

Shamgar Commission Report on the Assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin March 28, 1996

Translation of Commission findings by Roni Eshel
Sources: see below

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on November 4, 1995. Four days later, the Israeli Government appointed a special Commission of Inquiry to investigate events surrounding the assassination. President of the Supreme Court Meir Shamgar chaired the Commission that also included two other members, General (Res.) Zvi Zamir and Professor Ariel Rosen-Zvi. The Commission started its work on November 19, 1995, finally issuing its conclusions and recommendations on March 28, 1996.

Political Background to the Assassination

On September 13, 1993, the Oslo Accords were officially signed on the White House lawn with the participation of President Bill Clinton, Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Yasser Arafat.

Rabin, though not enamored with Yasir Arafat or the PLO, believed it was necessary to provide some international support for the PLO in its rising competition with Hamas. Rabin feared that the Palestinians were slowly being influenced by Iran and particularly radical Islamic militancy. He believed that it was better for Israel to reach some kind of accommodation with the secular element of the Palestinian leadership and, if possible, truncate the status of Hamas. The signing of the Accords and subsequent agreements between Israel and the PLO led to heated political debates in Israel about the future of the territories that Israel secured in the June 1967 War. A significant number of Palestinians despised Arafat for signing an agreement with the country that he had vowed to destroy for most of his life; Hamas and others considered Arafat a traitor to their cause to liberate all of Palestine.

Many Israelis, especially on the political right and those who supported settlement in the territories, expressed their mistrust in the PLO intentions. Many believed that the Palestinians had no intention of ever living in peaceful coexistence next to Israel. Rabin found himself and his government caught between a growing internal opposition to the agreement and had to contend with a series of Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens and civilian targets. The question was asked, "If the PLO had recognized Israel, why was Israel still being subject to terrorism by Palestinians?" Rabin became the tangible target for criticism, with the Likud Party becoming the main opposition to the Accords. A growing number of anti-government rallies were held, many that were increasingly caustic and verbally abusive of Rabin. Rabin was depicted as being removed from traditional Jewish values and called a "traitor" to Israel, despite his previous governmental track record as Chief of Staff during the 1967 War, Ambassador to the United States from 1968-1973, and Prime Minister from 1974-1976. Posters depicted him as wearing an Arab headdress in the fashion of Arafat. Other posters showed him in Nazi uniform, calling him a liar and standing on trial for crimes against peace. In political rallies of the right wing groups, there were instances where mock coffins were carried with Rabin supposedly inside.



Within certain religious communities in the country, opposition to the Accords and Rabin grew. Some rabbis gave sermons against Rabin, condemning the transfer of Jewish land to Palestinian control, which was estimated to be the precursor for the establishment of an eventual Palestinian state alongside Israel. Many of the critical rabbis, who lived in settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, viewed Rabin as the individual who betrayed the biblical Jewish right to control Judea and Samaria. Religious and political leaders inferred that Rabin was a traitor, and therefore became a candidate to be killed because he was endangering by his actions the safety of the general public. More extreme religious factions labelled Rabin “Pulsa De’Nura,” a cursing ceremony in which a prayer is made for a person to die quickly. This cursing ceremony, referred to in Kabala literature, was held against Yitzhak Rabin on October 2, 1995, in front of his official residence in Jerusalem.

The atmosphere of physical, political and verbal violence grew and engulfed the daily life of the Israeli society. The Palestinian terror attacks increased in its intensity and scope. Rabin stood fast amidst all the adversities and despite all the setbacks he reiterated constantly that the process should continue and be fulfilled on the agreed upon gradual steps. Rabin was referred to in the Israeli media, though not by Israeli society as a whole as a “traitor,” a “liar,” a “Nazi” and a “murderer.” Incitement was catalyzed by the Likud Party leadership, which included Benjamin Netanyahu. Rabin’s supporters organized counter demonstrations. The country was shredded by political anger dominated by fiercely held contentious views.

The Assassination

On Saturday evening of November 4, 1995, a demonstration took place in Tel Aviv, with the participation of the leaders of the Labor Party, aimed to assert the need for a negotiating process. Speeches and songs engaged the audience, with Rabin addressing a supportive and cheering crowd. In a brief speech Rabin said, among other things:

Permit me to say that I am deeply moved. I wish to thank each and every one of you, who have come here today to take a stand against violence and for peace. This government, which I am privileged to head, together with my friend Shimon Peres, decided to give peace a chance – a peace that will solve most of Israel's problems.

I was a military man for 27 years. I fought so long as there was no chance for peace. I believe that there is now a chance for peace, a great chance. We must take advantage of it for the sake of those standing here, and for those who are not here – and they are many.

I have always believed that the majority of the people want peace and are ready to take risks for peace. In coming here today, you demonstrate, together with many others who did not come, that the people truly desire peace and oppose violence. Violence erodes the basis of Israeli democracy. It must be condemned and isolated. This is not the way of the State of Israel. In a democracy there can be differences, but the final decision will be taken in democratic elections, as the 1992 elections which gave us the mandate to do what we are doing, and to continue on this course.



