Barak, Ehud, 1942–

Definition: Barak, Ehud from Philip’s Encyclopedia

Israeli statesman, prime minister (1999–2001). Barak was chief of staff (1991-94) of the Israeli Defence Forces before joining the cabinet of Yitzhak Rabin. He succeeded Shimon Peres as leader of the Labour Party. Despite the optimism that greeted Barak’s landslide victory over Binyamin Netanyahu in the 1999 elections, there was little progress towards peace with the Palestinians. In May 2000, he withdrew Israeli troops from S Lebanon. Escalating violent clashes with the Palestinians dented Barak’s popularity, and Ariel Sharon, leader of Likud, defeated him in elections.

Summary Article: Barak, Ehud

From The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide


Following an illustrious 36-year military career, he began his political career in 1995, as interior minister in Yitzhak Rabin's government. After the assassination of Rabin in November 1995, Barak became foreign minister under Shimon Peres. In May 1996, Barak was elected to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, and was a member of the defence and foreign affairs committee.

With his party in opposition, he was elected Labour Party chair in June 1997, defeating Peres. He established the ‘One Israel’ alliance, partnering Labour with opposition parties Gesher and Meimad, which, with 76 seats at the May 1999 general election, became the largest faction in the Knesset. He was then elected prime minister. Although respected for the inventiveness and bravery that marked his military background, he was politically inexperienced and, as he later recognized, was to make mistakes as prime minister.

Barak was born at Kibbutz Mishmar HaSharon, of Polish-Lithuanian descent, his parents having been pioneer immigrants to Israel in the 1930s. He received a degree in Mathematics and Physics from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1968, and in 1978 completed a postgraduate degree in Economic Engineering Systems at Stanford University, California. He enlisted in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in 1959 and in the course of his military service took the Hebrew name Barak, which means ‘lightning’.

Assigned to an elite army unit, he became a commander before he was 30. In 1972, he led a team from the elite force disguised as mechanics that stormed a Belgian airliner en route to Israel that had been

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hijacked by Palestinians. Barak was also a key architect of the 1976 Operation Entebbe for the rescue of passengers on the Air France aircraft hijacked by terrorists and forced to land at Entebbe airport in Uganda. He served as Chief of Military Intelligence 1983–86, Chief of Military Command 1986–87, Deputy Chief of Staff 1987–91, and, finally, as Chief of the General Staff 1991–94.

As defence minister, he oversaw in November 2012 an 8-day military operation in the Gaza Strip against 1,500 Hamas military and other installations which Israel believed to be responsible for rocket attacks on Israeli civilians.

quotations

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