

What Rabin Knew: Peace Takes The Courage To Change Axioms

by Harley Schlanger

The dangerous policies of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) leadership, which have devolved into a “scorched-earth” policy against Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA), were contrasted by Lynndon LaRouche on Dec. 9 against the effective approach taken by Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin, during his second stint as Prime Minister of Israel (from July 1992, until his assassination on Nov. 4, 1995) was relentless in his efforts to achieve a just, lasting peace with the Palestinian leader. He knew, as LaRouche has recently insisted, that Israel would be destroyed, eventually, by the policy that Sharon represents.

Rabin learned this lesson the hard way, by changing his fundamental axioms of thinking in response to the responsibilities of command leadership. Breaking with the assumption of the “Zionist fascist,” Vladimir Jabotinsky, Rabin gave Israel a quality of leadership, in search of her security, which Sharon rejects outright.

Sharon says that his murderous brutality is Israel’s only option for national security. He argues that Arafat is a terrorist, and the PA and its police and security apparatus aid and abet the Hamas terrorists who strike against Israel (though Sharon helped create Hamas to counter Arafat’s Palestine Liberation Organization). Since Arafat, according to Sharon and the IDF, uses terrorism as part of a broad strategy to destroy Israel, Israel has no choice but to launch violent attacks against the PA, “to protect Israeli lives.”

Sharon’s actions are leading not to security, but to an ongoing cycle of bloody retribution. The only end of this cycle is either the complete capitulation by a defeated Palestinian population to Israeli military domination, or the expulsion of the majority of them from “Greater Israel.” Sharon’s preference is to push them into Jordan, which he would proclaim the “Palestinian state,” thus plunging Jordan into unremitting destabilization.

The actual outcome of his policy, if it is not stopped, will be a horrific religious war, which will count many, many Israeli Jews among its victims.

Jabotinsky And The ‘Iron Wall’

For years, Sharon has been a devoted follower of the fascist doctrine of Vladimir Jabotinsky, who was a self-professed admirer of Mussolini. Jabotinsky, called “Vlad Hitler” by Israeli founding father David Ben-Gurion, set out a doc-

trine for relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs in a 1923 document, “On the Iron Wall.” He wrote that the prospect for peace between the Palestinian Arabs and the Jews depended on Arab acceptance of Zionism.

“A voluntary agreement between us and the Arabs of Palestine is inconceivable now or in the foreseeable future,” he asserted. Therefore, Jewish settlement could develop only “under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an iron wall which they [the Arabs] will be powerless to break down.” By “iron wall,” Jabotinsky meant a Jewish military force strong enough to break Arab resistance to the Zionist presence in Palestine. Once the opposition was broken and acquiescence to Zionism was attained, it would be possible to negotiate with the Arab population.

While Ben-Gurion opposed this view, and had hopes that the Palestinian Arabs would accept the terms of the United Nations partition plan of November 1947, and form a state alongside Israel, the Arab rejection of partition led to a war in 1948, followed by an uneasy and unsatisfactory stalemate, which lasted until 1967.

Israel’s decisive victory in the June 1967 war, and its seizure of the West Bank and Jerusalem, precipitated unhealthy developments reflecting Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall,” which are at the heart of the problems today. It unleashed a triumphalism with strong messianic overtones, spawned the settlers’ movement and the ultra-religious movement, both of which proclaim that the territories seized in that war constitute the “holy soil” of “Greater Israel,” which must never be relinquished.

Two miscalculations arose from the victory in that war, both of which come directly from the “Iron Wall” theory. These became the axioms that have guided Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians since 1967.

The first is a political axiom: that the Palestinians in the occupied territories have no choice but to acquiesce to Israeli rule, and to give up any hope of ever achieving statehood, accepting dependence on Israel for their economic well-being. The second is a military axiom: Any Palestinian upsurge must be crushed with an iron fist, and Israeli security forces should impose “collective punishment” to discourage rebellion. This includes destroying, or sealing off the homes of those suspected of engaging in anti-Israeli activity, shutting off electricity and phone service, firing people, etc.