I want to say that I am proud of the fact that representatives of the countries with whom we are living in peace are present with us here, and will continue to be here: Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, which opened the road to peace for us. I want to thank the President of Egypt, the King of Jordan, and the King of Morocco, represented here today, for their partnership with us in our march towards peace.

But, more than anything, in the more than three years of this Government's existence, the Israeli people have proven that it is possible to make peace, that peace opens the door to a better economy and society, that peace is not just a prayer. Peace is first of all in our prayers, but it is also the aspiration of the Jewish people, a genuine aspiration for peace.

There are enemies of peace who are trying to hurt us in order to torpedo the peace process. I want to say bluntly that we have found a partner for peace among the Palestinians as well: the PLO, which was an enemy, and has ceased to engage in terrorism. Without partners for peace, there can be no peace. We will demand that they do their part for peace, just as we will do our part for peace, in order to solve the most complicated, prolonged, and emotionally charged aspect of the Israeli-Arab conflict: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

This is a course that is fraught with difficulties and pain. For Israel, there is no path that is without pain. But the path of peace is preferable to the path of war. I say this to you as one who was a military man, someone who is today Minister of Defense and sees the pain of the families of the IDF soldiers. For them, for our children, in my case for our grandchildren, I want this government to exhaust every opening, every possibility, to promote and achieve a comprehensive peace. Even with Syria, it will be possible to make peace.

This rally must send a message to the Israeli people, to the Jewish people around the world, to the many people in the Arab world, and indeed to the entire world, that the Israeli people want peace, support peace. For this, I thank you.

Shortly after the rally/demonstration ended, Rabin left the stage and went towards the back of the municipality building, accompanied by his bodyguards. There was a small gathering of people in the area greeting Rabin. A person approached Rabin from the back and shot three bullets from his pistol – two hit Rabin's back and one hit his personal bodyguard. The Prime Minister, now 73 years old, was fatally wounded and was rushed to a nearby hospital in Tel-Aviv. The assassin, Yigal Amir, a 27-year-old student at Bar-Ilan University later to be identified as an extremely fanatic person, was promptly caught and arraigned.

That same evening at 11:14 PM Rabin's Chief of Staff stepped out to an anxiously awaiting crowd at the entrance to the hospital and announced the passing of Israel's Prime Minister. The Government convened the following day and appointed Shimon Peres to be Rabin's successor as Prime Minister.

Rabin's funeral was held on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem on November 6th. Many heads of state participated in the funeral, including US President Bill Clinton, who ended his eulogy with the Hebrew words, *Shalom Haver* ("good friend"). These two words had a huge impact on the



Israeli public, were quoted continuously, and used in posters and stickers. Rabin's granddaughter, Noa Ben-Artzi, delivered her personal eulogy to her grandfather: *You will forgive me, for I do not want to talk about peace. I want to talk about my grandfather. One always wakes up from a nightmare. But since yesterday, I have only awakened to a nightmare – the nightmare of life without you, and this I cannot bear... Grandfather, you were the pillar of fire before the camp and now we are left as only the camp, alone, in the dark, and it is so cold and sad... I know we are talking in terms of national tragedy, but how can you try to comfort an entire people or include it in your personal pain... Grandfather, you were, and still are, our hero. I want you to know that in all I have ever done, I have always seen you before my eyes. Your esteem and love accompanied us in every step and on every path, and we lived in the light of your values. You never abandoned us, and now they have abandoned you – you, my eternal hero – cold and lonely, and I can do nothing to save you... Having no choice, I part from you, a hero, and ask that you rest in peace, that you think about us and miss us, because we here – down below – love you so much. To the angels of heaven that are accompanying you now, I ask that they watch over you, that they guard you well, because you deserve such a guard...*

The Shamgar Commission

The Commission heard the testimony of 72 witnesses in 61 meetings and produced a report that contained 6,385 pages that included the detailed study of numerous exhibits. The Commission reviewed the systems upon which the General Security Services (GSS) and the police forces were deployed in the light of known threats of possible attempts to murder the Prime Minister. The Commission also examined the steps that were taken immediately following the shooting and the evacuation of the Prime Minister to a nearby hospital. The Commission concluded that the murder was made possible because of lack of cooperation between the various security agencies that were responsible for the overall security measures at the public events.

According to the Commission report the murderer, Yigal Amir, came by bus to the event from his home in the city of Herzlia, situating himself in the parking area where Rabin's car was parked. At one point he even leaned against the car.

