
Clinton Presidential Records Mandatory Declassification Review

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Shimon PERES
(Phonetic: PEHress)

ISRAEL

Prime Minister, Minister of Defense (since November 1995)

DECLASSIFIED IN PART
PER E. O. 13526

Addressed as: Mr. Prime Minister 3.5c



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Longtime Labor Party politician Shimon Peres became Prime Minister for the second time following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995. According to 1.4c, 1.4d press reporting, the spate of terrorist bombings inside Israel has disintegrated the generally positive reviews Peres won from the Israeli public immediately after the assassination. These reports say the Israeli public remains polarized over the peace process

1.4c, 1.4d

 Israel is scheduled to hold prime-ministerial and Knesset elections on 29 May 1996. Public opinion polls taken before the early 3 March bombing in Jerusalem showed Peres and his leading opponent, Likud Party chairman Binyamin Netanyahu, in a virtual tie. 3.5c

Labor's Leading Dove 3.5c

According to 1.4c, 1.4d Israeli press reports, Peres has sought to unite diverse domestic constituencies with his Cabinet choices, which include members of his party's hawkish wing and moderate members of Israel's religious community. Peres brings vast government experience to his post—he served previously as Foreign Minister (1992-November 1995), Finance Minister (1988-90), Prime Minister (1984-86), and Defense Minister (1973-77). 3.5c

Peres has long been more willing to compromise on the West Bank and Gaza Strip than many other members of the Labor Party have been, according to 1.4c, 1.4d press accounts. He was an early supporter of negotiations with the Palestinians, and, as Foreign Minister, worked closely with PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. He shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 with Arafat and Rabin for their joint efforts in bringing about the Gaza-Jericho accord on limited Palestinian autonomy, which was signed in September 1993. Peres was an architect of the interim agreement on Palestinian self-rule signed by Rabin and Arafat in September 1995. Peres's public statements since becoming Prime Minister suggest that he has been more eager than Rabin was to accelerate peace talks with the Syrians. 3.5c

1.4c, 1.4d

1.4c, 3.5c

1.4c, 1.4d, 3.5c

Career and Personal Data 3.5c

Peres was born on 15 August 1923 in Vishneva, Poland (now Belarus). He immigrated to Palestine in 1934. During the 1940s he was a member of Haganah, the prestate underground army, and he became a protege of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister. From 1950 until 1952, Peres was chief of the Ministry of Defense Supply Mission in New York; he also studied at Harvard University and at the New School for Social Research. Peres became a Knesset member in 1959. As director general of the Ministry of Defense during 1953-65 and later as Deputy Minister, he was active in expanding and modernizing Israel's military industry. 3.5c

Peres resigned from the Defense Ministry in 1965 to concentrate on party matters. In the late 1960s he rejoined the government, and during 1969-77 he served successively as Minister Without Portfolio (with special responsibility for the occupied

territories), Minister of Transportation and Communications, and Minister of Defense. 3.5c

In 1984, Peres gained the prime-ministership under a rotation arrangement with Yitzhak Shamir that set up a Likud-Labor national unity government. During his term, the Israeli press widely credited Peres with several accomplishments, including the introduction of an economic stabilization program, a large-scale troop withdrawal from Lebanon, and an improvement in relations with Egypt. In 1986 he switched places with Shamir to become Foreign Minister. He was appointed Finance Minister in 1988 during the second unity government. 3.5c

1.4c, 1.4d, 3.5c

Peres underwent successful prostate surgery in early 1989; since then he has been hospitalized twice with urinary tract infections, according to the press. He speaks English, French, and Hebrew. Peres is an avid reader and has published several books. He is married and has three children. In October 1992, Peres's wife, Sonia, suffered a heart attack, according to press reports. 3.5c

1.4c, 3.5c

Ezer WEIZMAN

(Phonetic: VITESmahn)

President (since 1993)

Addressed as: Mr. President 3.5c

I have no executive power, but I have the power of influence.

Weizman, on the presidency, 1994

Ezer Weizman plays an active role in Israeli political life despite having little official authority in policy decisionmaking. He has transcended the mostly ceremonial duties of the presidency by casting himself as the people's president and by making frequent visits to local communities to discuss the concerns of the man on the street, according to Israeli media reports.

