withdrawal from Palestinian territory. Palestinians in the Gaza territory will certainly be happy to see Israelis dismantling settlements and withdrawing their forces. But, if Israel continues to besiege the Gaza Strip; if Israel continues to impose restrictions on the movement of Palestinians from and to the Gaza Strip; if Israel continues to control the movement of goods to and from Gaza, at the end of the day, this will not help. And, if Israel intends by this move to impose final borders or impose a final settlement, I think this will be a recipe for the escalation of further violence.

Interview: Amnon Lipkin-Shahak

'The Occupation Cannot Last Forever'

Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak (ret.) served as the Chief of General Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces from 1995-98. He was Israel's Minister of Tourism and Minister of Transport from 1999-2001, and took part in the Israeli delegation to peace talks at Camp David II, Sharm El-Sheik, and Taba. He was a member of the Israeli delegation to the Geneva Initiative negotiations. General Lipkin-Shahak was interviewed by William Jones in Washington on Feb. 11.

EIR: Maybe you want to explain something of the background to the Geneva Initiative. Obviously, in a very difficult situation, in which there was almost no optimism regarding the Israeli-Palestinian situation, people on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides took the opportunity to put something forward in order to create a ray of hope, to show that there are potentially agreements, on all major areas of contention, that can be reached. What effect do you think this has had on the population in Israel? in Palestine? What do you hope to achieve with this?

Lipkin-Shahak: Well, first of all, as you mentioned, if there was any other political initiative in the air, maybe this initiative wouldn't be needed. But this initiative came on the political level at a point in time when there was nothing—a total vacuum. And I think that the timing for this initiative was perfect. Of course, nothing is perfect; but the time was ripe. Because the initiative creates for the people in Israel and, in other ways, for the Palestinians, a public discussion about the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a discussion of "where are we going"?

Before the Geneva Accords, we all agreed that terror should not continue, that we should fight terror, and that we should do whatever is needed and whatever is possible to fight terrorism. But just by fighting terrorism—even if [we] will be very, very successful—we are not going to bring an end to the conflict. And after the Geneva initiative was brought to the public, suddenly we saw the Israeli government, we saw Sharon—the first week that Geneva was in the air, things started to move. Sharon sent his son to meet Palestinians. The Labor Party came with new ideas about a future peace agreement. Another party, the Shinui, which is a member of the coalition, started to suggest certain ideas. The Israeli Prime Minister with his present unilateral proposal came only at that point.

And by the way, Sharon said recently—in order to explain why he made this unilateral suggestion—that whenever there is a vacuum, we have these Genevas. And to prevent Geneva, we have to initiate something. And I think he's right, by the way. And I think this public, internal Israeli debate is needed. Because we are talking about the future. Nobody is happy in Israel. The economic situation is not very promising. Every aspect of life is affected by the conflict.

And in the end, we have to have a certain answer to the conflict, a certain solution. We are not rewriting the Bible and telling people, " 'Look, here you have a paper that gives answers to most of, or to all of the difficult questions." No, if you want, take the paper and change things or suggest things. But what we are telling you is that, given the most difficult questions, there are, in fact, Palestinians with whom we can sit together and reach answers to these questions. There are Palestinians who are willing to enter into reforms inside Palestinian society. And those reforms are needed. So don't lose hope.

EIR: The Geneva Initiative has gained considerable international support, in Europe, and from Canada. Now you have presented this in a major way here in the United States, with your meeting here.

Lipkin-Shahak: Yes, but already a month ago we had meetings here. We met Colin Powell.

EIR: Who also expressed support for the Initiative.

Lipkin-Shahak: Yes, and we also met a number of Congressmen and Senators. But, look, Washington is not the place where we are going to spend a lot of time and effort. We are going to work, and we're working hard, back in Israel; and the Palestinians are working among their people. I think that what we have to do: To convince more Israelis and Palestinians to support the initiative, or to understand that an end to the conflict can only be done by means of an agreement, and not by an unilateral act, or by doing nothing. And therefore, most of our efforts are not here or Europe or somewhere elsewhere, but in Israel and among the Palestinian people.

EIR: The United States has, however, traditionally played an important role. To the extent that there was something

moving on the ground in the Middle East, with the support of the United States, certain things could start to happen to pull the process together. If you had an opportunity to sit down with President Bush, what would you want him to do to try to move the situation forward?

Lipkin-Shahak: I would say several things. First, I think he is informed about the situation in the Middle East. We know that American interests in the Middle East are much broader than trying to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Americans are facing difficulties in Iraq and are not yet finished with their operations. The Americans have interests in the rest of the Middle East, and in the Near East, in the Arab world. And it's very clear to everybody that there is a very tight connection between solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Arab-American relations.

But, this is not what I'm going to tell President Bush. What I will tell President Bush is—and I'm sure if it were up to him, he would like to help in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because it will serve American interests. And I think that in order to do so there is an opportunity now to support a few moderate-thinking Palestinians. Because not only among the Palestinians, but also in most Arab countries, there is a fight between moderates and the extremists. And if the United States will not help the moderates among the Palestinians, there will be no change; there will be nothing good; and the chance that the extremists, in the end, will prevail, is a threat to the United States no less than it is a threat to Israel. If the war against terror is serious, we have to support those who are against Arab terrorism. And these are the same moderate people.

