



by Joseph Shattan

Peace Out

Yitzhak Rabin extended an olive branch to Syria and the PLO, and it cost him his life. Now what?

Sometimes small, seemingly insignificant quirks or gestures can provide a window into a person's soul. In Yitzhak Rabin's case, it was his famous half-smile that appeared to define him. Rabin almost never smiled fully; usually, the right side of his mouth would curl up just a bit, but the left side remained immobile. It was as though, even while smiling—or trying to smile—he could not let go of his basic sadness. Maybe that's why so many Israelis loved him—they identified with his ambivalence. Like him, they could not forget their terrible yesterdays; like him, they both believed and disbelieved in a better tomorrow.

Ambivalence was, at least initially, also the hallmark of Rabin's attitude toward the peace process. Unlike his foreign minister and successor Shimon Peres, Rabin didn't seem too enthusiastic about the Declaration of Principles that he and PLO chief Yasir Arafat signed in Washington on September 13, 1993. He had his doubts about the whole business, and he did not go especially out of his way to conceal them. Yet Rabin felt that, all things considered, Israel had to do something to break the Arab-Israeli impasse. In this, too, he mirrored the soul of his nation.

As the peace process unfolded, however, a strange thing happened: Rabin's initial skepticism gave way to almost unqualified enthusiasm, even as the rest of

Israel grew more skeptical than ever. Rabin, in other words, was moving to the left, but Israel was moving to the right. Yet he could not accept the fact that he and his people were no longer on the same wavelength. He blamed Israel's growing disenchantment with his policies on Israel's largest opposition party, the Likud, which Rabin began to equate, in his public statements, with Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group. Toward the end of his life, he grew increasingly angry and intolerant. The leader who had only recently overcome his own reservations about the peace process was now determined to shove that process down the Israeli public's throat.

But Israelis are a funny people: When you push them, they have a tendency to push back. Rabin's efforts to force the pace of the peace process backfired. The man who seemed to embody Israel's soul inadvertently destroyed its most precious asset—the unity of its people. Under Rabin, Israeli society grew increasingly polarized and angry. Eventually, one very angry Israeli gunned Rabin down. As one student would later comment, "Someone had better find a way to create a sense of unity, or everything will fall apart."

To understand how Israel got itself into such a god-awful mess, you have to go back to March 1993. Rabin had been in office for nine months and his popularity had dropped sharply. During the election campaign he had promised to conclude an agreement with the Palestinians within six to nine months of coming into

office; yet no agreement was in sight, the *intifada* (Palestinian uprising) was raging, and life in Israel was becoming intolerable.

Enter Shimon Peres, who disclosed to Rabin that, unknown to the prime minister and in violation of Israeli law, a group of Israelis, connected to Peres protégé Yossi Beilin, had been conducting negotiations with PLO representatives in Oslo since Labor's victory in the summer of 1992. The negotiations were bearing fruit. Should they be continued? asked the wily Peres. A politically desperate Rabin gave his belated consent, and so, without the knowledge of Israel's cabinet and without any input from the military or intelligence services, the agreement with the PLO known as the Declaration of Principles, or Oslo I, was finalized.

The curious thing is that while negotiating secretly with the PLO in Norway, Rabin believed that when the time came to go public, the PLO would graciously step aside and allow a non-PLO delegation in Washington to actually sign the accords. He was wrong, of course. After reaching the agreement, Arafat promptly told the non-PLO delegates to get lost, which they did. Rabin was then faced with a wrenching dilemma: Either recognize the PLO openly, or forget about any political solution to the *intifada*. Rabin chose to recognize the PLO, even though, while campaigning for office, he had vowed never to do so.

Rabin broke his vow because he bought into the Israeli left's line that the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict was the Palestinian problem. According to this view, Israel would never succeed in making peace with its Arab neighbors until it had first satisfied the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Rabin couldn't have cared less about their aspirations, but, as he later indicated in newspaper interviews, he was haunted by

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the thought that if Israel and Syria did not sign a peace treaty, sooner or later Syrian missiles, armed with chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons, would rain down on Tel Aviv. An agreement with the PLO was the key to an agreement with Syria, and an agreement with Syria, in turn, was the key to Israel's long-term security.