1.4c, 1.4d, 3.5c

Weizman does not hesitate to speak out on controversial political issues even when it contradicts government policy, according to press reporting. In the past, the press frequently criticized Weizman for pursuing a foreign policy agenda independent of the government's, including proposing his own Arab-Israeli peace plan and undertaking unsanctioned diplomatic missions.

In recent years, his reactions to Palestinian terrorist attacks have been among the harshest of any Israeli official. After the February and March 1996 suicide bombings in several Israeli cities, he publicly called for a suspension of the peace process. Weizman also demanded that PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat immediately annul the Palestinian charter. He also said that Israel must launch an "all-out offensive" against terrorism.

3.5c

Weizman is popular in Israel as one of the last of the country's great founding soldier-statesmen, according to Israeli commentators. They note that,

1.4c, 3.5c

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although his foreign affairs duties are largely representational, Weizman's stature has made him useful as an alternative foreign policy interlocutor with Arab states. For example, in December 1994 Weizman traveled to Cairo, where he appealed to Egyptian officials to drop their demand that Israel sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a condition of Egypt's signing

1.4c, 1.4d

Seeking the Epicenter 3.5c

During his career Weizman has typically sought out and played instrumental roles at key turning points in Israeli military and political history. As both the father of the Israeli air force and a former air force Chief of Staff, he is generally credited with developing the air power strategy crucial to Israel's victory in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. In 1977 Weizman, then the Likud bloc's campaign manager, orchestrated Likud's first Knesset election victory, overturning nearly 30 years of Labor Party dominance. In 1980 he bolted the Likud Party and, after briefly heading his own Yahad Party, joined the Labor Party in 1984.

3.5c

Weizman, who made a dramatic political conversion from hawk to dove in the late 1970s, speaks his mind bluntly on peace issues without apparent regard for his party affiliation. Many of Weizman's close associates attributed his conversion to the hurt he felt when his only son,

(continued) LP 96-103639 11 March 1996

1.4c, 1.4d, 3.5c

Shaul was seriously injured on the Egyptian front in the early 1970s. As a Likud-government Minister of Defense during 1977-80, he was instrumental in the negotiations between Israel and Egypt that led to the 1978 Camp David accords. More recently [1.4c, 1.4d] he opposed the interim agreement Israel reached with the Palestinians in September 1995 because it was concluded too hastily. [3.5c]

Career and Personal Data [3.5c]

Weizman was born in 1924 in Tel Aviv. He joined the British Royal Air Force as a ground

crewman at the outbreak of World War II and eventually won his pilot's wings and an officer's commission. After the war he studied aeronautics in the United Kingdom for a year before returning to what was then British Mandate Palestine. He headed the air branch of Haganah—a prestate Jewish underground organization—and was instrumental in acquiring aircraft and in organizing the Israeli air force. After independence Weizman held a number of positions of increasing responsibility in the IDF, including those of air force commander and IDF Deputy Chief of Staff.

[3.5c]

After retiring from active duty in 1969, Weizman joined the Gahal Party (precursor of the Likud Party) and served in then Prime Minister (1969-74) Golda Meir's unity government as Minister of Transport and Communications. In 1970 he resigned from the government in order to form an aviation parts company. He remained active in Likud and reentered politics full-time in 1977 as its campaign manager, subsequently serving as Minister of Defense under then Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Weizman resigned from that post in 1980 after charging Begin with hampering the peace process. During 1980-84, Weizman was again active in private business. [3.5c]

Weizman's support for Labor's efforts to form a coalition after Knesset elections in 1984 won him the largely ceremonial post of Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister in the Labor-Likud unity government formed that year. Weizman was Minister of Science and Technology from 1989 until 1990. He resigned suddenly from the Knesset and party politics in 1992, claiming that then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir had missed opportunities to forward the peace process. [3.5c]

[1.4c, 1.4d, 3.5c]

Weizman speaks English. He and his wife, Reuma, have a daughter, Michal. The Weizmans' son died in an auto accident in 1991. Weizman is the nephew of Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president. [3.5c]