

Decision Points Podcast: Season 2

Crucial Leaders in Arab-Israeli Relations

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

Aug 19, 2020

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.

Part of a series: [Decision Points Podcast \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/decision-points-podcast\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/decision-points-podcast)

or see Part 1: [Decision Points Podcast: Season 1 The U.S.-Israel Relationship \(/policy-analysis/decision-points-podcast-season-1-us-israel-relationship\)](/policy-analysis/decision-points-podcast-season-1-us-israel-relationship)

The second season of the Decision Points podcast with host David Makovsky focuses on key Israeli and Arab leaders.

This season of Decision Points features episodes on key leaders on the Israeli and Arab sides, focusing on an intersection between their biographies and a key moment that exemplifies their decision-making, from the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre to Anwar Sadat's historic trip to Jerusalem. Each episode will tell the story of an important leader, highlighting their contributions to Israeli-Arab-American relations over the last 70 years. The first episode is coming out August 19th on David Ben-Gurion.

Trailer

Episode 1: David Ben-Gurion and the Decision to Declare the State of Israel

On May 14, 1948, the British were scheduled to bring an end to the British Mandate in Palestine. The question on the table for the Jewish community in Palestine was existential: to immediately declare a state and risk invasion by better-armed Arab states or accept an international ceasefire? Join leading Israeli historian Anita Shapira to discuss the dramatic cabinet debate and David Ben Gurion's decision to declare the state.

Episode 2: Shimon Peres and the Development of Israel's Nuclear Program

Shimon Peres's contributions spanned the first seven decades of Israeli history, making his life inseparable from that of the country itself. Often remembered as a leading statesman, not a soldier, he is nevertheless credited with establishing the Israeli defense industry and making the controversial decision to pursue a nuclear program—a move predicated on close relations with France, the looming memory of the Holocaust, and numerous geostrategic considerations.

In this episode, host David Makovsky is joined by Shai Feldman, a leading expert on nuclear history, and Nimrod Novik, a close advisor of Peres, for a discussion on the late leader's pivotal role in Israel's nuclear development.

Episode 3: Golda Meir and the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre

Raised in America before emigrating to Israel, Golda Meir was the country's first and only female prime minister, and one of only two women to sign its declaration of independence. A study in contrasts, she was tough on terrorism but also a key player in securing the release of 200,000 Jews from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, sparking a wave of Russian emigration to Israel. Her legacy is viewed differently at home and abroad. Her tenure coincided with several major threats to Israelis—most infamously the “Black September” attack on the Olympic team in Munich. Join David Makovsky for this episode, which features interviews with Meir biographer Francine Klagsbrun and journalist who focuses on Israeli counterterrorism history and author of the bestselling *Rise and Kill First*, Ronen Bergman, to discuss Israel's reaction and response to the attack.

Episode 4: Menachem Begin and the Bombing of the Osiraq Nuclear

Reactor

Throughout his life, Menachem Begin held many titles: leader of the Irgun, an underground revisionist-Zionist militia; leader of the opposition; and prime minister. One value motivated everything he did: the protection of the Jewish people and prevention of a second Holocaust. One of the clearest examples of this principle was Operation Opera, the Israeli raid on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. Join Amos Yadlin, one of the fighter pilots involved in the operation, and Dan Meridor, a cabinet secretary under Begin, to discuss the raid, the development of the “Begin Doctrine,” and the lessons from Osiraq that can be applied to more recent nuclear challenges from Syria and Iran.

Episode 5: Anwar Sadat’s Trip to Jerusalem

On November 19th, 1977, Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt and arguably the leader of the Arab world, stepped off a plane at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. This was the first time an Arab leader set foot in the Jewish state. He was going to go his own way for the restoration of Egyptian land and the cause of peace. Join Abdel Monem Said Aly, CEO of the Regional Center for Strategic Studies in Cairo, to discuss Sadat’s road to Jerusalem.

Episode 6: Yitzhak Rabin’s Journey from War Hero to Peacemaker

Yitzhak Rabin was Israel’s first native-born prime minister, and he personified the national ethos throughout his life. At once pragmatic and patriotic, he fought for Israel’s security, survival, and prosperity in both the military and politics. All of his efforts culminated with the Oslo Accords. In this episode, David Makovsky hosts three people who knew Rabin personally: his ambassador to the United States Itamar Rabinovich, his son Yuval Rabin, and Dennis Ross of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Episode 7: The Enduring Debate over Yasser Arafat’s Strategy and Journey

More than anyone else, Yasser Arafat relished the role of embodying the Palestinian national struggle—even his keffiyeh was shaped to resemble historical Palestine. Some depicted him as a defiant freedom fighter, but he would become reviled by many, especially in the United States and Israel, as an arch-terrorist. His sudden appearance on the international stage came as a peacemaker during the Oslo Accords. What led to that moment, and why couldn't he clinch the deal to create a sovereign Palestinian state, instead returning to violence?

In this episode, David Makovsky hosts Hussein Agha, one of the Palestinian negotiators for the Oslo II agreement and a close advisor to Arafat, and Amos Gilead, former chief of the IDF's Intelligence Research and Analysis Division. Hussein and Amos have very different opinions regarding the peace process, and this is the first time they have appeared together to discuss Arafat.

