

## Preface

The Chaim Herzog commemorative volume, the eighth in the series of books published by the Israel State Archives to commemorate the presidents and prime ministers of Israel, tells the story of Israel's sixth president.

A full appreciation of Herzog's personality is impossible without an understanding of the home in which he grew up in Dublin – the home of Rabbi Isaac HaLevi Herzog and his wife Sarah Herzog, née Hillman. The crowning achievement of Rabbi Herzog's public activity was his appointment as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in Palestine during the British mandate and in the State of Israel. From his parents, Chaim Herzog received his love of learning and of Jewish tradition and his Zionism, but eventually he rebelled against the life style in which he had grown up, and to a certain extent also against his parents' religious beliefs.

Herzog's parents expected him to study in a *yeshiva*, an institute of higher Jewish learning, in Palestine, but these studies were not appropriate for him and instead he studied law in Jerusalem and in Britain. He served as a senior intelligence officer in the British army during World War II and took great pride in his part in the war against Germany.

After his service in the British army, Herzog returned to Palestine, where he was able to use his intelligence training to help the Jewish community and later the State of Israel; first, as a member of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and later, in the ranks of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Twice he served as head of military intelligence in the IDF (1948-1950, 1959-1961). During his first term of office, Herzog worked towards the integration of intelligence information and practices with the IDF's military operations in the War of Independence, and helped shape the Intelligence Branch after the war. During his second term of office he had to contend with the Egyptian build-up of troops in Sinai (Operation Rotem) and organized *Aman* (the Directorate of Military Intelligence) for operations in non-Arab countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Herzog held many other important positions in the IDF: IDF attaché in the U.S. (1950-1954), commander of the Jerusalem District and the Jerusalem Brigade (1954-1957) and chief staff officer (deputy commander) of the Southern Command (1957-1959). In 1962, he left the IDF, but later received an emergency appointment in the reserves – he was to serve as military governor of the West Bank if it were to come under IDF control. In 1967, during the Six Day

War, the IDF did in fact conquer the West Bank and Herzog was appointed its first governor. At the time, this also included Eastern Jerusalem (until the city was united).

In the mid-sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Herzog entered the political arena and joined the *Rafi* (Israel Workers List) political party . He was drawn to this party due to its democratic and national values, central to which were changing the electoral system and implementation of the system of choosing candidates in open primaries, on the one hand; and on the other – his admiration of David Ben-Gurion, the founder of *Rafi*, and his close ties to several of the party's leaders such as Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres. Herzog's political standing grew as he won over public opinion with his compelling, analytical radio broadcasts on the eve of the Six Day War and during the War. His knowledgeable and calming presentation earned him the reputation of someone who knew how to soothe the nation's fears.

After the war Herzog stood out as an active public figure and prolific journalist, essayist and writer in Hebrew and in English. In 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, Herzog resumed his role as an analyst on TV and radio. Following the war, Herzog published his book "The War of Atonement", in which he described the war as an Israeli victory and credited it to the low and middle ranking soldiers and officers in the IDF. He criticised Israel's military leadership, including Minister of Defence Dayan, despite their close relationship before the war.

Herzog's rhetorical and communication skills did not escape the notice of the minister of foreign affairs, Yigal Allon, and on his recommendation, Herzog was appointed Israel's Permanent Representative (ambassador) to the U.N. in 1975. The three years he served in the U.N. were some of the most difficult in the state's history with regard to foreign affairs. Diplomatically Israel was on the defensive, because of the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil crisis. The Soviet-Arab bloc enjoyed an automatic majority in the U.N. General Assembly, and Herzog had to muster all his wits and wisdom in order to wage a diplomatic campaign to minimise the blows falling on Israel.

In one of his first battles in the U.N., Herzog fought to prevent adoption of the resolution which compared Zionism to racism – a resolution which attempted to discredit the legitimacy of the State of Israel. The resolution could not be prevented, but Herzog campaigned against it vigorously. His efforts culminated in his speech at the U.N. General Assembly, where he pointed out that the date of the resolution, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1975, marked 37 years since the "Kristallnacht" pogrom against the Jews in Nazi Germany. Herzog ended his speech by tearing up the draft of

the resolution. Thus he started a long battle to overturn the resolution, a struggle that ended victoriously in December 1991.

