



JINSA Statement on General Mattis

November 27, 2016

We are pleased with the array of highly qualified candidates that President-elect Donald Trump is reportedly considering for Secretary of Defense. The Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) – an organization dedicated to a robust U.S. national security posture and a strong U.S.-Israel security relationship – does not and will not endorse any candidate for this or any other government position. However, we feel compelled to convey that characterizations of one candidate, General James N. Mattis, USMC (ret.), as anti-Israel are ill-founded and unfair.

The criticism revolves around extemporaneous remarks General Mattis made at the Aspen Institute in July 2013 on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. They were made shortly following his retirement after a very distinguished four-decade-long career in the U.S. military, with his last position as Commander of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), where his area of responsibility covered much of the Middle East and Central Asia (excluding Israel).

We understand and share many of the objections to his remarks, including that he seemed to blame mostly Israel for the impasse, despite the critical challenges it faces in lacking a stable, moderate Palestinian partner that genuinely seeks a durable peace with the Jewish state. Some American Jews and even Israelis make the same mistake. In any case, he has not repeated those remarks.

On the larger U.S. military and strategic issues related to the Middle East, which a Secretary of Defense will have to address early on, General Mattis has notably and indisputably distinguished himself in advocating for a more robust U.S. military posture to counter, contain and deter Iran, even at the peril of his military career, and its importance to American security and the restoration of America's position in the Middle East – views JINSA has strongly propounded. Along similar lines, he has stressed the need to stand by our longstanding regional friends.

General Mattis' outlook on these issues aligns perfectly with Israel's, which considers an aggressive Iran its greatest strategic threat, and a nuclear Iran to be an existential threat. Israel also seeks a strong U.S. presence in the Middle East. General Mattis has noted this alignment of views with Israel, and correctly explained the synchronization of Israeli and Arab outlooks on these subjects. This should be heartening to the overwhelming majority of Americans who believe that a strong State of Israel is necessary for its own sake and important for a strong America.

JINSA's experiences with General Mattis have been very positive, including many private discussions in the last few years on the Middle East. We recently consulted several notable Israelis and Americans in the civic and military spheres who also have interacted with him and they share our confidence in his support for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

Were General Mattis to become Secretary of Defense, and work more closely with Israel in that position, an opportunity he lacked at CENTCOM, we believe he will become an even closer friend of the State of Israel.

Michael Makovsky
President and CEO