



Mor Altshuler

VIEWPOINT

The Civil War

EVERY ISRAELI REMEMBERS WHERE HE OR SHE was when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. I was in Washington, D.C., where my husband was serving at the Israel Embassy. Fearfully, I followed the news reports about the shooting; when they announced that Rabin was dead, I felt sheer panic.

I wasn't the only one. When my husband came to work, a friend whispered, "Hunting season has begun." That man had been a senior officer in the IDF and had been decorated for bravery in the Yom Kippur War, but, on that day, he was trembling with fear. During the British Mandate, his father had been a member of the Irgun, one of the separatist groups that had refused to accept the authority of the socialist Hagana, the militia composed largely of supporters of David Ben-Gurion's Mapai Party. His father had told him about the "hunting season" – those years from 1944-1945 when the Hagana had persecuted the members of the break-away groups, turning them over to the British.

My father and uncle had been members of the Irgun, and I, too, was afraid that it would be open hunting season again. Indeed, several days after Rabin was assassinated, a friend called from Israel and told me that my father had been accused of supporting the assassination and that a member of the government had put his name on a list of provocateurs who should be imprisoned.

My father, who had fought in all the wars from the War of Independence to the Yom Kippur War, was well-known for his opposition to the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians. Friends and acquaintances in the small town in which we lived organized a petition, calling on him to resign from his position as town secretary – a volunteer position. My father wasn't arrested and he continued to volunteer as the town secretary for many more years. In 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister, and my husband and I returned to Israel.

We felt more at ease, but I cannot forget the sense of terror and persecution. And today, we still do not distinguish between legitimate opposition to the Oslo Accords and incitement to murder. To this day, the role that the Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet) played in the general atmosphere of incitement that preceded the murder has not been revealed. I believe that there were many on the right side of the political map who didn't scream, "Rabin is a traitor," and didn't abuse the halachic term *din rodef* to justify his assassination. And I believe that in their hearts, they are infuriated that their democratic opposition to the political steps taken by Rabin are viewed as complicit with or support for that assassination.

How ironic: Many of Rabin's supporters feel that the people and the country that they believe in have betrayed them, and that the shots fired by Yigal Amir killed the peace process, too.

What would have happened if Rabin had not been assassinated? Would he have had the power to stop the Palestinian terror and bring



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the Palestinians to enter into a course of real peace negotiations? Perhaps he would have brought the entire process to a halt. Quite likely, he would have lost the elections to Benjamin Netanyahu, just like Shimon Peres did, and would have stepped off the political stage.

As a historian, I know that questions of "what if?" are not relevant. The Oslo Accords opened the gates to the horrendous Palestinian terror that killed thousands of Israelis. We refer to them as "the victims of peace." Yasser Arafat refused Ehud Barak's offers in Camp David in the summer of 2000 and began another wave of terror and murder of innocent civilians. Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas, did not respond to then-prime minister Ehud Olmert's generous offers. As prime minister, Arik Sharon unilaterally evacuated the Gaza Strip and allowed Hamas to take control. The terror coming from Gaza led to the Cast Lead Operation and the Goldstone Report. We've also experienced a bloody war on our northern border.

And ever since Rabin's assassination, our situation in our domestic arena has deteriorated, too. Discourse in Israel has become more violent and less tolerant. Secularists and haredim openly detest each other; Palestinian citizens of Israel do not recognize the State of the Jews and the Jews respond with racism and extremism. The level of internal hatred grows constantly higher, proving that we have not managed to deal with the national trauma caused by Rabin's murder.

Indeed, we have not learned the necessary lessons: that in the struggles between left and right in Israel, no one side is completely right. Both sides must engage each other in dialogue before we even begin to negotiate with a third side.

The assassination of Rabin did not merely indicate that civil war could break out in Israel. It was a civil war – a violent struggle in which one man was murdered and the borders that are intended to separate ideological and political disagreements from bloodshed and self-destruction were breached. ●

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