

IN THE NEWS

Gates confirmed as defense secretary

The U.S. Senate confirmed Robert Gates, who described Israel as a nuclear power, as defense secretary by a 95-2 vote.

The two senators who voted against Gates Wednesday night, Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) and Jim Bunning (R-Ky.), cited his willingness in the past to engage Iran.

In his confirmation hearings, Gates said Iran is seeking nuclear weapons because "they are surrounded by powers with nuclear weapons — Pakistan to their east, the Russians to the north, the Israelis to the west and us in the Persian Gulf."

Israeli media described the comment as a potential breach of a longstanding tacit agreement by Washington to go along with the Jewish state's policy of nuclear ambiguity.

House passes anti-terrorism bill

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the more moderate version of the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act.

The act, which seeks to isolate the Palestinian Authority until it recognizes Israel and rejects terrorism, was bogged down last summer over differences between the Senate and House versions.

GM's wish to rewrite company history?

General Motors, reflecting on the conduct of company chief Alfred P. Sloan during the Nazi era, said it wished it could "hit the rewind button" and change the company's history.

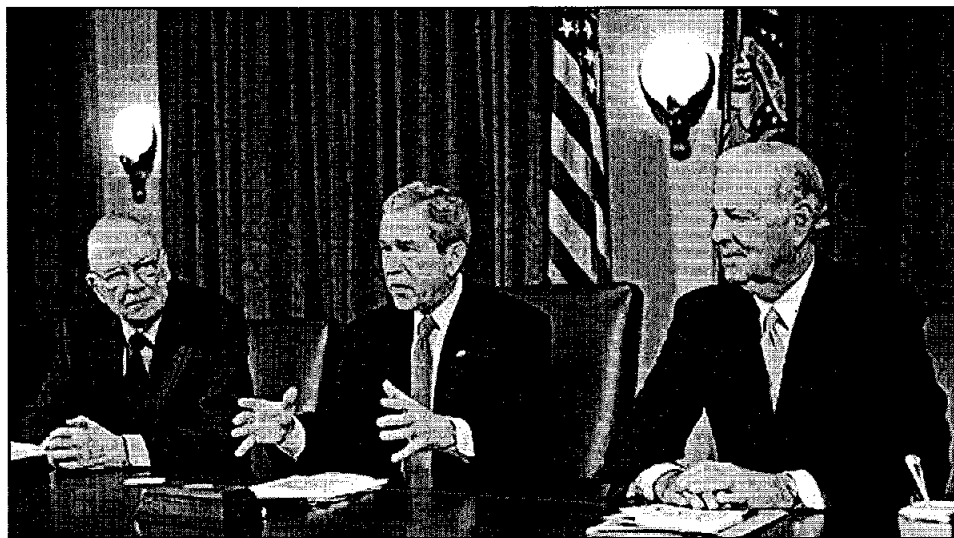
The comments came in the wake of JTA's four-part special investigation, "Hitler's Carmaker," which detailed how GM, under Sloan's leadership, helped the Third Reich mobilize to conquer Europe through the carmaker's wholly-owned German subsidiary, Opel. GM had declined to comment for the series, which was published last week.



WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

For pro-Israel crowd, Iraq report has some unwelcome proposals



Eric Draper

President Bush addresses the media during a meeting Wednesday with the Iraq Study Group at the White House.

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Iraq Study Group's near-term recommendations for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict — international conferences, dealings with Syria and Iran — already are raising hackles in some pro-Israel quarters.

Long-term expectations could be even more problematic.

The report from the blue-ribbon panel, headed by former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and former U.S. Rep. Lee Hamilton, was presented Wednesday. It mostly hews to the Bush administration principle of making an end to hostility toward Israel a prerequisite for improved relations with the United States: The Pales-

tinians and Syrians first must demonstrate good faith through ending terrorism and recognizing the Jewish state before they can repair relations with Washington.

Baker, Hamilton and the eight other commissioners go further than the Bush administration, however, in describing the payoff for such good behavior: a return to the U.N.-conceived "land-for-peace" formulations of previous administrations in dealings with the Palestinians, and an Israeli handover of the Golan Heights to Syria.

On the Palestinian issue, the report recommends "adherence to U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and to the principle of land-for-peace, which are the

Continued on page 2

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ *The recommendations on Syria represent a considerable shift for Israel*

Continued from page 1
only bases for achieving peace."

Israel and the Bush administration are committed to 242 and 338, which date back to the period just after Israel captured the West Bank and Golan Heights in 1967. However, making these resolutions the "only" bases for achieving peace could be interpreted as negating the signal Israeli accomplishment of recent years: the April 14, 2004 letter from President Bush that recognized some Israeli West Bank settlements as facts on the ground.

On Syria, the commission recommends that "the Israelis should return the Golan Heights, with a U.S. security guarantee for Israel that could include an international force on the border, including U.S. troops if requested by both parties."

