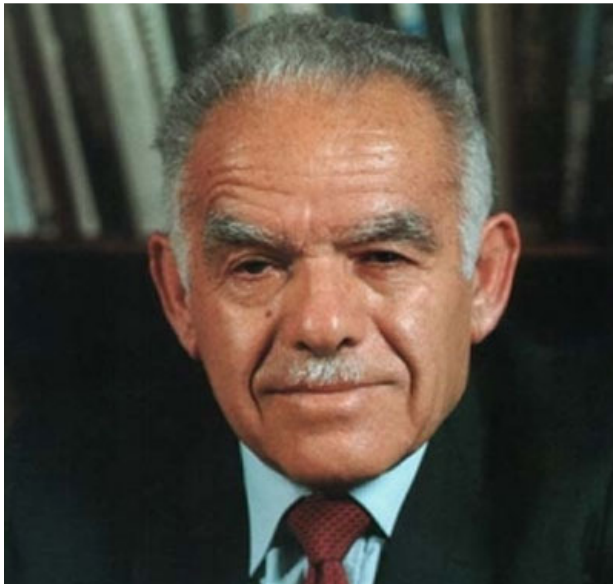


## ***MEI REMEMBERS***

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**Yitzhak Shamir**

(1915-2012)

By

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**F**ormer Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, who took the mantle of the government after the towering Likud leader Menachem Begin suddenly retired from public life in 1983, died on 30 June after a long illness in Tel Aviv. He was 96 and was under medication since 2004. He was seen by his admirers and detractors alike, as a true compatriot, a zealot who never compromised his ideological stand and who passionately sought to defend Israel's interest as he saw fit. Many felt that his uncompromising attitude was harming Israel's cause at international arena but his firm beliefs and ideological convictions stood him apart from many of his predecessors and successors.

Yitzhak Jazermicki (later Shamir), was born in Poland on 15 October 1915 and came to the Mandate Palestine as a youth in 1935. At the age of 14, he joined Betar, the Revisionist Zionist youth movement founded by Vladimir Jabotinsky. Shamir joined the Irgun, the

militant movement which opposed the British Mandate over Palestine and believed in armed struggle. Later, he chose to side with Avraham Stern when the latter left Irgun in 1940 to form Lehi, also known as Stern Gang. Along with other leader Shamir led Lehi after Avraham Stern was killed by British forces in 1940. Shamir was accused of involvement in a number of acts of terrorism and assassinations, including the killing of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte in September 1948. After the formation of the State of Israel, Shamir joined with the Israel's external intelligence agency, Mossad. He served in the agency's European headquarters in Paris and left the organization in 1965 to join active political life.

Shamir joined Herut headed by Begin in 1970 and was elected to the Knesset on the Likud list in 1973. After Likud formed the government in 1977, the first right wing government in Israel, Shamir was elected Speaker of the Knesset. Then he served as the Foreign Minister under Begin and upon Begin's resignation, Shamir became the seventh Prime Minister of Israel and served during 1983-84. He again served as Premier from 1986 till 1992, first as part of the unity government with the Labor Party and then as the head for a narrow coalition. Shamir resigned from active politics in 1999 when he also left the Likud opposing the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu. He supported Ariel Sharon during the 2001 direct election of the Prime Minister.

As Speaker of the Knesset, Shamir presided over the Knesset during the historic Jerusalem visit of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt. As Foreign Minister he led the negotiations with Egypt after the 1979 Camp David Accord. As Prime Minister of Israel, he presided over a number of important events. The crowning moment of his tenure came when Israel witnessed massive Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union.

Shamir was not enthusiastic about the Middle East Peace Process which began in Madrid in October 1991. Likewise, lack of personal chemistry with President George H W delayed the critical loan guarantees from the US. He also blocked the initiative by his Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in 1987, known as the London framework agreement with King Hussein on the Palestinian problem.

During the Kuwait War of 1991 when Saddam Hussein launched Scud Missiles against Israel in his bid to break the US-led anti-Iraq coalition, Shamir famously refrained from any retaliation thereby showing his leadership acumen. In 1989, he formulated the Shamir Plan, a five-year transitional arrangement for the Palestinians in Occupied Territories but it did not yield much result.

President Shimon Peres described his one time ally and cabinet colleague as "a brave warrior for Israel, before and after its inception. He was a great patriot and his enormous contribution will be forever etched in our chronicles. He was loyal to his beliefs and he served his country with the utmost dedication for decades."

Shamir was a person of iron-will, a man of modesty and a leader of firm self-control. His commitment to the Jewish people and *Eretz Israel* was second to none. He was deeply influenced by the Holocaust, where he had lost his entire family including his father. This historic memory shaped his tough outlook and hard-line politics. His wife Shulamit, who was also a holocaust survivor, died in 2011. They were married in 1944 and had two children Yair

and Gilada. In a state funeral held on Monday 2 July Yitzhak Shamir was buried alongside his wife in the Mount Herzl cemetery in Jerusalem.

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