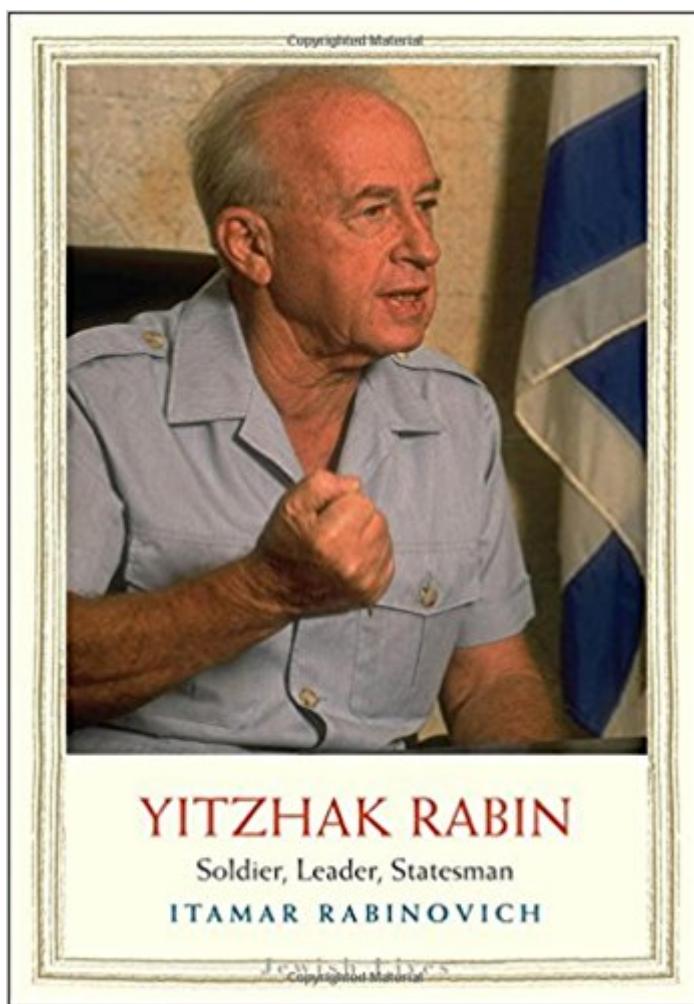


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Yitzhak Rabin: Soldier, Leader, Statesman (Jewish Lives)



Synopsis

An insider's perspective on the life and influence of Israel's first native-born prime minister, his bold peace initiatives, and his tragic assassination. More than two decades have passed since prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995, yet he remains an unusually intriguing and admired modern leader. A native-born Israeli, Rabin became an inextricable part of his nation's pre-state history and subsequent evolution. This revealing account of his life, character, and contributions draws not only on original research but also on the author's recollections as one of Rabin's closest aides. An awkward politician who became a statesman, a soldier who became a peacemaker, Rabin is best remembered for his valiant efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for the Oslo Accords. Itamar Rabinovich provides extraordinary new insights into Rabin's relationships with powerful leaders including Bill Clinton, Jordan's King Hussein, and Henry Kissinger, his desire for an Israeli-Syrian peace plan, and the political developments that shaped his tenure. The author also assesses the repercussions of Rabin's murder: Netanyahu's ensuing election and the rise of Israel's radical right wing.

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Customer Reviews

"Mr. Rabinovich, the distinguished Israeli scholar and diplomat. . . . easily establishes that the prime minister was a man of great complexity. . . . Even the warm esteem in which he holds Rabin does not prevent Mr. Rabinovichâ•a scholar with an abiding commitment to historical