■ That represents a considerable shift for Israel, primarily by announcing Syria's payoff if it makes peace. Israel has not come out so explicitly, preferring to say it will match the depth of its concessions to the depth of peace Syria offers.

Additionally, the recommendation ignores a question that dogged previous negotiations with Syria: whether the Golan includes a slice of the Sea of Galilee. Israel insists it does not, arguing that Syria took the seashore by force in the 1948 war.

The recommendation also would scuttle Israel's principle accomplishment in earlier negotiations, which stuttered throughout the 1990s: getting the Syrians close to agreeing to demilitarize a

chunk of land beyond the Golan, effectively nullifying the mountain range's height advantage. A small force policing the border would be considered a poor substitute for the strategic advantage of demilitarization.

President Bush is not obliged to heed the advice of the congressionally mandated commission, and is suggesting he will approach it piecemeal.

"There's some very good ideas in there," Bush said. "Not all of us around the table agree with every idea, but we do agree that it shows that bipartisan consensus on important issues is possible."

Hours after the report's release, the White House ruled out bilateral talks with Iran.

The Israeli Embassy in Washington would not comment on the report. Some of Israel's friends, however, were not so circumspect.

The American Jewish Committee questioned the substance of recommending talks between Israelis and moderate Palestinians when Hamas, a terrorist group that denies Israel's existence, heads the Palestinian Authority.

"The report does not explain what purpose will be served by negotiations between Israel and those Palestinians who, while presumably moderate, do not actually have the power to make and carry out agreements," the group said in a statement.

■ Additionally, the AJCommittee said, calling on Syria to press Hamas into recognizing Israel was "ingenuous" when what was needed was an agreement to shut out the group.

"If Syria chooses to seek the path of peace with Israel, it can demonstrate that policy shift by shutting down the Hamas headquarters in Damascus and the rest of the terrorist infrastructure supported by the Assad regime," it said.

Also troubling for some groups was the study group's preference for international conferences of the kind Baker foisted on Israel when he worked for the first President Bush, and its recommen-

dation that engagement with Iran on Iraq ignore parallel efforts to get Iran to give up its nuclear program.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee did not formally comment on the report, but sent out cautionary back-grounders on previous efforts to engage Iran.

"Iran has rebuffed previous U.S. efforts to engage its leadership and has exploited negotiations over its nuclear

program to continue its weapons pursuit," AIPAC said in one e-mail, headlined "Proceed with Caution if Engaging Iran and Syria."

Dovish pro-Israel groups welcomed the

report for its embrace of greater engagement, long one of their pleas to the Bush administration.

"There must be a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace," said the Israel Policy Forum, echoing similar comments by groups such as Americans for Peace Now and Brit Tzedek v'Shalom. "Sustained American diplomatic engagement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy even without a war in Iraq."

■ Democrats dealt mostly with the report's recommendations on removing combat troops from Iraq by early 2008. Among leaders of the incoming Congress, only Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), likely to head the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee, addressed the Israeli-Arab component, and not favorably.

"There is no basis to conclude that a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian problem is central to resolving Iraq," he said in a statement. "These two issues, both difficult to resolve, must not be artificially conflated. The status of the Palestinians does not prompt Shi'ites and Sunnis to engage in reciprocal mass assassinations in Iraq. There are many sound reasons to encourage serious efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestinian problem. Iraq is not one of them."

Troubling for some Jewish groups was the preference for international conferences of the kind James Baker once foisted on Israel.

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Just what does the gay ruling mean?

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — It adopted three conflicting opinions and lost four members, but the Conservative movement's highest legal body was claiming victory after its decision this week that paved the way for gay rabbis and same-sex commitment ceremonies.

"We as a movement see the advantages of pluralism, and we know that people come to different conclusions drawing from the same basic resources of our tradition," Rabbi Kassel

Abelson, chairman of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, told reporters Wednesday following the decision.

"These teshuvot are accepted as guides so that the gays and lesbians can be welcomed into our congregations and communities and made to feel accepted and welcomed."

It was one of the most closely watched decisions in the history of the law committee and capped months of often divisive debate within the movement over the proper approach to gays and lesbians.

As it has in the past, the committee endorsed opposing positions, leaving it to individual rabbis to determine such hot-button questions as whether or not to officiate at same-sex commitment ceremonies or to allow gays and lesbians synagogue honors.

Of the three opinions endorsed by the committee, the most liberal, authored by Rabbis Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins and Avram Reisner, calls commitment ceremonies "appropriate" and "welcomes" gay clergy while retaining the biblical prohibition on homosexual intercourse.

This prohibition comes from the book of Leviticus, which says: "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination."

For lesbians, that decision would affect only their ability to be ordained as Conservative rabbis and have a commitment ceremony.

