



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, November 7

Headlines:

- **Jewish Congress Members Poised to Take Key Leadership Roles**
- **With Mideast Peace Plan, Jared Kushner Prepares his Debut**
- **Netanyahu May Cancel Paris Trip If there's no Meeting w. Putin**
- **Russia Deploys New Cruise Missiles Off Syrian Coast**
- **Shin-Bet Director Warns: West Bank Quiet Deceptive**
- **Minister Muzzles Official in Clash Over 'Cultural-loyalty Bill'**
- **BDS Poses No Threat, Says Minister in Charge of Fighting It**
- **Snowden Issues Surveillance Warning to Israelis**

Commentary:

- **Ma'ariv: "Dina Zilber- Public Courage in an Era of Cowardice"**
 - By Ben Caspit
- **Ha'aretz: "What Happens to U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Israel, Iran, After the Democrats Won the House"**
 - Ha'aretz, Reuters

News Excerpts

November 7, 2018

JTA

Jewish Congress Members Poised to Take Key Leadership Roles

Democrats took control of the House of Representatives in the midterm elections held Tuesday, with Jewish Congress members poised to take key leadership roles. Republicans looked to increase their majority in the Senate. Five Jewish Democrats are set to chair key House committees, including three representatives from New York: Jerrold Nadler, the Judiciary Committee; Eliot Engel, Foreign Affairs; and Nita Lowey, Appropriations. Adam Schiff of California will head the Intelligence Committee and John Yarmuth of Kentucky will lead the Budget Committee. Democrat Jared Polis will be the first Jewish and first gay governor of Colorado, and J.B. Pritzker, a Jewish Democrat, will be the next governor of Illinois. See also, ["NEW DEMOCRATIC HOUSE, MANY JEWISH PARTY FIGURES HOLD THE POWER OF SUBPOENA" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

With Mideast Peace Plan, Jared Kushner Prepares his Debut

At a standing desk in his cramped, high-ceilinged West Wing office, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser has labored for nearly two years over a detailed plan for peace in the Middle East. Along the way he has granted a mere handful of interviews, none of which have provided much in substance of a plan that has, up until now, remained the administration's most closely guarded secret. But we're about to see a lot more of Jared Kushner. As he puts the finishing touches on a project he hopes to be his crowning achievement in government, Kushner is preparing to sell it to the public. State Department sources tell The Jerusalem Post that Kushner recently visited Foggy Bottom to begin preparing for a more public role centered on the plan.

Ynet News

Netanyahu May Cancel Paris Trip If there's no Meeting w. Putin

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may cancel his trip to Paris, where he planned to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, after the French asked world leaders not to hold meetings on the sidelines of the conference marking 100 years to the end of World War I. The prime minister is scheduled to leave for France on Saturday to attend the conference, which will host over 100 leaders from around the world. Netanyahu wanted to meet with Putin on the sidelines of the conference, but such a meeting has yet to be scheduled, despite talks between NSA Ben-Shabbat and his counterpart Nikolai Patrushev. See also, ["Report: Netanyahu-Putin meeting in Paris canceled amid tensions" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Russia Deploys New Cruise Missiles Off Syrian Coast

Russia said it deployed its new frigate with long-range Kalibr cruise missiles to the Mediterranean Sea on Monday, a few months after Moscow had reinforced its naval forces off Syrian coast. "The Black Sea Navy Fleet's frigate Admiral Makarov left Sevastopol and laid a course for the Black Sea straits. The vessel will be acting in the standing naval force of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean," the Russian Defense Ministry said. Russia has in the past fired Kalibr cruise missiles from frigates and submarines stationed in the Mediterranean Sea at militant targets to support Syrian army offensives.