accuracy. "from presenting a portrait of his friend in full." Elliott Abrams, *Wall Street Journal* "Rabinovich's language is lean, precise, devoid of embellishment and reminds me of the way Rabin himself used to talk: dugri, as we say in Hebrew, straightforward, to the point." In an era when language is being abused for political purposes and agendas, Rabinovich's book is a breath of fresh air. Uri Dromi, *Times Literary Supplement* "Puts the complexities of [Rabin's] career and achievement in fresh perspective." Kirkus Reviews "This well-written, easily digestible biography also provides useful insights into the inner workings of Israeli politics." Booklist "Rabinovich's biography of Rabin is clear and objective. It is the work of a man who has substantial scholarly credentials—he currently heads the Israel Institute think tank—and who worked with Rabin in his efforts to make peace with Syria. The author describes Rabin's meticulous attention to detail and his insistence on careful planning, which were both the late prime minister's greatest assets and greatest faults. In the end, as this book makes clear, Rabin was not a dreamer but a realist, not a bold thinker but a careful planner, not a charismatic leader but an often intemperate and undiplomatic head of state." Rabbi Jack Reimer, *Jewish News Service* "Rabinovich is a distinguished historian of the Middle East . . . His book tells a very revealing story that ties the arc of Rabin's life to the course of Israel's history from the pre-State period to the 1990s." Dennis Ross, *Jewish Review of Books* "Rabinovich's book transports readers back to a time when a much different Middle East seemed possible, an all-too-brief window when regional tranquility wasn't a far-off notion or a dark punchline. But Rabinovich's book also makes the important case that nothing was ever as simple or straightforward as it now may seem to have been—starting with Rabin himself." Armin Rosen, *Tablet* "Rabinovich has produced an immensely engaging study of Yitzhak Rabin. The subtitle, 'Soldier, Leader, Statesman,' captures the focus of Rabinovich's insightful narrative . . . It is certainly required reading for anyone interested in Israel and the Middle East today." America Magazine "[This] compelling tome adds new layers to the story of one of Israel's most well-known and admired leaders, thanks to original research and unique personal recollections . . . The author offers new insights into Rabin's relationships with leaders such as Bill Clinton, Henry Kissinger and King Hussein of Jordan, as well as a sophisticated analysis on the repercussions of his murder that echo to this day." St. Louis Jewish Light "Yitzhak Rabin was a soldier and a statesman who fought for the security of Israel and for a concept of peace for all nations. Itamar Rabinovich has written a thoughtful and extraordinarily comprehensive account of a significant

leader. • Henry A. Kissinger writes: "Itamar Rabinovich has written an insightful book on Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's charismatic warrior-statesman who valiantly dedicated himself to the cause of peace in the Middle East. As the head of Rabin's team during Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations and as Israel's ambassador in Washington, Rabinovich was at Rabin's side during key moments in his country's history. I recommend his book to all those interested in peace between Arabs and Israelis. • James A. Baker, III writes: "This highly informative and tightly-packed biography is undergirded by a deep personal knowledge of Rabin's strengths and flaws as a leader and a sure command of Israel's military and diplomatic history. • Derek Penslar, Harvard University and the University of Toronto

Itamar Rabinovich is president of The Israel Institute (Washington, D.C., and Tel Aviv); Global Distinguished Professor, New York University; and Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow, Brookings Institution. He is a former president of Tel Aviv University and was Rabin's ambassador in Washington and chief negotiator with Syria.

This biography of Yitzak Rabin by Itamar Rabinovitch (professor, university president, and colleague of Rabin) is another excellent addition to Yale University Press' "Jewish Lives" series. The author has crafted a well-written overview of the life of an important Israeli military and political leader. Beginning with Rabin's birth in Jewish Palestine (He would become the first native-born prime minister of Israel.), Rabinovitch examines Rabin's education, time in the Palmach during the War of Independence, transfer after the war to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), rise to the position of chief of staff prior to the Six-Day War of June 1967, successful tour as Israeli ambassador to the United States, entry into politics and failed prime ministership, rehabilitation, and second role as prime minister. His second prime ministership saw an agreement with Yasir Arafat and the Palestinians and a treaty with Jordan. Rabin's peace efforts culminated in his assassination on 4 November 1995. Rabin was no dove; his willingness to make concessions for peace was based on the nation's security needs. The author deals adeptly with the long-running feud between Rabin and Simon Peres for leadership of the Labor Party. Ironically, at the point which both men decided that they could accomplish more by working together with Rabin as leader of the Labor Party and Peres as second in leadership. Rabinovitch is at his best in the section on