A conservative opinion upholding the movement's previous position barring gay clergy and commitment ceremonies was presented by Rabbi Joel Roth.

Both papers were endorsed by a majority of the 25-member committee. A third opinion by Rabbi Leonard Levy calling for reparative therapy for gays received the minimum six votes for adoption.

Dorff, explaining his position, said: "It's

a paper which very much seeks to make room for gays and lesbians in public ways in the Conservative movement, to find some sort of commitment ceremony that would be open to sanctifying and celebrating the unions of gays and lesbians.

"We do have a Jewish and a social and a medical need to try to confirm those unions," said Dorff, vice chairman of the law committee.

Two other papers, both of which would have removed all barriers to homosexual activity, won the support of seven committee members but were

not adopted due to their designation as takanot, a halachic category requiring an absolute majority for acceptance.

Roth and Levy, along with Rabbis Mayer Rabinowitz and Joseph Prouser, resigned from the law committee in protest of its adoption of the liberal paper.

In explaining his resignation from a committee that had just endorsed his view, Roth said the "ostensible legal reasoning in the permissive paper that was approved was outside the pale of acceptability of halachic reasoning."

Roth stressed that he was only resigning from the committee and would not abandon the Conservative movement or the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he is a professor of Talmud and Jewish law.

Though the resignations seemed to undermine claims that Conservative Judaism can tolerate a diversity of opinion within its ranks, rabbis were celebrating what they called the movement's successful balance of its commitment to Jewish law and its embrace of the challenges of modern life.

Participants in the two-day meeting at Manhattan's Park Avenue Synagogue stressed that discussions were conducted without rancor and in a spirit of respect for the dignity and scholarship of all the positions presented.

"The tenor is very uplifting," said Rabbi Alvin Berkun, the president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the association of Conserva-

tive rabbis, and an ex-officio member of the committee. "I personally was inspired by the level of scholarship, the level of commitment to the process."

"The Conservative movement has been handed a teaching moment the likes of which we haven't seen in 20 years."

Plans were already under way before the final decision was announced for further discussions on the issue across the movement. At JTS, incoming Chancellor Arnold Eisen planned to meet with faculty Thursday to discuss the issue.

The Masorti movement, the Conservative movement's sister organization in Israel, announced Tuesday it would hold "serious discussions of the halachah with regards to homosexuality" following the decision.

Rabbi Chanan Alexander, chairman of the executive committee of Masorti's Israeli rabbinical school, the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, told the Jerusalem Post his movement would not be bound by Wednesday's decision.

"The Israeli public is in a different place

from the United States on this issue," said Alexander. "We have to be responsive to our public."

Both the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, which have been open to gay clergy and same-sex commitment ceremonies for years, welcomed the decision.

But Agudath Israel, a fervently Orthodox group, slammed it, calling the move an "abandonment of pretense of fealty to Judaism."

In New York, the decision was hailed by JTS students, a group of whom held a news conference outside the synagogue to welcome the move.

"Today we breathe a breath of fresh air," said Jay Michaelson, a gay Jewish writer and teacher, and spokesman for KeshetJTS, a student advocacy group. "Our age-old traditions are wiser than passing prejudices because they take account of new information like what we now know to be scientifically true about sexuality."

BACKGROUNDER

We do have a Jewish and a social and a medical need to try to confirm those unions of gays and lesbians.

Rabbi Elliot Dorff

Vice chairman,
Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards

How will posterity remember GM's conduct?

By EDWIN BLACK

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The epilogue of the tumultuous saga of General Motors during the New Deal and Nazi era is still being written.

In 1974, a generation after World War II, the company's controversial history was resurrected by the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly.

GM and Opel's collusion with the Nazis dominated the opening portion of the subcommittee's exhaustively documented study, which mainly focused on the company's conspiracy to monopolize scores of local mass transit systems in the United States.

The report's author, Judiciary Committee staff attorney Bradford Snell, used GM's collaboration with the Third Reich as a moral backdrop to help explain the automakers' plan in more than 40 cities to subvert popular, clean-running electric public transit and convert it to petroleum-burning motor buses.

The Senate report, titled "American Ground Transport," was released shortly after the Arab-imposed 1973 oil shock — and it accused GM of significantly contributing to the nation's petroleum woes through its mass-transit machinations.

■ GM had been convicted in 1949 of leading a secret corporate combine that funded a front company called National City Lines that systematically replaced electric trolleys with oil-guzzling motor buses across America. After Snell's report was presented, GM immediately went on the counterattack, denying Snell's charges about both its domestic conduct and its collusion with the Nazis, and demanding that the Senate Judiciary Committee cease circulating its own report. That, of course, did not happen.

But following the release of the Snell report, the automaker then created its own 88-page rebuttal report titled "The Truth About American Ground Transport," whose entire first section, as it turns out, had nothing to do with American ground transport. It was headlined "General Motors Did Not Assist the Nazis in World War II."

