

# Washington Jewish Week

## U.S. ambassador remembers ‘wound’ of Rabin murder

June 22, 2016 By [Daniel Schere](#)

Israel may not be as close to achieving a lasting peace with the Palestinians as they once were under the leadership of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, but there are still encouraging signs in the region that give hope to diplomats like U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro.

Shapiro reflected on the legacy of Rabin, who was assassinated in 1995, and discussed Israel’s current political situation Monday at 6th and I Historic Synagogue in Washington.

Shapiro was spending his first day in Washington, working for Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Fla.), when he met Rabin. It was 1993, a few months before the signing of the Oslo Accords between Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. It marked the formal mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

“My brain split in two,” Shapiro said of the moment on Sept. 13, 1993. “Half of my brain said, ‘This is the dream, this is what we’d hoped for in moving toward a peaceful reality,’ and the other half said, ‘I missed my chance. I’m going to have to work on Latin America or something.’”

Shapiro said the day of Rabin’s assassination was the “worst day of my life” and left many unresolved questions about Israel’s future.

“The wound is almost as raw today as it was 20 years ago,” he told 400 listeners.

But Israel’s strategic position is better than it has ever been, he said. It has a flourishing economy and is under no threat from any Arab army. And Israeli-Arabs, who make up about 20 percent of the population, want to assimilate into cities more and pursue educational opportunities.

“What they want very much is to integrate deeper into Israeli society,” he said. “They want opportunities. Maybe not the military service, but they want to engage in the high-tech sector, they want to go to Israeli universities, they want to meet Israeli-Jewish citizens in social settings.”



*U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro said the 1995 assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was the “worst day of my life.” Photo by Daniel Schere*

Yet there is a “pervasive sense of foreboding about the future,” with the constant threats of rockets, tunnels and knife attacks in urban areas that have created a sense of “it can happen anywhere, anyplace, anytime,” Shapiro said.

There are also lingering concerns in Israel over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action brokered last year between the United States and Iran, he said. In the run up to the Iran deal’s passage, relations between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Obama administration chilled visibly.

“What made it particularly vexing was that we were approaching the objective from the same strategic position of preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon,” he said. “It would have been my preference if we could have those disagreements in private.”

Despite that divisiveness, Shapiro asserted it is working as it should by mandating Iran to remove all nuclear material and stop its centrifuges among other elements of the agreement. This has increased Iran’s breakout time for obtaining a nuclear weapon to a year, from a couple months before.

“There is an understanding that issue, while still on the table, is not an existential threat to Israel,” he said.

Shapiro’s appearance was sponsored by the Jewish Primary Day School in the Nation’s Capital in memory of Rabin.