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Amnon Lipkin-Shahak

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Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, the former Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff and a cabinet minister, died in Jerusalem on 19 December 2012. He was deeply involved in peace negotiations with Syria and the Palestinians and took active part in the Camp David Summit meeting of 2000 with the Palestinians.

Lipkin-Shahak was born in Tel Aviv on 18 March 1944 and studied at a military academy in Haifa before joining the army's paratrooper brigade in 1963. He studied at the IDF Staff and Command College and the National Defence College, and at the Marine Command and Staff College in the US. He served as a company commander in the June War of 1967 and as a deputy brigade commander in the Sinai during the October War of 1973. During his years of

service, he was twice awarded the Medal of Courage; once as a captain for his role in the 1968 *Operation Inferno*, a raid on a PLO camp in Karameh, Jordan and second in 1973, for his role in the *Operation Spring of Youth*, an assault on Black September and militant PLO leaders in Beirut.

Lipkin-Shahak was the chief of military intelligence from 1986 to 1991. In 1991, he became the deputy chief of staff of the IDF. In 1995, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak became the 15th chief of staff of the IDF replacing Ehud Barak, and retired from active military service in 1998. During the period of his rise to the peak of military career, he embodied the spirit of the times as Israel tried to balance security challenges with the expectations and hopes of peace born with the Oslo Accords of 1993.

After the signing of Oslo Accords, Lipkin-Shahak became an important intermediary between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman Yasser Arafat. Rabin also chose Lipkin-Shahak to lead the Israeli team during the negotiations with Palestinians in Taba, following the Cairo Summit of 1993. These negotiations led to the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement. Lipkin-Shahak also oversaw the partial implementation of the Oslo interim peace accords with the Palestinians, which included a military withdrawal from several areas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There are suggestions that during this period, he was the most trusted Israeli for the Palestinian interlocutors. As Chief of staff, he was also involved in the failed Syrian peace negotiations.

After retiring from the military in 1998, Lipkin-Shahak entered politics and was elected to the 15th Knesset on a Centre Party ticket in 1999. He joined the government of Ehud Barak as the Minister of Tourism. He later became the Minister of Transportation in the same government. Midway through his term, he left the Centre Party and started the New Way faction. After Barak's failed re-election bid in February 2001, Lipkin-Shahak resigned from the Knesset and quit politics. He however, remained active in the public domain as a strong supporter of peace with Palestinians and continued to champion the two-state solution. In 2003, he was among the first signatories of the Geneva Initiative, an unofficial programme negotiated by Israeli and Palestinian peace advocates and former officials.

Lipkin-Shahak would be remembered not only as a military leader and statesman but also for his continued support for peace with the Palestinians. After a long battle with cancer, Amnon-Lipkin Shahad died in Jerusalem on 19 December 2012.

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