Rabin's assassination and its aftermath. A number of people both within and outside of Israel believed that the heated rhetoric over the Oslo Accords, especially from the West Bank settlers and the religious right, would likely result in an attempt on Rabin's life. A number of Israelis put the "Land of Israel" above the "State of Israel." They labeled Rabin a traitor to Israel and the Jewish people, even sanctioning his murder based on an old Jewish law. Likud politician Benjamin Netanyahu (the current prime minister) poured gasoline on the fire, but after Rabin's assassination, he distanced himself from any blame for helping create this volatile atmosphere. The assassin was a religious radical. The investigation of the assassination, however, ignored the assassin's religious and political views, concentrating instead on the security lapses. Peres became prime minister and continued peace talks with the Palestinians and Syria. Instead of having an immediate election, he waited six months. Two weeks before the vote, Hamas attacks killed nearly 60 Israelis in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, convincing many Israelis that the Palestinians could not be trusted to police their own people. These acts of terror returned Likud to power, the country began a move to the right, and the peace process was gradually discarded. Peace today is much harder to achieve than in 1995 because West Bank settlements have expanded and new ones have been added. The author concludes that

Rabin's death was a watershed for Israel because in the end the assassin and his camp were in fact rewarded for the crime. (239) I would have liked to have seen more citations. Two points here. First, in the "Acknowledgments" the author mentions the benefit of personal interviews and conversations with a large number [40] of individuals. (252) These interviews are only referenced in one endnote. Thus, how did these interviews benefit Rabinovitch? Second, in the section on the Entebbe raid (128-32), only two sources are cited—Rabin Memoirs and Amos Shifris's First Government, 1974-1977. Surely a biography of Peres or Yoni Netanyahu (the only IDF fatality at Entebbe) or Saul David's Operation Thunderbolt could have added something to this section. Nevertheless, this concern does not detract from an otherwise first-rate biography of Rabin. If I could, I would give the book 4.5 stars, but since the choice is a 4 or 5, I went with 4.

Yitzhak Rabin: Soldier, Leader, Statesman by Itamar Rabinovich is a biography of the famous Israeli politician. Mr. Rabinovich is a political operative who worked with Mr. Rabin. This biography of the

Israeli persona, an account of Mr. Rabin's career and life as a soldier and statesman. Mr. Rabinovich worked with Mr. Rabin late in his career and even held the same post, that of Israel's ambassador to the United States. The book's most impressive part comes as a first-person account of Mr. Rabin's second term as the Israeli Prime Minister. The author was witness to history and his narrative is fascinating, the insights are thoughtful, and the deductions are enlightening. I still remember the day that Mr. Rabin passed away from an assassin's bullet. I was not in Israel, but on a comfortable couch in New Jersey, however I felt as if I was in another world. After all Israel, "the light to be cast unto the nations" as David Ben-Gurion (Israel's first Prime Minister) said, is not a country where political leaders are assassinated. At the time no one understood how such a tragedy could happen. A Jewish Prime Minister, assassinated by a Jewish man, in a Jewish state, surrounded by bodyguards and an adoring crowd. Mr. Rabinovich wrote an outstanding summary which attempts to inform the reader of the complex circumstances which allowed a man to feel as if he was permitted to pull the trigger and murder a person in cold blood. Putting his emotions to the side, the author's analysis is straightforward and thoughtful. The author talks about Mr. Rabin's many achievements, as well as his failures, his personality traits (both positive and negative), and the person he was, not just the public figure. The book is engrossing and an important primary source for future generations to study.

Itamar Rabinovich's brilliant account of Yitzhak Rabin's life and career is both a masterly historical monograph and a gripping first-person account of Rabin's second term as Israeli prime minister. Given that Rabinovich worked intimately with Rabin during those epochal final years, eventually in Rabin's own former position as Israel's Ambassador to the United States, these latter sections of the book are not only a page-turning treat for the general reader but will, one assumes, comprise an important primary source for historians and political scientists as well. The book also contains the most trenchant summary I've read of the complex, ultimately lethal circumstances that underlay and permitted Rabin's assassination, an analysis that is no less heartbreakingly sober and clear-eyed. The book, though inevitably pierced through with a sense of loss and of what might have been, leaves one with at least some hope that Rabin's indomitability, along with his biographer's sensitivity and intellectual rigor, will prevail in the end.

I read this book with great pleasure and interest. It's a realistic biography of the life of Rabin by a knowledgeable writer who has worked together with Rabin. It teaches us not only about his life, his character and his achievements and failures, but also about the political climate in Israel and the USA during his period. I do recommend this book very much.

In addition to providing detailed insights into Rabin's life and times, Rabinovich's book exhibits the kind of first-hand knowledge that can only come from direct involvement with the man and the events. At times I felt I was being brought into the room to watch events unfold, leaders interact, and important national and international decisions be taken.

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