

“Concern” over Egypt: Top U.S. Military Commander To Visit Israel, Jordan

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, February 13, 2011

[Reuters](#) 13 February 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Top US military officer to visit Israel, Jordan

WASHINGTON: The top U.S. military officer heads to Jordan and Israel next week for high-level talks meant to reassure key allies at a moment of heightened uncertainty after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s ouster.

Mubarak handed over power to the Egyptian army on Friday after an 18-day popular uprising, with Washington now facing huge challenges in a potentially volatile power shift in Cairo that could have repercussions for U.S. policy across the Middle East.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. military’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, will arrive in Jordan on Sunday for talks with his military counterpart and with Jordan’s King Abdullah.

It comes just days after Abdullah swore in a new government led by a former general....

Mullen will continue to Israel, where Egypt’s turmoil has raised fears of potential Islamic radicalization that could threaten Cairo’s peace agreement with Israel.

Mullen is due to meet Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres and the outgoing head of the armed forces, Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenazi on Sunday and Monday, before returning to Washington.

“At this very critical time in the Middle East (Mullen wants) to reassure our Israeli partners that our commitment to them, and to the military relationship that we have enjoyed with them, remains strong,” Capt. John Kirby, an aide to Mullen, told Reuters.

Israel has named Benny Ganz, a former defense attache in Washington and second-in-command of Israel’s armed forces, to replace Ashkenazi. Mullen was also expected to meet Ganz, Kirby said, adding the two already knew each other “quite well.”

Israel’s Defense Minister Ehud Barak met top U.S. officials in Washington this week. He told U.S. television that the world should encourage change in Egypt but give the country enough time to prevent it from falling into the hands of extremists.

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