

Gen. James Mattis Is Headed to Israel

U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis arrives in Israel this week for his first official visit to the Jewish state since assuming the position, the Pentagon announced Friday.

Mattis—who is visiting Israel as part of a weeklong trip to several of America’s key Middle East allies, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt—is expected to arrive Thursday to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Reuven Rivlin and Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman. Mattis will also participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Yad Vashem Holocaust remembrance center in Jerusalem, the Pentagon said.

Mattis is anticipated to speak with senior Israeli officials about issues such as Iran, Syria and the fight against the Islamic State terror group. It is unclear if Mattis will also discuss the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has recently been the purview of President Donald Trump’s international negotiations representative, Jason Greenblatt.

Lieberman and Mattis met last month in Washington, D.C., where Lieberman told his counterpart that the U.S. needs to play a more “active” role in the Middle East. The Israeli defense chief’s comments came before the recent American strike on Syria in response to the Bashar al-Assad regime’s chemical attack against civilians.

“Strategic cooperation between Israel and the U.S. is vital and critical, not just for Israel’s security but for the security and stability in the Middle East as a whole; and it impacts global security as well. The global axis of evil currently stretches from Iran to North Korea,” Lieberman said.

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