And therefore I think that while we're not talking on behalf of the Israeli people, and we're not trying to replace the Israeli government here—if it will be replaced, it will be replaced in elections in Israel—but we believe that the U.S. should support moderates, should support those who are preaching to look for peaceful solutions to the conflict. And if we provide a sample, that can be the beginning of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

EIR: Things came very close in Camp David II, as you indicated in your comments to the conference. And there has been much criticism, and a lot of speculation, as to what actually happened when the negotiations failed. Prime Minister Barak, with the backing of President Clinton, presented a proposal that Chairman Arafat could not, or would not accept; and then the blame was placed on Arafat for the failure. The question that has been continually raised is: Did they really go into those negotiations with a sufficient basis to achieve any kind of agreement, or were they pushed by circumstances, both here and in Israel—where both the Democrats here, as well as Barak, were facing very tough elections?

Lipkin-Shahak: Look, there will be a number of books out on this topic soon, by Dennis Ross and by Martin Indyk. There were no serious preparations for Camp David. I believe the professionals on the American team and on the Israeli team said that July was not the proper time to invite the parties to Camp David. I believe the Palestinians felt that Camp David was a trap, that they had to try to get out alive from the trap. They didn't come to Camp David to sign an agreement.

Former Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff General Lipkin-Shahak: "This [Geneva] Initiative came into a total vacuum." He believes that the most difficult issues can being solved by direct negotiations, and that assassinated former Prime Minister "Rabin was certainly right."

When we came to Camp David, the differences between Israelis and Palestinians were huge. It was impossible to bridge the gap at Camp David. There was zero preparation on the Palestinian side for swallowing what was in Camp David. I believe that they behaved—especially Arafat—in the most stupid way at Camp David. But, if Camp David had ended, not in the declaration of a total failure, but, instead, by saying, "We didn't reach an agreement. We were unable to give all the answers that were needed to reach an agreement, but we made some progress and the two parties will go back and continue to negotiate. And if the Americans feel in four or six weeks that the time is ripe, they will call the two parties [together] again for another meeting." Maybe then, the whole array of events would have turned out a little bit different.

But, there is no doubt that the Palestinians didn't want to reach an agreement at Camp David. Barak was fully convinced, and I think Barak convinced President Clinton, that he could reach an agreement at Camp David. But it was a totally wrong assumption. And therefore, it ended as it ended. And the way it ended was also another mistake. It should have ended differently.

EIR: You spoke about the economic situation. It has been the policy of *EIR* and our founding editor, Lyndon LaRouche, since the early 1970s, that economic measures had to be im-

mediately taken—at that time, even pending any political agreement—in order to create the conditions of life in the Palestinian areas so that the people there could clearly see that peace was going to improve their conditions of life. From Madrid, through Oslo, to the present day, the economic improvements have been discussed: the water projects, irrigation, the Med-Dead [Mediterranean-Dead Sea] Canal, the desalination plants. And when all this was placed on the back burner, as it always was, it created a significant obstacle to bringing home to the population—especially in the Palestinian areas—that peace would lead to a better future for them. How do you view these problems?

Lipkin-Shahak: There is more than some truth in it. Look, the Palestinians were waiting not only for political freedom and the end to occupation, and a Palestinian state. They were waiting to improve their personal standard of living. It worked for a while. And part of the reason that it failed—during the last years, it failed because of the second Intifada. There is no possibility to improve the standard of living when people are conducting suicide attacks, and terror is the name of the main game among the people. In the year 2000, Palestinians enjoyed, in Bethlehem and in Jerusalem, and in Gaza, thousands of tourists, even Israeli tourists, who brought money and created jobs. But when there are suicide attacks, there is no tourism.

Part of the money that went to the Gaza and the West Bank was Palestinian money, from wealthy Palestinians from the outside, who invested in West Bank and Gaza. And they lost their money. Why should they invest more money in a place in which they will lose their investment. And there was also some corruption. And people do not want to put money where they feel the money is being misused.

But on the other hand, too little was done. The Gaza, for instance, could have been independent in water resources. A medium-sized desalination project in the Gaza could give total independence from outside water resources. And, in a way, it's the same in the West Bank. And so, it is not only the international community to be blamed. The European community, even the United States, invested a lot of money in the Palestinian Authority. Some of this money went into the wrong pocket, some of it was improperly used; but the main reason for the poor economic situation is the terrorist activity, especially over the last three years. Without it, I believe that the economic situation of the Palestinian Authority as a whole, as well as for individuals, could have been much, much better than it is.

EIR: You mentioned at the forum, the example of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin, who spent his life like yourself, primarily as a soldier, had fought against Arab forces and had fought with Palestinians for a long time, and then realized that there was no military solution to the conflict, and that the country must take another tack. Do you see yourself in that tradition?

Lipkin-Shahak: Well, I believe that Rabin was right in his decision. Rabin was courageous. Rabin was not only willing to take the risk, but Rabin paid with his life for the risk he took. Rabin was willing to lead the Israeli people to a different future, and I have no doubt now that Rabin was right, that the only way to keep Israel as a Jewish and a democratic state is by solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The occupation cannot last forever. We hate to run the life of other people. We cannot give in to terrorism. We cannot give in to those who are willing to kill innocent Israeli people. But we have to solve the conflict with the Palestinian people and let them run their life. We have our economic problems, we have our social problems. We have problems between ultra-Orthodox Jews and others. We are still a country to which many people are immigrating. More than a million Russian Jews have immigrated to Israel over the last 12 years and represent now a huge percentage of Israelis. And we have so many other things to do rather than killing Palestinians and being killed by Palestinian terrorists.

So I have no doubt that Rabin was right. And I believe that if Rabin had not been assassinated, maybe the whole picture would have been very much different than it now is. But there are too many "ifs." The main thing is that I do believe—and I don't know how long it will take—but it is in the Israeli interest to solve the conflict no less than it is the Palestinian interest to solve the conflict.