

U.S. secretary of state plans to visit Israel for annexation talks



Washington, May 10 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of State has announced that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to Israel next week for a brief visit, a trip that's expected to focus on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to annex portions of the occupied West Bank.

Pompeo will make the lightning trip to Jerusalem to see Netanyahu and his new coalition partner Benny Gantz on Wednesday as the Trump administration tries to return to business as normal by resuming governmental travel and reopening an economy devastated by the COVID-19 outbreak. The State Department formally announced the trip more than a week after plans for it first surfaced and a day after some Israeli media outlets reported it.

According to reports from Washington, Pompeo will "discuss U.S. and Israeli efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as regional security issues related to Iran's malign influence." Spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement: "The U.S. commitment to Israel has never been stronger than under President [Donald] Trump's leadership. The U.S. and Israel will face threats to the security and prosperity of our peoples together. In challenging times, we stand by our friends, and our friends stand by us."

Alone among most governments, the Trump administration has said it will support the annexation of occupied West Bank territory claimed by the Palestinians for an eventual state as long as Israel agrees to enter peace talks with the Palestinians.

Pompeo and his small travelling party will need exemptions from Israel's own virus restrictions that bar foreign visitors from entering and require returning Israelis to self-quarantine for 14 days. Pompeo will be on the ground in Israel for only several hours on Wednesday, the 13th, before returning to Washington, DC from his first overseas trip since making an unannounced visit to Afghanistan in March.

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