

Beat: Vips

UPDATE 3 -- Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon dead at 85

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USPA News - Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, considered by many as having been one of Israel's finest military commanders, died on Saturday, more than eight years after a massive stroke and brain hemorrhage left him in a permanent vegetative state. He was 85. Sharon died at around 2 p.m. local time on Saturday at Chaim Sheba Medical Center near Tel Aviv after his condition sharply deteriorated in recent days, caused by the onset of a blood infection and the failure of several key organs that included his kidneys.

His son Gilad confirmed the news, saying: "He's gone." Professor Shlomo Noy, the director of the hospital's rehabilitation department, said the prominent politician had overcome "many medical complications" during his hospitalization at the facility. "Throughout this period, he was considered to be in a state of minimal consciousness, with ups and downs in his medical condition, in non-verbal minimal communication," he said. Noy said Sharon continued his struggle with "surprising strengths and determination" despite his deteriorating condition in recent weeks. "Today, he departed peacefully with his loving family at his side," Noy said. "This is the time and place to thank the medical staff of the respiratory rehabilitation department, which cared for Mr. Sharon with professionalism, patience and compassion, as the former prime minister surely deserved." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed "deep sorrow" at Sharon's death, crediting him for having played a central role in the country's struggle for security. "He was, first and foremost, a courageous fighter and an outstanding general, and was among the IDF's (Israel Defense Forces) greatest commanders," he said. Netanyahu added: "He established Unit 101 and took the initiative in the war against terrorism, which became a central pillar of the State of Israel. Upon leaving the military, he continued to work on behalf of the people of Israel both in his many government roles and as the 11th prime minister of the State of Israel. His memory will be enshrined forever in the heart of the nation." Israeli President Shimon Peres also expressed his sadness at Sharon's death, calling him a "daring leader" who loved his country. "He was one of Israel's great protectors and most important architects, who knew no fear and certainly never feared vision," the president said. "He knew how to take difficult decisions and implement them. We all loved him and he will be greatly missed." The former prime minister's death had been expected for days, with Sheba Medical Center describing Sharon's condition as "grave" earlier this week, using a Hebrew term that means a patient is close to death. A hospital statement said Sharon's condition had rapidly deteriorated on Thursday. Test results last week showed that Sharon was suffering from a blood infection in addition to the decline of several key organs. But hospital director Dr. Zeev Rotstein later said the former prime minister was fighting "against all odds" and that doctors had been able to stabilize his blood pressure and pulse. Sharon is by many considered to have been one of Israel's finest military commanders and was given popular nicknames such as "The King of Israel" and "The Lion of God." He joined the Likud party after retiring from the army and went on to serve in a number of ministerial posts before becoming the party's leader in 2000, after which he became prime minister in the following year. But Sharon's political career came to an abrupt end in January 2006 when he suffered a massive stroke and brain hemorrhage, leaving him in a permanent vegetative state. Some hopes were raised in January 2013 when doctors said the iconic leader had shown "significant brain activity" while viewing pictures of his family and listening to his son's voice, but no further developments were reported.

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