In addition, the Israeli mission had numerous struggles in the U.N. Security Council. Making use of the veto power held by the permanent members of the Security Council, such as the U.S., the U.K. and France, the delegation was able to prevent anti-Israeli resolutions and ensure more balanced decisions. Nevertheless, some anti-Israeli resolutions passed due to American-Soviet compromises. One of the few times Israel succeeded in preventing a majority vote against it without a veto was after Operation Entebbe – the IDF operation to rescue Israeli and French hostages being held by terrorists in Entebbe, Uganda, in July 1976. Herzog's speech at the Security Council justifying the Israeli operation contributed to the political success of the operation.

Herzog returned to Israel in 1978, and was elected in 1981 to serve in the 10<sup>th</sup> Knesset (Israel's parliament) as a member of the Labour party. As a Knesset member, Herzog dealt with political, legal and security issues and fought government bureaucracy.

In March 1983, in a surprise move, Herzog was elected Israel's 6<sup>th</sup> president, although he was the candidate of the opposition Labour party. On May 5<sup>th</sup> 1983, during his inaugural speech in the Knesset, Herzog made mention of a peace activist who had been murdered during a demonstration against the Lebanon War, and called for unity in the face of Israel's enemies.

Indeed, throughout his presidency, unity, or at least tolerance, was his guiding principle – unity between Jews and Arabs, orthodox and secular Jews, liberals and conservatives, rich and poor, and Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. From the very beginning of his presidency he worked within the limits of his authority towards establishing a national unity government, a goal which was achieved in 1984 and lasted until 1990.

As president, Herzog had to contend with far more requests for special pardons, one of the prerogatives of his position, than did his predecessors. Two incidents stood out especially and resulted in a fair amount of criticism for Herzog.

The first concerned a group of extremist religious Jews who were arrested in 1984 on suspicion of belonging to an underground organization which was involved in terrorist attacks against Arabs living in the territories. Herzog refused to discuss the possibility of giving them a pardon before they stood trial. After the trials, he consented to consider some of their requests for pardon and to shorten their sentences as long as they expressed remorse.

The second incident was the "Bus No. 300 Affair" involving two agents of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), who killed two terrorists taken prisoner after hijacking a bus. Herzog drew on his background in law and intelligence when considering the incident. He pardoned the two agents before they stood trial, judging that putting them on trial would cause great damage to the ISA and the Israeli defence establishment.

During Herzog's presidency, Israel had to deal with two violent confrontations: the Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule, the Intifada, which started in December 1987, and the Gulf War, when 39 Iraqi missiles landed in Israel during January–February of 1991. Herzog justified the IDF's actions against the Intifada and did all he could to raise public morale.

During his term of office, Herzog used his diplomatic and rhetorical skills to advance Israel's standing in the world. His speech at the 1987 joint session of the U.S. congress, during the first state visit of an Israeli president to the U.S., is particularly noteworthy.

The fall of the hostile Soviet bloc in 1989–1991 brought about two welcome results for Israel: mass immigration from former countries of the USSR, and the renewal of diplomatic relations between Israel and Russia, and many Eastern European and Asian countries. Herzog worked hard to improve conditions for immigrants and strengthened the newly-established diplomatic relations by reciprocal visits.

One of Herzog's goals was to strengthen the ties between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. He made use of his many visits abroad to meet with Jewish communities and kept up a lively correspondence with public figures in the Diaspora.

Alongside public and military affairs, the documents published in this book reveal much of Herzog's personal life, showing his childhood and adolescence, his meeting with his wife Aura, and the family they built together, the birth of his children, and his relationships with his parents and his brother, the diplomat and civil servant Ya'acov Herzog.

The book contains 183 documents, chosen from over 7,000, which were collected from a number of archives, mostly the Israel State Archives, the IDF Archives (IMDEA) and the Central Zionist Archives.