Thus, GM's involvement with Nazi transportation in Germany juxtaposed

with its conspiracy to convert electric mass transit at home became inextricably linked by virtue of the Senate's investigation, the company's own rebuttal and the compelling historical parallel between the company's conduct in the United States and its conduct in Germany.

GM further demanded that the Senate never permit its own report, "American Ground Transport," to be distributed without GM's rebuttal attached. The Senate agreed — a rare move indeed. Snell, however, labeled the GM rebuttal a document calculated to mislead historians and the public.

Yet another generation later, in the late 1990s, GM's collaboration with the Nazis was again resurrected when Nazi-era slave laborers threatened to sue GM and Ford for reparations. At the time, a GM spokesman told a reporter at The Washington Post that the company "did not assist the Nazis in any way during WWII." The effort to sue GM and Ford was unsuccessful, but both Ford and GM, concerned about the facts that might come to light, commissioned histories of their Nazi-related pasts.

■ In the case of Ford, the company issued its 2001 report, compiled by historian Simon Reich, plus the original underlying documentation, all of which was made available to the public without restriction. Ford immediately circulated CDs with the data to the media. Researchers and other interested parties may today view the actual documents and photocopy them. The Reich report concluded, among other things, that Ford-Werke, the company's German subsidiary, used slave labor from the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944 and 1945, and functioned as an integral part of the German war machine. Ford officials in Detroit have publicly commented on their Nazi past, remained available for comment, apologized and have generally helped all those seeking answers about its involvement with the Hitler regime.

As for GM, it commissioned the eminent business historian Henry Ashby Turner Jr. in 1999 to conduct an internal investigation and report his findings. Turner, author of several favorably reviewed books, including "German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler," was well known for, among other things, his insistence that big business did not make a pivotal contribution to the rise of Hitlerism.

GM, however, declined to release Turner's internal report or discuss the company's Nazi-era or New Deal-era history or archival holdings when contacted by this reporter. In February, corporate spokeswoman Geri Lama twice refused

to give this reporter the location of the company archive. In November, Lama was again asked for an on-the-record response. She said she was referring the question to "staffers," but af-

ter more than a week, no reply had been received.

GM has maintained a special combative niche in the annals of American corporate history, achieving a reputation for suppressing books, obstructing access to archival records and frustrating critics from Ralph Nader to Bradford Snell. GM attorneys even fought efforts by longtime company president and chairman Alfred P. Sloan himself to publish his own memoirs, although the autobiography was finally published in 1964 after a long court fight.

■ In July 2005, Turner published the book "General Motors and the Nazis: The Struggle for Control of Opel, Europe's Biggest Carmaker" (Yale University Press). The book features 158 chapter text pages of carefully detailed and footnoted information, plus notes, an index and a short appendix. Although the book has been reviewed, BookScan, which tracks about 70 percent of retail book sales for the publishing industry, reported in late October that only 139 copies of the Turner book had been sold to the key outlets monitored by the service since the publication's release.

In his book Turner, relying on his work

HITLER'S
CARMAKER:
Part 4 of 4

GM has maintained a special combative niche in the annals of American corporate history.

as GM's historian, disputed many earlier findings about GM's complicity with the Nazis, concluding that charges that GM had collaborated with the Nazis even after the United States and Germany were at war "have proved groundless." Turner rejects "the assumption that the American corporation did business in the Third Reich by choice," asserting, "Such was not the case." Turner also states that GM had no option but to return wartime profits to its stockholders, since "the German firm prospered handsomely from Hitler's promotion of the automobile and from the remarkable recovery of the German economy."

However, Turner does state explicitly that "by the end of 1940 more than ten thousand employees at Opel's Rüsselsheim plant were engaged in producing parts for the Junkers bombers heavily used in raining death and destruction on London and other British cities during the air attacks of the Battle of Britain." Turner also condemns GM for taking the Opel wartime dividends, which included profits made from slave labor. He writes, "But regardless of who [in the GM corporate structure] decided to claim that tainted money, its receipt rendered GM guilty, after the fact, of deriving profit from war production for the Third Reich made possible in part from the toil of unfree workers."

Aware that questions would arise about his relationship with GM, Turner's book states in its preface: "This book was not commissioned by General Motors. It was written after the documentation project was completed and without any financial support from GM. Its contents were seen by no one at GM prior to publication. It is therefore an independent undertaking by the author, who bears sole responsibility for its contents."

Turner did not respond to voice mail and e-mail messages seeking information about his sponsored GM history project, his subsequent book or other relevant topics.