Shin-Bet Director Warns: West Bank Quiet Deceptive

Shin Bet Director Nadav Argaman warned Tuesday morning that the relative quiet in the West Bank is "deceptive," as " Hamas is trying very hard to carry out terror attacks in and from Judea and Samaria." During his briefing to members of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Argaman went on to explain that "Over the past year, we were able to thwart 480 terror attacks, including 219 Hamas cells and 590 lone attackers. This is a very large number that is indicative of the terrorism bubbling under the surface." "In addition, we were able in the last year to thwart cyber attacks—both terrorism and espionage—against the State of Israel," he added. "In general, these successes... are the result of very strenuous activity by the entire Israeli security system—Shin Bet, IDF, Israel Police—which allows this reality and allows Israeli citizens to live their daily lives," the Shin Bet director noted. See also, ["'Deceptive quiet': Shin Bet chief says 480 terror attacks foiled in past year" \(TOI\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Minister Muzzles Official in Clash Over 'Cultural-loyalty Bill'

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked said Tuesday she would bar Deputy Attorney General Dina Zilber from representing the ministry in the Knesset and elsewhere, over her criticism of a bill that aims to deny state funds to cultural institutions deemed disloyal to the state. Shaked said Zilber had committed a disciplinary violation by expressing a personal view that contradicted the ministry's position. In a debate preparing the bill for a second and final vote in the full Knesset, Zilber told the legislature's Education, Culture and Sports Committee on Tuesday that the bill poses some "real difficulties." "Let's have nothing but obedient attorney generals, artists who are eunuchs, a reined-in media, and people disciplined and educated to all think alike," Zilber said. See also, ["Justice minister calls for deputy AG's firing over criticism of loyalty bill" \(TOI\)](#)

Ha'aretz

BDS Poses No Threat, Says Minister in Charge of Fighting It

The Israeli minister spearheading a heavily funded government campaign against the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement said Tuesday that the international group poses no threat whatsoever to the local economy. "From an economic perspective, the so-called BDS [movement] has been a failure," Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan told a large gathering of evangelical Christians in Tel Aviv. "Foreign direct investment in Israel continues to rise, our credit rating is at its highest level ever, we have more startups per capita than any other country, and just last month we had a record number of tourists," he said.

I24 News

Snowden Issues Surveillance Warning to Israelis

US whistleblower Edward Snowden urged Israelis to be on guard against heavy-handed government and private surveillance in a speech by video link Tuesday and defended his 2013 massive leak of classified documents. Snowden highlighted Israel's high-tech capabilities, but warned that accepting too much government surveillance and too easily acceding to the argument that it is needed for security reasons posed serious risks. "If we can allow ourselves to be terrorised by someone with nothing but a knife, to reorder our societies for the convenience of state power ... we've stopped being citizens and we've started being subjects," said Snowden, who spoke from an undisclosed location in Moscow. See also, ["Edward Snowden warns Israelis of surveillance dangers" \(RTE\)](#)

Dina Zilber- Public Courage in an Era of Cowardice

By Ben Caspit

- I've never met Dina Zilber or spoken with her. I can't say whether her act of suicide yesterday at the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee [sic] was planned in advance or whether things simply spiraled out of control. One thing that I do know is that the day will come when Zilber will tell her grandchildren proudly about what happened.
- The day will come when historians will construe that incident as a rare show of public courage in an era of cowardice, personal integrity in an era of hypocritical sycophancy, a last sunrise before the final sunset. Until that day arrives, I will suffice with a personal statement: thank you, Ms. Zilber, the ousted deputy attorney general. The justice minister's guillotine that chopped off your head in one swift fall of the blade is the greatest badges of courage that you could have received.
- These are terrible times. Before our very eyes the state that our forefathers established here 70 years ago is gradually being destroyed. The free, liberal and self-confident Israel, the light unto the nations, the role model, the villa in the jungle, now better resembles the jungle itself. People who dare to think outside the extreme right wing's message page are marked and are decried as traitors.
- A filthy, fulminating and endless wave of legislation is threatening to drown what is left of the values on which the state of the Jews was founded. At the memorial for the Rabin assassination, everyone pounces on Rabin's grandchildren for daring to criticize the prime minister, who headed the unbridled and violent campaign of incitement at the end of which a brainwashed Jewish murderer shot the prime minister in the back. Shame has taken early retirement. It has been replaced with violent brazenness, blind imperiousness, a mass attack on everything that this country was built and has symbolized for a generation, with the goal of annihilating and destroying. The State of Israel is gradually giving way to the kingdom of Judea.
- On paper, Dina Zilber might have said things yesterday that she should not have said, given the office she holds. In my opinion, one could certainly take the view that she, as a senior gatekeeper, warned against dangerous processes that are liable to damage Israel's democratic values. She, in the context of her job, is supposed to interpret the law, basic laws, the principles of the legal system and the values of the Declaration of Independence. The loyalty bill, as she understands it, is damaging to all of the above, and she expressed that in her statements.
- But for the sake of argument, let's assume that she should have used different language, or something like that. The speed with which Ayelet Shaked's ax came down frightens me. It is the natural outgrowth of everything that has been happening here lately, in the context of the imperious race of fawning hypocrites on the right, in which they all try to prove to that same legendary "base" that they are more ruthless than the dictator. That is sickening. My view is that Zilber said too little and too late. Even if she is now forced to resign, it was worth it. Once again, thank you.
- And what are they now going to do to the attorney general himself, who informed the High Court of Justice that he isn't prepared to defend another genius, Ofir Akunis, for his awful and