Immediately after Rabin and Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn, Israeli and American leaders began an intensive courtship of Syria's President Assad, culminating in an Israeli promise to leave virtually the entire Golan Heights if only the Syrian dictator made peace with Israel. So intensive was this courtship that one almost had the feeling that Assad and his Soviet patrons had won the Cold War, and that Israel and its American patron were desperately suing for terms.

But the legitimacy of Assad's regime rests on its self-professed role as leader of the Arab crusade against Israel. Were he to renounce that crusade and make peace with Israel, even on the most favorable (to him) of terms, Assad's rule could be undermined. Besides, peace with Israel would antagonize Iran, a vital ally in Syria's effort to isolate its arch-rival, Iraq. Hence, despite tantalizing hints to the contrary, Assad steadfastly refused to take Rabin's bait, no matter how many times U.S. Secretary of State Christopher, or even President Clinton, prostrated themselves before the Syrian dictator.

So Rabin's great gamble—an agreement with the PLO to be followed by peace with Syria—had failed, and not even the peace agreement with Jordan, or the breakthroughs with Qatar and Oman, could make up for that failure. To make matters even worse, the PLO, which had promised to forego violence and renounce the clause in its National Charter calling for Israel's destruction, wasn't living up to its commitments: The Charter remained unchanged, and Palestinian authorities either couldn't or wouldn't clamp down on terrorism. In the wake of Oslo I, terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians escalated dramatically: In the fifteen months after the Rabin-Arafat handshake, 123 Israelis were killed by Palestinian terrorists, compared to 67 killed in the fifteen months prior to the agreement. Though Rabin and his American allies tried desperately

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to conceal it, the plain fact was that Rabin's whole policy lay in shambles.

Rabin, however, could not possibly admit—even to himself—that he had failed so dismally. The first law of politics is that, when you find yourself in a hole, you must stop digging—which is precisely what Israel's president, the very dovish Ezer Weizman, urged Rabin to do. But Rabin would not slow down the peace process; instead of putting down his shovel, he began digging even faster. Having begun the process by warning that Arafat's failure to live up to his commitments would result in its reversal (“The wheel can always be turned back”), he continued it, despite PLO violations, by arguing that there was “no alternative.” Eventually, he seems to have convinced himself that his strategy was working, and that Arafat—as Rabin told Kissinger shortly before his murder—had changed. Casting all his doubts aside, he concluded Oslo II—an agreement between Israel and the PLO reached last September, whereby Israel promised to cede control of most Arab-populated cities in the West Bank to the PLO. Having failed to live up to his commitments under Oslo I, a presumably-chastened Arafat would be rewarded with further concessions.

When Oslo II came before the Knesset, Israel's parliament, it passed by the slimmest of margins: 61 to 59. Moreover, the sixty-one votes in favor of the accord included five votes from Arab Knesset members. Without Arab help, Oslo II would have been rejected outright.

Although it is very politically incorrect to say so, Israel's Arab citizens—the ones who live in Israel proper, not the West Bank or Gaza—increasingly identify with the PLO and Hamas, not Israel. As Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote in *The Siege*, his superb history of the conflict, “The Arab population of Israel constitutes that part of the besieging forces which is actually installed inside the citadel.” Those words were written in 1986—a year before the outbreak of the *intifada* that radicalized them even further—yet even then it was clear to O'Brien that Israel's Arabs (close to 20 percent of Israel's total population) had the same relationship to Israel that the Sudetenland Germans had to Czechoslovakia in the 1930's. Today, an Israeli Arab gynecologist, Ahmed Tibi, serves as Arafat's political adviser, and Israeli ministers regularly urge that more money be spent on Israeli Arabs so as not to lose that community's loyalty entirely.