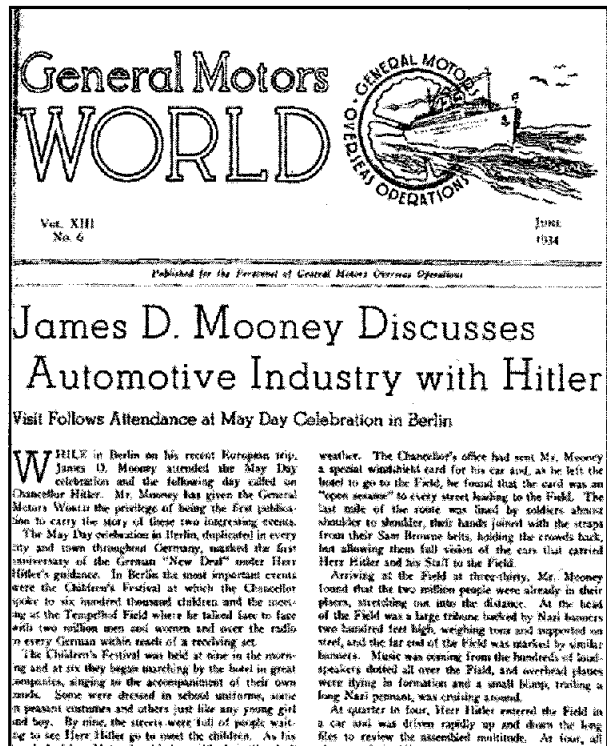
The GM Opel documents assembled for the company's probe and Turner's commissioned examination were digitized on CD-ROMs and donated to Yale's Sterling Memorial Library, where the collection is categorized as being "open to the public." In point of fact, the obscure collection can only be viewed on a computer terminal; printouts or digital copies are not permitted without the written consent of GM attorneys.

Sterling reference librarians, who are willing to make the collection available, complained to this reporter as recently as October that they do not know how to access the digitized GM materials because of a complicated and arcane database never before encountered by them. One Sterling reference librarian answered a question about the document by declaring, "I have spoken to two reference librarians. No one knows anything about it [the GM Opel Collection], no one is in charge of it. No one knows how to access it."

Yale archivist Richard Szary, who supervised the accession of the collection, said that for the approximate half-decade the documents have been on file, he knows of only "one or two" researchers other than this reporter who have had access to the papers. Szary, who was previously said to be the only Yale staffer who understood how to access the materials, facilitated this reporter's on-site access. He has since left Yale. By late November, however, in response to an inquiry by this reporter, a senior Sterling librarian said her staff would "figure out how to make it available" by reviewing technical details.

Simon Reich, who compiled Ford's Hitler-era documents, bristled at the whole idea. "Ford decided to take a very public, open and transparent route," he stated. "Any serious researcher can go into the [Henry Ford] archive, see the documents in paper form and have them copied. Compare and contrast this with the fact that GM conducted a very private study and the original hard-copy documentation upon which the study was made has never been made available, and today cannot be copied without the GM legal department's permission."

Between the unpublished GM internal investigation, the restricted files at Yale and the little-known insights offered in Turner's book, the details of



Courtesy Edwin Black

This issue of General Motors World magazine from June 1934 details a meeting in Berlin between Hitler and James D. Mooney, GM's overseas chief.

the company's involvement with the Hitler regime have remained below the radar.

Nonetheless, GM's impact in both the United States and the Third Reich was monumental.

On Jan. 15, 1953, company president Charlie Wilson was nominated to be Secretary of Defense, a job that would ultimately see him usher in the era of the interstate highway system. At Wilson's confirmation hearings, Sen. Robert Hendrickson (R-N.J.) pointedly challenged the GM chief, asking whether he had a conflict of interest, considering his 40,000 shares of company stock and years of loyalty to the controversial Detroit firm. Bluntly asked if he could make a decision in the country's interest that was contrary to GM's interest, Wilson shot back with his famous comment, "I cannot conceive of one because for years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa. The difference did not exist. Our company is too big."

Indeed, what GM accomplished in both America and Nazi Germany could not have been bigger.

(Edwin Black is the author of the award-winning "IBM and the Holocaust" and the recently published "Internal Combustion: How Corporations and Governments Adicted the World to Oil and Derailed the Alternatives.")

Anxiety, depression grip Sderot residents

By DINA KRAFT

SDEROT, Israel (JTA) — A warm, late-autumn sun spills over empty swing sets and slides. The children of this working-class border town have no time to play. Listening for alerts of falling rockets from Gaza, they scurry between home and school.

It's a routine that has intensified in recent weeks with the number of Kassam rockets fired toward Sderot increasing. Even in the days after a fragile cease-fire goes into effect, the unease continues.

"My kids won't sleep upstairs anymore," says Sigal Avitan, 38, who grew up here and cannot imagine leaving — not even after more than 1,100 rockets shot at the area in a little over a year.

"Every night I have to spread out blankets on the floor of the living room. My two oldest sleep there, my two youngest sleep in my bed," she says. "This is no kind of life. This is not normal."