miserable decision not to allow the appointment of the scientist, Professor Yael Amitai, to the Scientific Committee, a professional forum, because she signed a petition 16 years ago? That happened, naturally, after a different professor was appointed to an equally important position (Talia Einhorn, who was appointed to the senior officials appointment committee), despite having signed a petition calling for soldiers to disobey orders [during disengagement].

- Incidentally, in a democratic country both professors obviously should serve in their official capacities regardless of an opinion of one kind or another that they expressed in a long-forgotten petition. But Ofir Akunis, a man whose legacy amounts to nothing squared, has just one vested interest: the Likud primary. So as to avoid being pushed down the list, Akunis will fire whomever he needs to. Just like Ayelet Shaked, just like Miri Regev, just like all the other thugs who are fighting over the right wing voters.
- The problem is that in the meantime, the country is going to hell. Leftists fear for their lives, journalists are persecuted, the notion of “loyalty” has been tied to “culture,” countless crucial pieces of legislation have been postponed to a later date while tens of millions of shekels more have been allocated to the prime minister’s plane and the ad hominem Gidon Saar bill has been advanced at full speed. Not only is this not amusing anymore, it has become frightening. Things that seemed unbelievable just two years ago are now swiftly occurring in front of our very eyes. Sometimes I ask myself how Israel managed to get as far as it did without Ayelet Shaked, Ofir Akunis, Miri Regev and the great luminary, Oren Hazan.
- How did they ever establish it, all those treacherous leftists? How did they conquer Jerusalem in 1967? How did they build Dimona, the National Water Carrier, Israeli industry, the Negev? How did they establish the IDF, the GSS and the Mossad? How did all that function and even prevail without all these new laws? How did Herzl say, “If you will it,” before Im Tirtzu [literally, “if you will it”] existed? The real question that is beginning to present itself is whether Israel will survive this filthy wave. Regrettably, I don’t know the answer to that question anymore.

SUMMARY: On paper, Dina Zilber might have said things yesterday that she should not have said, given the office she holds. In my opinion, one could certainly take the view that she, as a senior gatekeeper, warned against dangerous processes that are liable to damage Israel’s democratic values. She, in the context of her job, is supposed to interpret the law, basic laws, the principles of the legal system and the values of the Declaration of Independence. The loyalty bill, as she understands it, is damaging to all of the above, and she expressed that in her statements. But for the sake of argument, let’s assume that she should have used different language, or something like that. The speed with which Ayelet Shaked’s ax came down frightens me. It is the natural outgrowth of everything that has been happening here lately, in the context of the imperious race of fawning hypocrites on the right, in which they all try to prove to that same legendary “base” that they are more ruthless than the dictator. That is sickening. My view is that Zilber said too little and too late. Even if she is now forced to resign, it was worth it. Once again, thank you.

What Happens to U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Israel, Iran, After the Democrats Won the House

Ha'aretz and Reuters

- Democrats will try to harden U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia, Russia and North Korea with their newly won majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, while maintaining the status quo on hot-button areas like China and Iran, congressional sources say. On Tuesday night, Democrats won control of the House of Representatives from Republicans for the first time since 2011. That means they can determine what legislation can be considered in the chamber and have a bigger role in setting spending policy and writing legislation, in their challenge to U.S. President Donald Trump's foreign policy agenda. But since they must still work with a Republican-controlled Senate to pass any bills, the Democratic majority's greatest influence will be oversight, the ability to call hearings and, if necessary, subpoena witnesses, as they chair committees like Foreign Affairs, Armed Services and Intelligence.