At 9:45 PM, Rabin was heading to his car accompanied by five bodyguards. When the group came down the stairs they passed by a small crowd that included the assassin, who took advantage of what seemed to be a gap in the tight security around the Prime Minister and fired three shots. Immediately following the shots a group of security apprehended the assassin. The fatally wounded Prime Minister arrived at the hospital in less than two minutes. According to the physician, Rabin arrived at the emergency room with no pulse and no blood pressure and underwent immediate treatment. But it was all in vain and Rabin died of his fatal wounds.

The Commission directed harsh criticism against those who were in charge of the security measures during and after the event. Head of the GSS Karmi Gillon resigned from his position even before the Commission concluded its work. The Head of the GSS Security Division, responsible for VIP protection, failed to assess the intelligence data and the threat of a Jewish assailant was not sufficiently conveyed to the bodyguards. The Head of the Division, known only by his initials D.Y., resigned from his position even before the appointment of the Commission. As for the Head of the VIP Protection Unit of the GSS, the Commission concluded that he attempted to improve the service conditions and increase the number of positions in his

Unit but he failed to reevaluate the threat versus his available means. The Commission recommended that he should not continue to hold his position in the GSS.

It became clear in the Commission study that what was expected in the area near the parking lot of the Prime Minister's car did not materialize. The Head of the VIP Protection Unit, at the rally itself, failed to adequately tour the parking area to make sure it was cleared of people and stayed that way. He failed to filter the entire area surround the parking place, failed to give sufficient attention to roof from which it was possible to look over the parking area, and did not check the lighting conditions there in real time. Based on its findings, the Commission recommended that this person should not hold a command position in the GSS.

The Commander of the Police Force who was in charge of the protection of the area of the rally and the parking lot was also subjected to the Commission's criticism. Apparently, in placing the police force in the area, the Commander omitted the northern section of the Municipality building that included the parking lot. The Commission recommended that the Commander be censured and that the Commission's comments will be inserted into his personal file.

In its systematic conclusion, the Commission recommended, among other things, the following:

- It should reevaluate the procedures for the cooperation between the Israel Police and the GSS.
- The VIP Protection Unit should double its personnel.
- There was no basis for the conspiracy arguments that were raised regarding the event.

The Commission asserted that *it was not appointed to investigate the circumstances and causes that led to the creation of the social and political culture of which the murder was an expression... the Commission was rightly limited to reviewing the performance of persons and institutional systems that were responsible for the security of the Prime Minister.*

In conclusion, the Commission related to the impact of political assassination in the context of Jewish history: *After the destruction of the First Temple, there was political dispute among the remaining Jews still in the Land of Israel, led by Gedaliah Ben Ahikam. The dispute was decided then through a political assassination (Jeremiah: 40). The Destruction of the Second Temple was also accompanied by bloodshed among brothers... Two thousand years later; we know now to eradicate this bad culture that has arisen amongst us...*

With regards to the impact of the murder on the fabric of the Israeli society the Commission wrote that *since the establishment of the State of Israel the country's strength was manifested in the creation of a balance between the cultivation of force and moral boundaries. Israel prides itself as the sole democracy in the Middle East. This was based on the fact that negative phenomena, such as a political assassination, does not exist in its political culture... It did not occur to us that a gun would determine political calculations and ideological differences. We did not believe that the settlement of such differences is within the range of an assassin's bullet. Three pistol bullets on November 4, 1995, completely refuted those basic beliefs. The State of Israel after the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin will never be the same.*

Five persons stood trial in connection with the assassination, but only Yigal Amir was accused directly of this act. Amir was sentenced to life imprisonment plus six years for wounding Rabin's bodyguard. In an additional trial, together with his brother and his close friend, Dror Adani, he was sentenced to an additional eight years. His brother, Haguay Amir, was sentenced to 12 years in jail for conspiring to murder the Prime Minister and possession of a

weapon. Dror Adani was sentenced to seven years in jail for conspiring to murder the Prime Minister. Avishai Raviv, an agent of the GSS, was put to trial for not preventing the crime, based on the fact that he knew Yigal Amir's intentions but did not report this to the GSS. He was found not guilty.

In 1997, the Knesset enacted A Day of Remembrance for Yitzhak Rabin . During the Hebrew date (the 12th day of the Month of *Heshvan*) of his assassination, Israel's official and education institutions commemorate his memory in various fashions and programs.

Sources: Shamgar Commission

Noa Ben-Artzi's eulogy:

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1995/11/Rabin%20Eulogy%20by%20Noa%20Ben-Artzi

President Bill Clinton's eulogy:

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1995/11/Rabin%20Eulogy-%20President%20Clinton

Summary of the Shamgar Report:

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1996/3/Report%20of%20Commission%20of%20Inquiry%20into%20Murder%20of%20Lat

Yigal Amir's sentencing decision:

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1996/3/Excerpts%20of%20Yigal%20Amir%20Sentencing%20Decision%20-%20March

Video recording taken by a by-stander of the murder:

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7368409094401324350#> cannot get this one to open

Sample of the incitements against Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin:

<http://noal.org.il/gallery/show/103582>