"This morning my daughter said she did not want to go to school and I told her, 'But there is a cease-fire now.' She replied, 'Yesterday there was also a cease-fire and a rocket fell while I was walking to school.'"

A sleepy town of low-rise buildings and eucalyptus tree-lined streets in southern Israel, Sderot is comprised of a hodgepodge of immigrant groups — extended Moroccan families that first settled here in the 1950s and more recent arrivals from Ethiopia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union.

The wave of Russian-speaking immigrants to Israel that began in 1990 more than doubled Sderot's population to 24,000. Residents describe it as a close-knit community where people look out for one another.

Sderot is one of Israel's many development towns. The concept of establishing towns in the rural periphery was created soon after the state was established in 1948, part of a policy to settle areas sparsely populated by Jews.

With little infrastructure or industry, many development towns floundered economically. They sometimes are portrayed as dumping grounds for immigrants, usually among the weakest socioeconomic segments of Israeli society.

Sderot is far, by Israeli standards, from the country's more prosperous center. But in the last six years it has found itself un-

wittingly on one of the front lines of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Its location about two miles from the Gaza border has made Sderot an easy target for terrorists' Kassam rockets. Before a surprise and partial truce went into effect about a week ago, fighting had escalated, especially in recent months, between the Israeli army and Palestinian terrorist groups. Two Sderot residents, both Russian-speaking immigrants, were killed in the past two weeks.

After Israel's historic withdrawal from Gaza was completed in September 2005, the rocket fire that had been aimed mostly at Gaza Jewish settlements was turned to the next available target: Sderot and surrounding villages and farms. However, even in the five years before then, rockets were launched sporadically at Sderot.

Residents say they're frustrated by a feeling that they don't matter to the government or the rest of the public. They feel stuck in a state of second-class citizenship even as they put their lives on the line.

"Nation, be ashamed. You have forgotten us in this war," reads a small, hand-printed sign taped to a pole along the roadside.

"This has become a depressed place," says Hanan Klein, 24, who knows many people who have moved out of town recently. "Living here is like playing Russian roulette. You hear an alert and the rocket will fall where it will."

Business has plummeted at the hair salon where Klein works. Those with appointments cancel after a rocket scare. Others prefer to get haircuts and do errands outside of town.

Bloria Dadon, 55, the owner of a small business in Sderot, wore a sign that read "Save Our City" at a demonstration by local businesspeople Monday.

"We want security and business ... we don't want pity or donations," she says. "It's been six years [of Kassams] and no

prime minister has visited us even once."

"They think we're weak," she adds, referring to the country's image of Sderot. "We are simply good, quiet people, but now it's time to start speaking out."

When Amir Peretz, a former Sderot mayor and hometown hero, took office as Israel's defense minister, there were hopes he would at last champion the underdog town.

But Peretz, a former trade union leader with scant military background, was criticized for his decisions in the Lebanon war this summer and has yet to recover politically. Sderot residents support him as one of their own, but some wonder about his effectiveness.

Across a major road and open, yellowing fields lies Gaza. Beyond the border are the squat buildings of Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun, the towns from where the rockets are fired.

It's an area Israeli forces had retaken in the past five months prior to the cease-fire. About 400 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting. Some were terrorists, others civilians caught in the cross-fire.

Longtime Sderot residents remember more peaceful days when they shopped in those towns and enjoyed friendly relations with Gazan neighbors.

Sadia Cohen, 71, has been living in Sderot since he emigrated from Morocco in 1955. A retired electrician, he now does odd jobs at a local elementary school. Part of his work lately is to welcome the children to school in the mornings, hoping a smile and friendly question will help soothe them.

"We all just want to live," he says of the people of Israel and Gaza. "But what happens? They shoot. We shoot. And we all sit in the middle and suffer."

Meanwhile, Liron Maimoni, 24, steps out of a bridal salon onto an empty dark street, her hair curled and her hands smoothing over a strapless dress of layered silk. She and her groom grew up in Sderot but did not consider celebrating here.

Instead, they ride in a ribbon-festooned car to their wedding — a safe distance outside of town.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

'Living here is like playing Russian roulette. You hear an alert and the rocket will fall where it will.'

Hanan Klein
Sderot resident

ARTS & CULTURE

Secular mother experiences outreach

By MOIRA SCHNEIDER

CAPE TOWN (JTA) — It all started when my daughter Daniella mailed me the sample curriculum for Aish HaTorah's Gem program on Judaism for women over 30.

Daniella, a ba'alat teshuvah, or secular Jew who became religiously observant, was several years into her spiritual return. Her journey had been given a considerable boost by a 12-month stint at the outreach organization's Eyaht women's seminary in Jerusalem two years ago.

My initial doubts were summarily brushed aside.

"Ma, just forget about everything and go," she said. "Studying Torah in Jerusalem is a special privilege."

