

Israel says goodbye to Peres

By [Luke Rix-Standing](#)

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Image: Chatham House

On 28 September the man called ‘the last founding father of Israel’ passed away at the age of 92. Shimon Peres was an ex-President and Prime Minister of Israel, and one of the last survivors from its foundation in 1948. Elected to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in 1959, he retired in 2014, 12 cabinets, and nearly 70 years later.

His death prompted tributes from fellow world leaders, including Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Perhaps most notably of all Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the Palestinian Authority, attended the funeral – his first entry to Jerusalem in nearly 20 years.

But Peres’ reputation as a unifier owes little to his early career; initially a hawkish military man, he was a protégé of David Ben-Gurion in the 1940s. It was only during his middle age that he mellowed politically, and produced his two most celebrated achievements: the Oslo Accords of 1992 and the Israel-Jordan peace process of 1994. For the former – a peace treaty between Israel and the PLO – he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, with fellow Israeli, Yitzhak Rabin, and Palestinian counterpart, Yasser Arafat.

His stature only grew with time – in 2007 he became the 9th President of Israel, a role he held until his retirement two years before his death. Not bad for a man already in his 80s. A famously brilliant orator, he was always quick with a witticism, whether critiquing current events or the state of global society. “Television” he once quipped, “has made dictatorship impossible, but democracy unbearable.” He predated Batman by more than a decade when he stated (after the assassination of Rabin): “you can bring an end to life, but you cannot kill an idea.”

With Peres, Israel has lost its last link to its founding principles, a dignified and globally respected advocate of a two state-solution, and arguably its most experienced statesman of the modern era. Netanyahu was a guest of honour at his funeral, sitting quietly through eulogy after eulogy. Perhaps he learned something.



One comment

JB

7 Oct '16 at 8:12 am

A less rose tinted view

<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-shimon-peres-palestinians-cant-forget/>

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