ISRAEL

- Chuck Schumer, the New York senator and minority leader, told Jewish Insider: "Senate Democrats are very strongly pro-Israel and will remain that way." Schumer was responding to criticism that a new wave of anti-Israel Democrats are poised to enter the Congress. Ilhan Omar, who will be one of the two first Muslim-American women entering the Congress this fall, has had to reject accusations that a 2012 tweet accusing Israel of 'evil doings' amounts to anti-Semitism and she has repeatedly denounced Israel for apartheid.
- Rashida Tlaib from Michigan, the other Muslim-American woman set to make history, has already had a political tussle over Israel since winning her Democratic primary for Congress. She lost the endorsement of J-Street for refusing to endorse the two-state solution. However, little seems likely to change in the U.S.-Israel relationship. U.S. President Barack Obama was a staunch ally of Israel and increased U.S. military aid to Israel during his time in office and was responsible for much of the funding that helped to create Israel's Iron Dome missile shield.

SAUDI ARABIA

- The furor over the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul has added to lawmakers' frustration with Saudi Arabia over civilian deaths in the war in Yemen and human rights. A Democratic-led House would vote on legislation to block arms deals with Riyadh, make it difficult to win congressional approval of a nuclear energy deal with the kingdom and take up a measure to stop U.S. aircraft refueling and other support for the campaign in Yemen.

RUSSIA

- Democrats plan Russia-related investigations, such as a probe of business ties and conflicts of interest between Trump and Russia. But from a policy perspective, a Democratic-led House would push to punish Russia for interference in U.S. elections and activities including its aggression in Ukraine and involvement in the Syrian civil war. The House would push for more sanctions, including measures targeting new Russian sovereign debt. They would also try to pressure Trump to enact all of the sanctions in a sweeping bill he reluctantly signed into law in

August 2017. "Trump would have to accept policies that he is not so enthusiastic to accept," said Ilan Goldenberg, a former congressional aide and State Department official now at the Center for a New American Security.

- Members of Congress have also vowed to push harder, using subpoena power if necessary, to obtain information about Trump's summit last summer with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The White House has released few details about the meeting.

NORTH KOREA

- Democrats say they are determined to obtain more information about meetings by Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo with North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un, worried that Trump is so eager to make a "great deal" that he will give Kim too much. They plan to call administration officials to testify in public, and behind closed doors, about the status of talks. But they also will walk a fine line, because they do not want to be seen as interfering with diplomacy and efforts to prevent a nuclear war.

CHINA

- Aides and outside experts do not expect that Democratic House control will mean significant changes in China policy. Democrats will hold more hearings, and demand more briefings, but criticism of Beijing has so far crossed party lines and that is not expected to change. Prominent Democrats, such as Representative Adam Schiff, who is in line to chair the House Intelligence Committee, have joined Republicans backing measures to clamp down on China, like legislation treating ZTE Corp and Huawei Technologies Co Ltd technology and phones as major cyber security threats.
- Like Republicans, Democrats are divided on Trump's trade war with China. Some party members see free trade as a generator of jobs, while others back tariffs to protect workers in industries such as steel and manufacturing.

IRAN

- Democrats were infuriated by Trump's withdrawal from the international nuclear deal with Iran that Democratic President Barack Obama's administration reached in 2015. But there is little they can do to change the policy as long as Republicans occupy the White House. Lawmakers also are wary of seeming too friendly to Iran, especially given hostility to Tehran by the government of Israel. While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has worked increasingly closely with U.S. Republicans, strong ties to Israel remain a top priority for both parties.

SUMMARY: Chuck Schumer, the New York senator and minority leader, told Jewish Insider: "Senate Democrats are very strongly pro-Israel and will remain that way." Schumer was responding to criticism that a new wave of anti-Israel Democrats are poised to enter the Congress. Ilhan Omar, who will be one of the two first Muslim-American women entering the Congress this fall, has had to reject accusations that a 2012 tweet accusing Israel of 'evil doings' amounts to anti-Semitism and she has repeatedly denounced Israel for apartheid. Rashida Tlaib from Michigan, the other Muslim-American woman set to make history, has already had a political tussle over Israel since winning her Democratic primary for Congress. She lost the endorsement of J-Street for refusing to endorse the two-state solution. However, little seems likely to change in the U.S.-Israel relationship.