The late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1993. As Israeli Defense Forces commander against the 1987 Intifada, Rabin learned the hard way, that his “iron fist” policy toward the Palestinians was doomed to failure: a lesson that Ariel Sharon appears incapable of learning. Here, a family seen amid the desperate poverty of Gaza, in 1993.

Rabin And The Intifada

The first serious challenge to these axioms emerged in December 1987, with the uprising known as the “Intifada.” The explosive intensity of the Intifada grew out of the poverty and misery which characterized the lives of most Palestinians, combined with the effects of 20 years of humiliation as an occupied, powerless people. In response, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir declared that Israel’s existence was at stake, and authorized harsh measures to suppress it, including assassination, deportation, mass arrests, curfews, and punitive economic measures.

The job of crushing the Intifada was entrusted to his Defense Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. Though Rabin was from the opposition Labor Party, which was in a coalition government with Shamir’s Likud at the time, Rabin agreed with Shamir, that suppressing the Intifada required the iron fist.

At first, IDF troops used live ammunition against the demonstrators, who were mostly youths armed only with stones, inflicting many fatal wounds. Conscious of the public-relations black eye for Israel which resulted, Rabin ordered his troops to “break their bones” with clubs, instead of shooting them. He expressed surprise when he discovered that soldiers beating young men with clubs in front of cameras did not improve Israel’s image. Still, he issued stern warnings, telling the Knesset (parliament), “They won’t obtain a single thing via the threat of war, terrorism, or violent disturbances. . . . The main problem at present is to enforce order, with all the sorrow and pain over loss of life on the Arab side. Whoever goes to violent demonstrations is placing himself in danger.”

But the Intifada continued unabated. Rabin realized that the “iron fist” axiom would not work. Historian Avi Shlaim writes in *The Iron Wall*, that Rabin and the IDF were soon

confronted with a devastating paradox: “It was precisely this kind of arrogant and aggressive attitude that had provoked the uprising in the first place. In the end, it was the [Palestinian] residents of the territories themselves who demonstrated to Rabin that military force was part of the problem rather than a solution.”

Rabin received the same message from troops deployed to crush the rebellion. A senior officer under Rabin told Israeli journalists Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, “I console myself with the thought that this punishment may lessen the violence, but deep in my heart I know that what we are doing will prompt others to react against us violently in revenge” (Schiff and Ya’ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel’s Third Front*).

It was soon evident to Rabin that the idea that Israel could sustain a “benevolent occupation” was a delusion. Further, the suppression of the uprising was having profoundly negative effects on IDF personnel, as they were becoming desensitized by the experience. An IDF officer told Schiff, “At first, I was shaken by every Arab death, especially if a child had been killed. But the more time passed and the more people died, the more I noticed that I wasn’t reacting anymore, that I just didn’t care. . . . I had become calloused, just like everyone else. We all underwent a change to one degree or another during our duty in the territories.”

Rabin’s widow Leah wrote in her memoir, *Rabin: Our Life, His Legacy*, that the inability to put down the rebellion without resorting to unacceptable tactics changed her husband. “The Intifada made it wholly clear to Yitzhak that Israel could not govern another people.” By 1989, she continues, he “was gradually moving toward advocating Palestinian autonomy and self-determination.”

Rabin And Oslo

With a strong mandate making him Prime Minister in the June 1992 elections, Rabin made it clear immediately, that peace with the Palestinians required overturning previously held beliefs. On July 13, 1992, when presenting his cabinet to the Knesset, Rabin attacked the axiom that Israel is a weak, vulnerable state surrounded by a hostile world. "Their answer to this sense of permanent threat" he said, referring to Shamir and the Likud leaders, "was to build up Greater Israel as a citadel for the entire Jewish people." He said he would not support the expansion of "political settlements," (i.e., those built by extremists trying to hold onto the occupied territories by expanding Israel's borders).