I flew to Israel, excited but also preoccupied with questions: Would I find the course beneficial? How would I cope with being a student again after so many years?

Of the group of seven, five were mothers of ba'alei teshuvah who had been motivated to attend in part by their desire to understand what made their children tick.

Janet Rothman of San Francisco said at the end of the program that she had found it to be "stunning" but would never have come had it not been for her son's involvement.

The daily agenda was filled with lectures ranging from the philosophical to the practical, interspersed with field trips including visits to Hebron's Ma'arat HaMachpela — the biblical burial site of the patriarchs and matriarchs — Masada, the Dead Sea and the Western Wall tunnels in Jerusalem. We even found ourselves dancing at a Chasidic wedding.

I didn't return home in a wig, as some friends and family had suggested prior to my departure.

The doors of Jewish learning were opened to me just a bit and in such a way that I'm inspired to seek out more treasures behind them. ■

(For more information, contact director Necha Golda Dubinsky at ndubinsky@aish.com or see the Aish HaTorah Web site at www.aish.com.)

Public menorahs light up U.S.

By JANE ULMAN

ENCINO, Calif. (JTA) — On the third night of Chanukah, at 6 p.m., a parade of 40 cars topped with electric menorahs will wend its way about six miles under police escort from southwest Houston to The Galleria, where several thousand people will gather for the lighting of a giant 7-foot menorah carved out of ice.

"Jews are thrilled to see a menorah. It brings them Jewish pride," said Rabbi Moishe Traxler, director of outreach at Chabad of Houston, who co-designed the \$1,000 4-foot, metallic-painted menorahs atop the cars based on a 12th century design by the Rambam.

Traxler oversees the lighting of the ice menorah's oversize candles.

Public lightings of Chanukah menorahs in the United States have grown exponentially since 1974, when Rabbi Abraham Shemtov of Philadelphia's Chabad-Lubavitch Center kindled a small menorah at the foot of the Liberty Bell at Independence Hall.

To many Jews, these public celebrations — many with oversize and unconventional menorahs carved of ice or built of Legos — create a sense of Jewish pride. And given that Chanukah is an anti-assimilationist holiday, many believe the exhibits establish the menorah as a universal symbol of religious freedom.

To others, however, the public menorah displays raise controversial legal issues regarding separation of church and state, as well as issues regarding the religious significance of the menorah and the true interpretation of the Talmudic commandment to publicize the holiday miracle.

Chabad now sponsors thousands of public menorah lightings worldwide, according to Chabad-Lubavitch spokesman Rabbi Zalman Shmotkin, but not all lightings fall under their auspices.

At The Promenade in Westlake Village, Calif., on the fourth night of Chanukah, about 25 third-graders from the Conservative synagogue Temple Beth Haverim in nearby Agoura Hills — dressed as latkes, candles and cruses of oil — will sing "I am a Latke" and other Chanukah songs preceding the lighting of a 9-foot menorah.

Since the mall opened 10 years ago, Beth Haverim has sponsored this "Chanukah pageant," which, according to Rabbi Gershon Weissman, carries out the commandment to publicize the miracle and makes the Jewish community feel supported.

That was exactly the purpose in the 1980s when the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, began actively campaigning for his Chabad emissaries stationed worldwide to sponsor public menorah lightings.

Controversy — and multiple lawsuits — erupted, however, most initiated by the Jewish community itself. They believed that public displays violated the Establish-

ment Clause of the First Amendment, which separates the institutions of church and state.

But in 1989 the Supreme Court, ruling on an 18-foot menorah that Chabad-Lubavitch had erected in a government building in Pittsburgh, decided

in *Allegheny County v. Greater Pittsburgh ACLU* that the menorah did not endorse a particular religion but rather, placed next to a Christmas tree, was a secular symbol that was "part of the same winter-holiday season."

The Union for Reform Judaism, however, continues to maintain a policy of separation of church and state, opposing all government-sponsored, government-funded religious displays on public property, according to rabbi and attorney Marla Feldman, director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, in a resolution on separation of church and state in the United States passed in 1997 and still in effect, maintains the same policy, according to Richard Lederman, the group's director of social action and public policy.

Over time, however, many non-Orthodox clergy have tempered their positions.

For the past 40 years, Reform synagogue Temple Emanu-El in Tucson, Ariz., has kindled a 12-foot oil menorah that sits permanently on the synagogue's front lawn facing a main thoroughfare.

"The basic mitzvah of the holiday is publicizing the miracle," said Rabbi Samuel Cohon. ■

The basic mitzvah
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Rabbi Samuel Cohon

Temple Emanu-El, Tucson, Ariz.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Commanders slam Olmert on captives

Israeli reserve military commanders had harsh words for the prime minister over his comments on captured Israeli soldiers.

