



Building Bridges at AZM Forum



Former US ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro (speaking, r) and Senator Chuck Schumer (l) at the AZM forum

In Washington's extremely partisan environment, it's rare to attend an event like last week's forum of the American Zionist Movement (AZM), where senior figures from both parties gathered at the Capitol Visitors Center with heads of important groups like Hadassah, Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), and AIPAC.

Given the rancor that seems to dominate discourse in the Capitol now, the discussions at the AZM forum were surprisingly deep and dignified. And the confab drew a distinguished guest list, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, former US ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro, Republican congressmen Lee Zeldin and Ed Royce, retiring congresswoman Ileana Ros-

Lehtinen, and others.

"Now more than ever, and in Israel's 70th anniversary year, there must be a renewal of the historic broad and bipartisan United States support for Israel," said AZM president Richard D. Heideman in his remarks.

A two-hour panel addressed one subject: How pro-Israel advocates can build consensus on both sides of the aisle in the battle against anti-Semitism and Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions movement (BDS), and other subjects of urgent communal concern. Prior to the panel, participants were given an off-the-record briefing by Jason Greenblatt on the Trump administration's Mideast peace plan; that session was not open to the media.

Democratic participants seemed to arrive at the event

COFFEE BREAK

WITH PROMINENT POLITICAL FIGURES AT THE AZM CONFERENCE

Halie Soifer, executive director of the Jewish Democratic Council (JDC)

Q It seems like support for Israel is becoming a partisan issue. What is your take?

A "Well, we did see questions of Israel arise in this election, and there were three Democratic candidates with whom JDC did not agree on their views on Israel, and we made our view on that public. We came out and specifically expressed concern with regard to the positions of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib when it comes to Israel."

Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-NY)

Q Do you think Netanyahu has any reason to be worried about the upcoming peace plan?

A "I haven't seen what the final proposals are... Ultimately, I'm someone who believes that piece should be negotiated on the ground in Israel. I also fear that right now you don't have a partner to peace on the other side of the table in any position, in good faith, to be able to negotiate long-term piece. It's possible that if someone representing the Palestinians were to sign a long-term solution, they could be assassinated within days. And on top of that, it's an unfortunate reality that many others just wouldn't accept the terms. So it's not even like they can make an agreement on behalf of all of their people. They can only make an agreement on behalf of some of the people."

Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, former Democratic National Committee chairwoman

Q Are you worried that there is a big divide between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to support of Israel?

A "There is not a big divide when it coming to support for Israel from the Democratic Party's perspective, particularly when it comes to the membership in Congress that puts votes on the board to make sure that we consistently maintain support for Israel's security, for the strong US-Israel relationship and maintaining Israel as the Jewish and democratic state."



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on the defensive. Recent public opinion surveys have shown a widening gap between Democrats and Republicans on the question of support for Israel. Furthermore, the recent midterm elections put three radical left-wing Democrats in Congress who have expressed support for BDS and antipathy toward Israel.

On the other hand, since President Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the US embassy there, and he maintains a close relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu, Republican attendees seemed to feel they had less to prove.

The timing, two weeks before the new Congress is sworn in, gives an important indicator of where US-Israel relations are headed in the next two years. The Democratic representatives who attended were very determined to prove to the assemblage that their

support for Israel will be stronger than ever when they take control. For example, they spoke about their support for a bill opposing BDS.

Schumer disclosed that after he learned that Republican members go early to the Senate fitness center, he has been using those hours of exercise to try to persuade Kentucky senator Rand Paul, who is holding up defense aid for Israel, to withdraw his opposition. And the Democratic speakers all emphasized that they did not support the candidates of their party who advocated for BDS during the election campaign.

These are encouraging signs for the Democrats – but is it just lip service, or are they really intending to move toward the center now that the House of Representatives is in their hands? We'll find out the answer starting on January 3, when the time for governing begins.

Will Trump's Temporary Chief of Staff Become Permanent?

President Trump announced over the weekend that he would appoint Mick Mulvaney as acting White House chief of staff to replace General John Kelly, who will leave the job at the end of the month. Kelly had been appointed in July 2017 to impose a sort of military order on the chaotic White House working environment, but repeated clashes with the president led to his departure. Kelly himself had replaced former GOP chairman Reince Priebus, so Mulvaney will be the third person to serve in this position in two years.

Mulvaney's selection comes after several others turned down the job. The leading candidate, Nick Ayers, currently Vice President Mike Pence's chief of staff, announced he was declining due to family reasons.

Mulvaney is

considered a comfortable fit for the job because of his rich political experience, conservative worldview, and good personal chemistry with the president. Trump reportedly appreciates Mulvaney's political acumen and skill in televised appearances, which are very significant factors for the president in selecting a candidate for a position. For now, it is unclear whether Mulvaney's "acting" status will become permanent. The president is preserving a measure of flexibility on the matter.

Mulvaney was born in Alexandria, Virginia, grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina, attended a Catholic high school and then Georgetown University in Washington, where he studied international finance and commerce. He later studied law at the University of North Carolina. During the 1990s, he joined his father's real estate business, and was also a partner in a restaurant chain.

Mulvaney was elected to South Carolina's 5th Congressional District in 2010, serving three full terms. He was

part of the Tea Party faction in Congress, opposing gun control and Obamacare. In 2017, shortly after Mulvaney was elected to his fourth term, President Trump appointed him director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In his role as OMB director, Mulvaney has earned the moniker "Mick the Knife" for his efforts to rein in expenditures. He has been quoted as saying, "I don't think there is anyone in this administration who is more conservative and right-wing than I am." Mulvaney has also poked fun at himself as a "right-wing nut job."

Mulvaney enters his new job at a time when Republicans have lost their majority in the House of Representatives and will therefore have a lot of trouble advancing any significant legislation without broad agreement. Mulvaney is not known for being a man of compromise. But what was possible for him these past two years as director of the OMB may be much harder to achieve when working with a divided Congress not particularly interested in cooperating with the president.