Yet O'Brien made one mistake. Given the hostility of Israel's Arabs, he wrote, “It seems unlikely that the besieged will ever allow the resident section of the besiegers a decisive voice in the conduct of the defense of Israel.” In fact, that is precisely what the Rabin government did. It allowed the most fateful question facing Israel today, the ultimate disposition of the West Bank, to be decided by the Arab members of the Knesset. A more statesmanlike leader would have said at the outset of the vote that, given the incredibly high stakes involved, passage of Oslo II required a supermajority—say, eighty members of the Knesset instead of sixty-one. But Rabin acted like a politician eager to win at any price, rather than like someone who understands that, on the really big issues, how you win matters more than whether you win.

Even as the funeral honored his statesmanship, the Israeli left's strategy for recasting his legacy was emerging. Rabin's initial doubts about the peace process would go unmentioned; he would be canonized as a consistent and unwavering champion of peace. And all those who question the wisdom of going ahead with the peace process would be tarred with Rabin's murder.

“Yes, surely I blame them,” said a grieving Mrs. Rabin, referring to the Likud party. “If you ever heard their speeches at the Knesset, you would understand what I mean. They were very, very violent in their expressions.”

Mrs. Rabin's angry recriminations have been quickly taken up by the Israeli left—and its "amen corner," the American press—which seems to regard Rabin's assassination as a stick with which to beat its right-wing opponents, rather than as a national tragedy that calls for soul-searching and repentance.

The great irony of Rabin's assassination is that, if the world were a rational place, it would immediately be seen as a powerful argument against rushing ahead with the peace process. For even if Rabin was right and Arafat has changed, a bullet could end his life just as easily as it ended Rabin's, or Sadat's, or King Hussein's grandfather's.

In contemplating withdrawal from the West Bank, the operative question is not what Arafat says, or even what he really believes in his heart of hearts. The real question now is what the West Bank's Palestinian inhabitants feel. From all indications, their attitude to Israel has in no way mellowed. A recent poll by the Center for Palestine Research and Studies in Nablus shows that 46 percent of Palestinians support armed attacks against Israel, with only 34 percent opposed to such attacks. Other polls are even more disheartening, and strongly suggest that the peace process is not furthering Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation. Under these circumstances, it's not surprising that even secular Israelis with no particular religious or emotional attachment to the West Bank oppose the withdrawal on security grounds.

Rabin and Peres indirectly acknowledged the reality of widespread Palestinian hostility to Israel. For the peace process to succeed, they repeatedly emphasized, the West, and especially the United States, will have to promote economic development in the West Bank and Gaza through a massive foreign aid program. That way, they argued, the average Palestinian will acquire a stake in peace, and will set aside his murderous passions in exchange for a steady job and a rising income.

What really underlies the peace process, then, is a kind of blind faith in the power of foreign aid to transform deeply-held political attitudes. That Israeli leaders should bet their nation's future on such a bizarre theory is really not that surprising, given Israel's own great dependence on foreign aid. Yet even in Israel's case, a very powerful argument can be

made that, on balance, foreign aid has set back Israeli prospects for economic development. In the case of the Palestinians, it is virtually a foregone conclusion that foreign aid will only serve to solidify the corrupt rule of Arafat and his cronies.

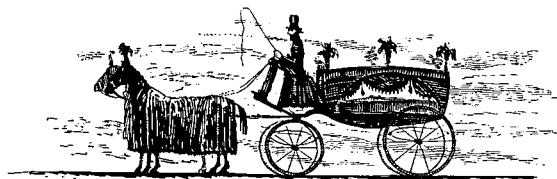
As is so often the case, then, with political assassinations, Rabin's murderer has achieved exactly the opposite of what he intended. Instead of ending the peace

process, he has endowed it with new life; instead of discrediting the left, he has enabled it to occupy the high moral ground. The left is now very much in the saddle in Israel, and since it clearly intends to use its newly-acquired moral capital to push through a policy that most Jewish Israelis simply do not support, it doesn't take a prophet to figure out that Israel's time of troubles has just begun. ❧



SARKES TARZIAN INC

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Broadcasters Making a Difference



by John Von Kannon

An Unsung Midwesterner

Remembering the father of the Adam Smith tie.

