

Blair visits Middle East as special envoy

by UPI

JERUSALEM -- Tony Blair, former prime minister of Britain and newly appointed envoy for the Middle East Quartet, arrived in Israel Monday to meet with officials. Blair, visiting the Middle East for the first time in his capacity as special envoy for the Quartet -- the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations -- was set to meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Haaretz reported Monday. Political sources in Jerusalem said Blair is expected to use his visit to study the state of the Palestinian Authority before beginning his official mandate of helping the Palestinians create state institutions. The sources said his visit is also expected to focus on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The envoy is also to meet with Israeli opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, Vice Premier Haim Ramon and President Shimon Peres as well as Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayad.

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