

Family Fortune

A new biography looks at the Guggenheims' public — and private — lives.

DAVID KAUFMANN has a read on PAGE 11.

FORWARD FORUM

Bilateral Will Is Key Issue

By SHLOMO AVINERI
Is Ariel Sharon an Israeli de Gaulle, come to power promising to implement the program of the nationalist right and instead becoming the vehicle for carrying out the ideas which the left had been unable to imple-

U.S. Role Is Main Factor

By DAUD KUTTAB
Everyone in the Middle East is crossing their fingers these days, hoping that regional and international leaders will not blow yet another opportunity for Arab-Israeli peace. The role of Palestinian and Israeli leaders is

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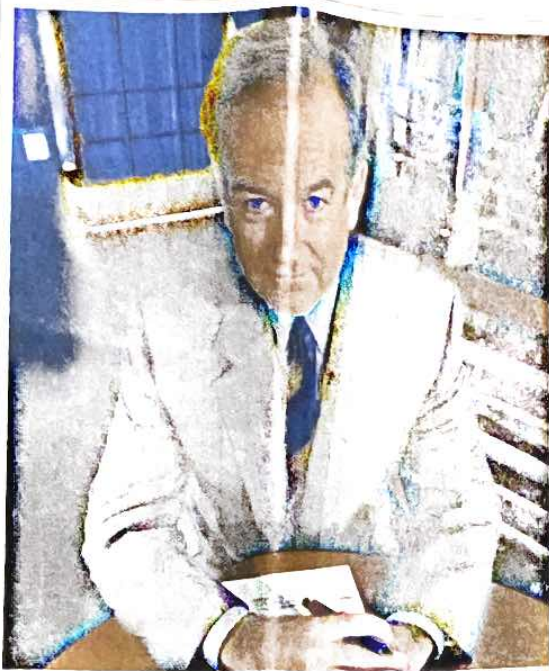
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X-MAS FACTOR: In his latest furor, Bill O'Reilly urges a Jew who dislikes public Christmas rites to 'go to Israel.' David Twersky weighs in, Page 8.

Holiday Invite List Showcases White House's Ties to Orthodox

By EJ KESSLER

The White House's budding relationship with the Orthodox Jewish community was on display last week at three public events that some participants said signaled who's in and who's out of favor with the administration as President Bush heads for a second term.

An intimate December 9 meeting between the president and 15 communal leaders featured 10 Orthodox rabbis, one Orthodox rebbetzin, four Reform rabbis and not one Conservative Jew. The 500-person White House Hanukkah party, held later that night, was choc-a-bloc with

showed that Bush was rewarding the religiously traditional elements of the community that supported his re-election and sending a message to the more liberal segments that did not. According to network exit polls, about 75% of American Jews voted for John Kerry — but a majority of the Orthodox, who comprise only 8% of Jews nationally, backed Bush. The liberal branches of Judaism, including the Conservative and Reform movements, together represent 79% of synagogue-affiliated Jews, compared with 21% who belong to Orthodox congregations,

As Israel Debates Syrian Overture, Washington Presses To Stop Talks

State, Defense Departments In Rare Unity on Mideast Policy

By ORIN IR

WASHINGTON — While Syria's repeated offers to reopen peace talks with Jerusalem are triggering a fierce debate within the Israeli military and political establishment, the Bush administration appears united in its opposition to launching such negotiations.

The administration is not officially advising Israel against such talks, Israeli and American sources said. But Washington has refrained from publicly endorsing the resumption of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations, and has quietly told Israeli leaders that this would be a bad time to resume talks with Syria, according to knowledgeable American and Israeli sources.

The unified front in Washington — marking a seemingly rare point of agreement on Middle East policy among officials at the State and Defense departments — stands in sharp contrast to the situation in Israel. Prime Minister Sharon has made clear in recent weeks that he has no intention of resuming negotiations with Syria anytime soon, but numerous top-level officials in Jerusalem, from the president and defense minister to the military chief of staff and intelligence heads, have publicly spoken out in favor of sitting down with Syria.

In Washington, the consensus against talks reflects the State Department's suspicion that Israeli-Syrian discussions would simply serve as a way for Sharon to delay progress with the Palestinians, as well as the view at both the Pentagon and the National Security Council that Damascus has failed to quell the flow of support for the insurgency in Iraq.

"It really wouldn't look good if

Israeli President Unveils Plan For 'World Knesset'

BY ORIN IR

JERUSALEM — Israel's government took its first public step last week toward the formal creation of an international Jewish "parliament," whose purpose would be to represent Diaspora Jews in the formation of Israeli government policies that have potential impact on Jewish life in other countries.

The initiative was unveiled at a special Monday meeting of the Knesset's committee for immigration and absorption, which has responsibility for Diaspora affairs. The meeting was held at the official residence of Israel's figurehead president, in an apparent effort to emphasize the ceremonial significance of the initiative, and was formally introduced by the president himself, Moshe Katzav.