Ha'aretz reported that the commanders spoke up Thursday in a letter regarding Ehud Olmert's speech Monday to a Nahariya high school class. When asked why he had cut off the Lebanon war before captured Israeli soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev were retrieved, Olmert said, "What should we have done?"

Keep fighting and maybe create dozens more bereaved families to accelerate the return of two people — and I hope they are still alive — for whom it was a question of spending a little more or a little less time in captivity, in the face of the possibility or certainty that many dozens more would be killed in the continued fighting?"

The commanders' letter called Olmert's words a "serious moral failure." Linking it to a controversial case in 2000 when a border policeman bled to death in Nablus while Israeli forces waited for backup, they said that "values such as dedication to the mission, and camaraderie, were trampled."

Copies of the letter also were sent to Defense Minister Amir Peretz and the military chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, Ha'aretz reported.

Mubarak upbeat on swap

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said talks he is mediating on an Israeli-Palestinian prisoner swap are nearing fruition.

Mubarak said in comments published Thursday that negotiations on the release of Cpl. Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier kidnapped by Palestinian gunmen from the Gaza Strip in June, "are in their final stage and await the approval of Hamas."

The governing Islamist faction has demanded that Israel in return release hundreds of jailed Palestinians, including terrorist leaders.

NORTH AMERICA

GOP taps Ros-Lehtinen for foreign affairs

Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives selected a staunchly pro-Israel congresswoman as their senior lawmaker on foreign affairs.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) will take the top GOP seat on the International Relations Committee that is being vacated by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), who is retiring.

Ros-Lehtinen, who chaired the committee's Middle East subcommittee, is very close to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and sponsored key legislation in recent years isolating Syria and the Palestinian Authority.

Elected to the position Thursday, Ros-Lehtinen will be the ranking member now that the Republicans have lost control of Congress.

Pelosi slots Lantos, Waxman as chairs

The incoming speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives nominated two Jewish lawmakers to chair committees.

The nod Wednesday from Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) virtually guarantees that Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), a staunch defender of Israel, will chair the International Relations Committee, and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), who is well known for his outspokenness, will chair the Government Reform Committee when Democrats assume control of the House in January after winning midterm elections.

Meridor makes first New York appearance

Israel's new ambassador to the United States made his first official appearance in New York at a federation event.

The UJA-Federation of New York's annual Wall Street Dinner on Wednesday, which drew some 1,300 guests from the financial world, raised an estimated \$21.5 million for the federation, officials said.

Sallai Meridor, who served previously as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which gets much of its funding from the federation system, thanked the American Jewish community for its help during Israel's war with Hezbollah this summer, stressed that Israelis and American Jews are connected and warned that Israel must prepare for a possible conflict with Iran.

Report describes Palestinian 'right of return'

The Iraq Study Group refers to a Palestinian "right of return" in its report, a term favored in the U.S. government.

In discussing areas of disagreement between Israel and the Palestinians, U.S. officials routinely refer to "refugees"; describing a Palestinian "right of return" is seen to implicitly accept the merit of the Palestinian claim.

But the term was used in the group's recommendations on the Palestinian issue when it described what matters must be decided in a final-status agreement: "borders, settlements, Jerusalem, the right of return, and the end of conflict."

U.S. politician calls for Olmert's resignation

A New York State assemblyman is calling on Ehud Olmert to resign in a series of full-page newspaper ads.

Dov Hikind's campaign started with ads in major Jewish American newspapers last week, to be followed by Israeli newspapers in coming weeks, then The New York Times and Washington Post.

The ad asks the Israeli prime minister to "please resign. For the sake of the Jewish people."

It also describes Olmert as "arrogant," "delusional" and "incompetent."

WORLD

Berlin public school attacks increase

Jewish schoolchildren increasingly are suffering anti-Semitic attacks in Berlin public schools, observers said.

Most incidents involve either neo-Nazis or Muslim pupils, according to a report Thursday in Der Spiegel Online magazine. The word "Jew" increasingly is used as a curse, the report said. Barbara Witting, director of the Jewish High School in Berlin, said children have been transferring to the Jewish school to avoid discrimination in public schools.

One recent transfer from a section of Berlin with a large Arab population reported that her daily walk to school had become an obstacle course, with young Arab boys following her, spitting and cursing. The problem appears to be on the rise both in right-wing and Islamic circles.

Jewish school No. 1 in UK

A Jewish day school ranked No. 1 in a British government survey.

The report, released Thursday, ranked the North Cheshire Jewish School as the best primary school in Britain.

Of the 209 primary schools in Britain whose pupils all reached the expected standard for 11-year-olds in English, math and science, almost two-thirds are faith-based schools, including Jewish, Catholic and Church of England institutions.

A total of 16,000 primary schools were included in the survey.

The results represent a vindication for members of the Jewish community, who led an interfaith coalition in October that ultimately defeated a proposal to require non-faith student quotas for faith-based, state-aided schools.