

## Begin Leaves Behind An Illustrious But Controversial Career

JERUSALEM (WNS) — Menachem Begin's decision to step down as Israeli Premier, saying I cannot bear the responsibility any longer, brings to conclusion an illustrious if not controversial career spanning the history of Israel from its pre-state days to its status today.

After serving in the opposition for 29 years, Begin won a stunning upset over the ruling Labor Party in the 1977 elections to become the nation's first non-Labor Premier. At the age of 64, he viewed his election as a vindication of his political and social views. Begin felt exhilarated and exuberant, filled with dreams of putting his Revisionist philosophy into practice.

During the six years of his rule, Begin led Israel to a peace agreement with Egypt and to a controversial war with Lebanon. He handed back the entire Sinai but strengthened Israel's hold on the administered territories. He stopped short of total annexation of the West Bank, but did annex the Golan Heights.

Begin leaves his office as a man who had grown weary of the petty infighting and bickering among the Cabinet ministers, especially in the past few weeks, sparked by the mounting toll of Israeli soldiers killed and wounded in Lebanon and by an austerity economic package proposed by Finance Minister Yoram Aridor.

Close associates of Begin said he was grieved by the death of 517 Israeli soldiers and the wounding of more than 2,000. He termed the war in Lebanon a "tragedy" and admitted that he had never anticipated that the war would become a quagmire.

In the past year Begin suffered two tragedies: his beloved wife Aliza died last November while he was in the United States, and his close friend and political partner, Simcha Ehrlich, died in June.

Begin was also reportedly distressed by the nation's economic crisis, the complexities of which were not within his grasp. Inflation ran as high as 140 percent an-

nually and the deficit in the balance of payments mounted. The budget crisis was one of the key reasons prompting Begin to resign, although not the main reason.

Other political failures and disappointments dogged Begin. The peace agreement he signed with President Anwar Sadat began to break down and finally stalled

altogether. The autonomy talks were deadended because Israel and Egypt were at odds over the degree of autonomy to be granted to the Palestinians on the West Bank. While

Begin believed in autonomy stalemate and the war in Lebanon, recalled its Ambassador. Begin also leaves behind an Israeli society more divided than ever.

# baby

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