earlier about Arafat and Rabin, the fact that Arafat was willing to settle on Rabin's words, didn't need a written piece of paper, definitely was true of King Hussein. So Israeli-Jordanian peace could have been possibly made in other ways, but I don't think it would have been achieved in 1994 in the way it was achieved without that personal relationship. Now, of course it was not always easy. In 1994, in November '94, as Strobe would remember, the Gingrich revolution brought the republicans in control of Congress and Newt Gingrich decided to show Bill Clinton who was boss, and the issue he chose was the Jordanian debt relief. And after the first tranche there was to be a second tranche, which he stopped. And what did King Hussein do? He did not call President Clinton, he called Prime Minister Rabin. He said you remember we made peace, the debt relief was part of it, and basically I expect you to help me get it done, and it was done.

MR. INDYK: Do you have any remembrance of that relationship with the King?

MS. RABIN: I just remember that we started hearing that they are meeting. First they were meeting on a boat in the Red Sea, but it was very, very highly kept as a secret. The Mossad was in charge of the arrangements. And they started meeting and then I remember a day he came to the apartment in (inaudible), also very secretly. The rest of the meetings I think were held in the Mossad place. And I remember that every time he came back from a meeting with Hussein he said, so it's so good dealing with him as opposed to all the rest that he was dealing with. (Laughter) Became so elated and happy and they had such an open and a common ground kind of relationship. They really liked each other and they were both smoking. (Laughter)

MR. INDYK: There's a lovely picture in the book of Rabin lighting King Hussein's cigarette.

MR. RABINOVICH: You know, speaking of leadership. So we spoke amply about Rabin's leadership, but Hussein also had his brand of leadership. And the moment I'd like to recite here was when one of his soldiers went berserk and killed seven Israeli school students --

MS. RABIN: Girls.

MR. RABINOVICH: Girls. And King Hussein flew into Israel, went into the small town where the family lived, and knelt before the parents and apologized. He did not lose an iota of respect in Israel or his country, he was very dignified. And only a man with, you know, a great stature and a great degree of self-confidence can do that. That of course made a huge difference and that was a particular style of leadership that an Arab monarch could demonstrate and one that is missing in the larger Middle East now.

MR. INDYK: We have to finish, but one of the great highlights of that relationship was when they jointly addressed a joint session of Congress.

MS. RABIN: Congress, yeah.

MR. INDYK: And the king gave an incredible speech, which he did without notes. Rabin, you quote the speech that Rabin gave, which was a really memorable one. Just tell us the story.

MS. RABIN: I remember. I remember.

MR. INDYK: The back story behind that speech.

MR. RABINOVICH: First I'll quote Henry Kissinger, who would have said, who would have known that Yitzhak of all people would become an orator of biblical proportions. (Laughter) But, of course, this brings us to the relationship between the leader and the speech writer. Rabin had Eitan Haber as a long-time confidant, among other things. I remember when we visited the White House and we visited the speech writing department, and we said well our speech writing department is half Eitan Haber. So that relationship, symbiotic relationship between leader and speech writer can only work where the symbiosis exists. So the speech writer knows the leader and knows more or less his preferences and what he likes, and the leaders sometimes takes it as it is and sometimes sends it back. And we could see the back and forth, but the result was a very powerful speech, of course beginning with citing his serial number as a soldier and the transition from soldier to leader.

MS. RABIN: Another highlight was Hussein's speech in the funeral.

MR. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MS. RABIN: Coming to Jerusalem and giving a speech at the funeral, and talking about my father as a brother.

MR. INDYK: He was an inspiration to all of us who had a chance to know him and to work with him, the likes of which we probably will never see again.

Thank you, Itamar, for a great contribution to the memory of Yitzhak

Rabin. The book you can get outside, it's a great read, and you won't regret reading it.

Dalia, thank you for joining us in this walk down memory lane and for all that you do to keep Yitzhak's memory alive.

Thank you all very much. (Applause)

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