Woodburn, Indiana

This self-proclaimed "Smallest City in Indiana" became a temporary Mecca for a hundred or so conservative leaders on a recent Saturday, here to pay their last respects to Don Lipsett—a man Heritage Foundation president Ed Feulner called "the unsung hero of the conservative movement." The conservative ideas that now flow from Washington and the Rush Limbaugh studios in New York began at the grass roots, and Woodburn is nothing if not grass roots. From the cheery sign on Norm's U-DO-IT Center ("Regional Games: Go Jason and Nolan") to the mixed news on the front of the American Legion hall ("No Bingo Saturday. White Mountain Band"), Woodburn is everything Washington can never be.

It is also the birthplace of Don Lipsett, who worked quietly to build the conservative movement for more than three decades. His low-key manner meant that some who knew him underestimated him. In this age of self-promotion, it also meant that he was indeed unsung.

In 1964 conservative organizations could pretty much be counted on one hand—three fingers to be exact: the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), the American Conservative Union (ACU), and *National Review*. Don served on the staff of ISI and ACU, and was a friend of the founders of *National Review*. He knew that if conservative ideas were to recover from the Goldwater defeat, they would need organizations and symbols.

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Don had a taste for both. In 1964 he founded the Philadelphia Society, a gathering of academic, policy, and business people who meet twice a year to discuss conservative philosophy. In the grim days of the late 1960s and the 1970s, it was the Philadelphia Society that held conservatives together. While at Indiana University he founded the Conservative Club, the Beer & Pizza Marching Society, and the Moon Mullins Study Group and Choral Society. All allowed Hoosier conservatives, including the founding staff of this magazine, to get to know one another. Those meetings led to friendships and successes for conservative institutions. For one, it introduced those of us involved in the early days of *The American Spectator* to new writers and new financial supporters.

Don also had a lovely sense of humor. A devoted student of Adam Smith, he founded the Invisible Hand Society, whose exact purpose is unknown, and the Stephen Decatur Shop, procurer of those Adam Smith neckties that flourished during the Reagan administration. Ed Meese rarely appeared in public without his, and, in tribute, most of the men at Don's memorial service wore theirs.

The purpose of Don's organizations was not just to develop and promote ideas and institutions, though they did. He was also working to build a movement, a community of kindred spirits. His purpose was serious, though his style was anything but. During the meetings of the various organizations he founded, Don was never at the podium giving speeches. Instead he would sit quietly in the back of the room, puffing away on

his pipe, and taking notes on odd scraps of paper. Those notes eventually became "A Listing of Important Laws," which he would fax to friends upon request.

Some of my favorites (numbering in the original) show Don's eclectic interests, world view, and sense of humor:

- John Lathrop Ryan's Law of Public Oratory: "Everybody except me speaks too long."
- Rusher's Other Law: "When you find a good thing, run it into the ground."
- James Burnham Law 5: "Whenever there is prohibition, there's a bootlegger."
- James Burnham Law vii: "You can't divorce yourself."
- The Harris Law of Nugatory Achievement. "If a thing isn't worth doing, it isn't worth doing well."
- Mike Mooney's Law: "You can't always count on your friends, but you can always count on your enemies."
- Josh Billings Law: "The fellow who writes the banks' advertisements is not the one who makes the loans."
- The Rt. Hon. Dr. Sir Rhodes Boyson, M.P.'s Third Law: "I wouldn't trust the communists even if I knew they were telling the truth."

Visitors to Don's Michigan home looked forward to long, late nights with him, and no stay was complete without a tour of the town in his vintage Cadillac limousine, once owned by Bill Buckley. The conversation would wander from the state of the conservative movement to the Indiana University basketball team, to news from long-time friends, to the latest hot mutual fund. One always left physically exhausted and emotionally refreshed.

As one of his eulogists put it, "Don Lipsett had the capacity to change lives by putting together relationships and ideas. He cemented them with a unique blend of conviction, humor, and personal loyalty." We will miss him deeply. ❧