

Amid Mideast Tensions, Putin Will Visit Israel in June

May 02, 2012



Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman

Vladimir Putin will visit Israel next month in one of his first foreign visits as president, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said.

"The information we have received from Russia shows that the visit will take place in June," Lieberman said in an [interview](#) published Wednesday in Moskovsky Komsomolets.

He said the exact date for the visit would be decided after Putin's inauguration on May 7.

He gave no further information about the trip, which unidentified sources in his ministry first leaked to Israeli media in March.

But Syria and Iran will almost certainly lead Putin's agenda. Russia has long been a strong ally of both countries, which are among Israel's staunchest enemies and are under increasing international pressure — Syria for a violent crackdown on the opposition and Iran for a nuclear program that Israel, the United States and other countries fear is designed to build

a bomb.

When Putin last visited Israel in April 2005, he defended Russian arms sales to Syria and the shipment of nuclear components to Iran, saying they posed no threat to Israel's security.

Putin, whose 2005 trip to Israel was the first by a Kremlin leader, also unveiled a Holocaust monument by sculptor Zurab Tsereteli in Jerusalem at the time.

Next month, Putin is expected to unveil another monument, this one in the Israeli city of Netanya to honor Jewish soldiers who fought in the Red Army during World War II. He and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the plans for the monument during a visit by Netanyahu to Moscow in January 2010.

Netanyahu invited Putin to visit Israel during a phone call that he made to congratulate the Russian leader on winning the presidential election in March, Israel's Haaretz newspaper [reported](#) at the time.

Foreign Minister Lieberman, who speaks fluent Russian and is a native of the former Soviet republic of Moldova, visited Moscow shortly after disputed State Duma elections in December and declared that Israeli observers had found the vote "fair, free and democratic."

Putin's first confirmed trip abroad as president will be to the United States, where he will attend a Group of Eight summit at Camp David, Maryland, on May 18 and 19.

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