Episode 8: A Behind the Scenes Account of King Hussein and Jordanian-Israeli Peace Ties

When King Hussein ascended to the throne at the age of sixteen, he dedicated his life to building a peaceful and prosperous Jordan. His reign was far from simple, however—he faced multiple wars abroad, a civil war at home, assassination attempts, and diplomatic crises. Throughout this tumultuous period, he maintained one secret connection that would only be made official years later: his relationship with Israel. The peace treaty signed by the two countries has endured for over twenty-five years and has been an important force for stability in the region.

Join David Makovsky for conversations with two guests who knew the king personally: his brother Prince Hassan bin Talal, and Israel's former Mossad director Efraim Halevy, who was integral to negotiating the bilateral peace. The episode features some never-before-heard revelations about Jordanian-Israeli relations. Washington Institute Director Rob Satloff frames the discussion and provides historical perspective.

Episode 9: Hafiz al-Assad and the Elusive Quest for Syrian-Israeli Peace

For the past decade, Syria has been a killing field on which the regime of President Bashar al-Assad has been a

ruthless perpetrator. As a result, international players now view the Syrian leader as a pariah. Under the rule of Bashar's father, Hafiz al-Assad, Syria employed harsh tactics and embodied rejection of Israel, but the former president also responded to regional changes amid the loss of his Soviet patron and the end of the Cold War. Reluctantly, he flirted with an Israeli peace as a means to retrieve the Golan Heights. Now, as other Arab capitals pursue rapprochement with Jerusalem, the question reemerges of how close Assad and his interlocutors came to a deal in the 1990s.

In this episode of *Decision Points*, David Makovsky talks with three individuals closely involved in the Syrian-Israeli peace process: former U.S. ambassador to Syria and Israel Edward Djerejian; former member of the U.S. peace team and translator for presidents and secretaries of state Gamal Helal; and Institute International Fellow and former member of the Israeli negotiating team on Syria Michael Herzog.

Episode 10: Ariel Sharon's Road from Settlement Building to Gaza Withdrawal

Israel's Ariel Sharon gained early renown for his battlefield courage and notoriety for his strident opposition to Palestinian statehood. But Sharon, who served as prime minister from 2001 to 2006, was not an ideologue. When he saw pragmatic opportunities to advance Israel's long-term interests, he pursued them, explaining his leading role in the 2005 Gaza disengagement plan. The program entailed the evacuation of some eight thousand Jewish residents in twenty-one settlements in Gaza, in addition to four settlements in the West Bank, causing much dismay among the prime minister's former acolytes. Yet Sharon made what he considered the right choice, thereby improbably advancing Palestinian claims to statehood. Gaza disengagement would mark an endpoint in Ariel Sharon's political evolution and endure as one of his most significant legacies.

In this episode of *Decision Points*, David Makovsky discusses Sharon with two figures intimately engaged in the Gaza disengagement: Stephen Hadley, who served as President George W. Bush's national security advisor, and Dubi Weissglas, Sharon's closest policy advisor when he was prime minister and an architect of disengagement.

Episode 11: Inside the Normalization Agreements Between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain

For the final episode of the season, the podcast focuses on a very significant step for Israel: the recent normalization agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Unlike with past peace partners Egypt and Jordan, Israel never fought either Gulf country on the battlefield. However, converging regional thinking, economic incentives, and shifting discourse about the indigenous roots of the Jewish people mean that these agreements have the potential to

reshape the Middle East.

The episode features two guests who know the motivations and behind-the-scenes negotiations that shaped the agreements better than almost anyone else: the Emirati and Bahraini ambassadors to the United States. Yousef al-Otaiba has represented the UAE in that role since 2008 and was promoted to the rank of minister in 2017. Otaiba is credited with being the leading architect of the breakthrough with Israel. H. E. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Rashed Al Khalifa has served as Bahrain's ambassador since 2017 and was previously in charge of the kingdom's Southern Governorate. This is one of the only joint interviews that they have done together since the breakthrough was announced. ❖

PART OF A SERIES

[Decision Points Podcast \(/policy-analysis/series/decision-points-podcast\)](/policy-analysis/series/decision-points-podcast)



[Decision Points Podcast: Season 5](#)

(/policy-analysis/decision-points-podcast-season-5-gaza-war-and-its-aftermath)



[Decision Points Podcast: Season 4](#)

(/policy-analysis/decision-points-podcast-season-4-essential-books-zionism-and-us-israel-relations)



[Decision Points Podcast: Season 3](#)

(/policy-analysis/decision-points-podcast-season-3-israels-challenging-policy-dilemmas)

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Responding to the Islamic State Attack in Oman](#)

Jul 24, 2024

◆
Aaron Y. Zelin,
Elizabeth Dent

[\(/policy-analysis/responding-islamic-state-attack-oman\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The Netanyahu Visit, U.S.-Israel Ties, and the War on Hamas](#)

Jul 23, 2024

◆
Stuart Eizenstat,
Morgan Viña,
Dennis Ross

[\(/policy-analysis/netanyahu-visit-us-israel-ties-and-war-hamas\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[To Stop Israeli Attacks on Yemen, Enforce Sanctions on the Iran-Houthi Link](#)

Jul 22, 2024

◆
Michael Knights

[\(/policy-analysis/stop-israeli-attacks-yemen-enforce-sanctions-iran-houthi-link\)](#)

TOPICS

[Arab-Israeli Relations \(/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations\)](#)

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-
analysis/israel)

Palestinians (/policy-
analysis/palestinians)