He continued, hitting other entrenched views of Israel's political and military elite: "We shall change the national order of priorities. Israel is no longer necessarily an isolated nation, nor is it correct that the entire world is against us. We must rid ourselves of the isolation that has gripped us almost for half a century."

With this speech, Rabin returned to the concept of Zionism put forward by Jabotinsky's opponent Ben-Gurion, who argued that Israel must offer European Jews the opportunity to escape the isolation of the European ghettos. For Ben-Gurion, this goal was as important as establishing Israel as a safe haven for Jews to escape the misery that anti-Semitism had inflicted upon them.

Rabin, in that same speech, said that he no longer believed that security for Israel was dependent primarily on military power. "Security is not a tank, an aircraft, a missile ship. Security is also a man's education, housing, schools, the street and neighborhood, the society in which he grew up. And security is also that man's hope."

Together with his former rival in the Labor Party, Shimon Peres, whom he appointed Foreign Minister, Rabin continued to reject the axioms of the past. Though he remained suspicious of Arafat and the PLO, in December 1992, his government repealed a six-year-old law which prohibited contact between Israeli citizens and the PLO. This cleared the way for the secret meetings between aides of Shimon Peres and Arafat, beginning February 1993 in Oslo, which led to the Oslo Accords.

Peres convinced Rabin that peace was not possible as a "political" policy, but required an economic component to cement an agreement. By including joint economic ventures in the agreement, there would be added incentive for both sides to maintain peace. Peres stated, "To construct a political staircase without economic banisters is to take the risk that people will begin to climb, only to fall off before they reach the top." Here Peres reflected the ideas of Lyndon LaRouche, whose "Oasis Plan"—presented to Peres by LaRouche in the early 1980s—was just such an economic development approach.

Oslo included detailed plans for Israeli-Palestinian water—including desalination—energy, industry, and agricul-

tural infrastructure. These Economic Protocols were never carried out, sabotaged by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which evidently preferred war to the investments required by peace.

Rabin waged a relentless fight against those who would derail the peace process. Between December 1992 and the signing of the Declaration at the White House in September 1993, Hamas launched several waves of terror. In a televised address on Dec. 15, Peres answered his critics, who demanded that negotiations be stopped due to the terrorism. "Why has there been an increase in shooting incidents in recent months?" he asked. "I have no doubt that those who propose this action are . . . the ones who want to kill Israelis, and also the peace and the chance to achieve peace." He would not allow them to do so.

In response to critics who said he should not have shaken Arafat's hand at the White House ceremony, nor proclaimed Arafat a "partner in peace," as he has been an enemy of Israel, Rabin scoffed, saying "You make peace with your enemies, not with your friends." It was this side of Rabin which was in evidence at the Sept. 13, 1993 White House ceremony. He surprised nearly everyone when he addressed Arafat and the Palestinian people directly: "We who have come from a land where parents bury their children, we who have fought against you, the Palestinians, we say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears, enough!"

Later that evening, Rabin proposed a toast to all who participated in the Oslo negotiations, asking that they tip their glasses to "those with the courage to change axioms."

Rabin's Legacy Vs. Sharon's Fascism

Rabin was murdered by a fanatic who had been nurtured in the noxious swamp populated by extremist rabbis and crazy settlers who still cling to the fascist beliefs propagated by Jabotinsky. At his funeral, U.S. President Bill Clinton delivered a moving tribute to his friend: "Your Prime Minister," he told the people of Israel, "was a martyr for peace, but he was a victim of hate. Surely, we must learn from his martyrdom that if people cannot let go of the hatred for their enemies, they risk sowing the seeds of hatred among themselves."

Sharon's actions of late demonstrate that he has learned nothing from Rabin's example, and that he is more than willing to plunge the region into war, with the possibility of millions of Palestinian, Arab, and Israeli casualties, rather than give up the discredited axioms of the pre-Oslo period.

The potential for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, which resulted from Rabin's break from those axioms, has been nearly obliterated by the assault against the peace process, first by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and now by Sharon. Given the sorry state of internal politics in Israel, it will require a strong intervention from outside the region, to prevent a new Holocaust from occurring.