

Monday, November 18, 2002

Famous Israeli diplomat leaves legacy after death

JERUSALEM (AP) — Abba Eban, the famously eloquent statesman who helped persuade the world to approve creation of the Jewish state and dominated Israeli diplomacy for decades, died Sunday, hospital officials said. He was 87.

Eban was known for his Jewish views about Israel-Arab relations. Yitzhak Herzog, a nephew who served as Israeli Cabinet secretary, said Eban "was a pragmatist who believed in pragmatism on the one hand and the need to talk and talk and talk, and on the other hand, to stand firm on the basic principles of Israeli defense and foreign affairs."

The tall, heavy-jowled Eban spoke 10 languages with an academic bearing and was usually seen in public in three-piece suits, contrasting with the open-shirted, sunburned Israeli pioneers, many of them ex-military commanders, who led the country through its first half-century. Widely admired abroad, Eban never really took off at home, spending his last years in the political wilderness.

Born in South Africa on Feb. 2, 1915, Eban grew up in England, attaining honors at Cambridge University, where he honed his oratory as a leader of the Cambridge Union, the university debating society.

His value to the emerging Jewish state as a diplomat was recognized quickly.

David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, once called Eban "the voice of the Hebrew nation."

He was only 31 when he was named ambassador to the United Nations, charged with the task of convincing two-thirds of the members to partition Palestine and allow cre-

ation of a Jewish state. On Nov. 29, 1947, the U.N. General Assembly approved partition by a narrow margin.

Eban soon added another title — ambassador to the United States — and he is still the only Israeli to have held both positions at the same time.

He served as Israel's foreign minister from 1966 to 1974, one of the most turbulent periods in the nation's history.

He used his rhetorical powers to try to persuade a skeptical world that Israel was acting properly in seizing the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Desert, Golan Heights and eastern Jerusalem in the 1967 war.

A dove at heart, Eban was often at odds with Israeli leaders. He believed Israel should negotiate peace in exchange for the territories it captured, while successive governments built Jewish settlements there instead.

Criticizing a hardline government for refusing to give up territory, he said that Israel was "tearing up its own birth certificate. Israel's birth is intrinsically and intimately linked with the idea of sharing territory and sovereignty."

Yet he was just as critical of the Arab leadership. He once said that the Arabs "never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity" to make peace with Israel.

In 1973, with his country facing possible defeat in another war, he helped persuade the U.S. administration of President Richard Nixon to carry out an emergency airlift of weapons and supplies to Israel.

His British accent and seemingly limitless vocabulary enthralled listeners in the halls of diplomacy, but he was con-

Israeli diplomatic pioneer dies at 87

Abba Eban, an Israeli diplomat best known for his explanation of Israel policies in world gatherings and interviews, died Sunday. No immediate cause of death was given.



Eban

Highlights

- ▶ Eban was born in South Africa on Feb. 2, 1915.
- ▶ He grew up in England, attaining honors at Cambridge University, where he honed his oratory as a leader of the Cambridge Union. He was fluent in 10 languages.
- ▶ Eban was only 31 when he was named ambassador to the United Nations.
- ▶ On Nov. 29, 1947, he helped convince the United Nations to approve creation of a Jewish state.
- ▶ He became ambassador to the United States and is still the only Israeli to have held both positions at the same time.
- ▶ He served as Israel's foreign minister from 1966 to 1974. His term spanned two wars and their aftermath.
- ▶ After losing his place in the Labor Party parliament faction in 1988, he turned to lecturing, public appearances and writing.
- ▶ In 2001, he was awarded Israel's highest accolade, the Israel Prize.
- ▶ He is survived by his wife, Suzy, son, Eli, and daughter, Gila.

SOURCE: Associated Press

AP

sidered pompous and distant at home, where his elegant phraseology seemed to set him above the people.

But his nervousness in public, almost unimaginable in a speaker of his ability, was evident in tics like a leg that twitched behind a podium as he turned his polished phrases.

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