

How Rotten Are These Guys?

The Bush Political Machine and Organized Crime

By [Robert Parry](#)

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The separation of the Bush political machine from organized crime is often like the thin layer of rock between a seemingly ordinary surface and volcanic activity rumbling below. Sometimes, the lava spews forth and the illusion of normalcy is shattered.

In the weeks ahead, a dangerous eruption is again threatening to shake the Bush family's image of legitimacy, as the pressure from intersecting scandals builds.

So far, the mainstream news media has focused mostly on the white-collar abuses of former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay for allegedly laundering corporate donations to help Republicans gain control of the Texas legislature, or on deputy White House chief of staff Karl Rove for disclosing the identity of a covert CIA officer to undercut her husband's criticism of George W. Bush's case for war in Iraq.

Both offenses represent potential felonies, but they pale beside new allegations linking business associates of star GOP lobbyist Jack Abramoff – an ally of both DeLay and Rove – to the gangland-style murder of casino owner Konstantinos “Gus” Boulis in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 2001.

These criminal cases also are reminders of George H.W. Bush's long record of unsavory associations, including with a Nicaraguan contra network permeated by cocaine traffickers, Rev. Sun Myung Moon's multi-million-dollar money-laundering operations, and anti-communist Cuban extremists tied to acts of international terrorism. [For details on these cases, see Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq](#) .]

Now, George W. Bush is faced with his own challenge of containing a rupture of scandals – involving prominent conservatives Abramoff, DeLay and potentially Rove – that have bubbled to the surface and are beginning to flow toward the White House.

Mobbed Up

On Sept. 27, 2005 – in possibly the most troubling of these cases – Fort Lauderdale police charged three men, including reputed Gambino crime family bookkeeper Anthony Moscitiello, with Boulis's murder. Boulis was gunned down in his car on Feb. 6, 2001, amid a feud with an Abramoff business group that had purchased Boulis's SunCruz casino cruise line in 2000.

As part of the murder probe, police are investigating payments that SunCruz made to

Moscatiello, his daughter and Anthony Ferrari, another defendant in the Boulis murder case. Moscatiello and Ferrari allegedly collaborated with a third man, James Fiorillo, in the slaying. [For more on the case, see [Sun-Sentinel, Sept. 28, 2005](#) .]

The SunCruz deal also led to the August 2005 indictment of Abramoff and his partner, Adam Kidan, on charges of conspiracy and wire fraud over a \$60 million loan for buying the casino company in 2000. Prosecutors allege that Abramoff and Kidan made a phony \$23 million wire transfer as a fake down payment.

In pursuing the casino deal, the Abramoff-Kidan group got help, too, from DeLay and Rep. Robert W. Ney, R-Ohio, the Washington Post reported. Abramoff impressed one lender by putting him together with DeLay in Abramoff's skybox at FedEx Field during a football game between the Washington Redskins and the Dallas Cowboys.

Ney placed comments in the Congressional Record criticizing Boulis and later praising the new Abramoff-Kidan ownership team. [Washington Post, Sept. 28, 2005]

After the SunCruz sale, tensions boiled over, as Boulis and Kidan got into a fistfight. Kidan claimed that Boulis threatened his life. Two months later, however, Boulis was the one who was shot to death when a car pulled up next to him and a gunman opened fire. Lawyers for Abramoff and Kidan say their clients know nothing about the murder.

Police, however, are investigating financial ties between the Abramoff-Kidan group and Moscatiello and Ferrari.

In a 2001 civil case, Kidan testified that he had paid \$145,000 to Moscatiello and his daughter, Jennifer, for catering and other services, although court records show no evidence that quantities of food or drink were provided. SunCruz also paid Ferrari's company, Moon Over Miami, \$95,000 for surveillance services.

Kidan told the Miami Herald that the payments had no connection to the Boulis murder. "If I'm going to pay to have Gus killed, am I going to be writing checks to the killers?" Kidan asked. "I don't think so. Why would I leave a paper trail?"

Kidan also said he was ignorant of Moscatiello's past. In 1983, Moscatiello was indicted on heroin-trafficking charges along with Gene Gotti, brother of Gambino crime boss John Gotti. Though Gene Gotti and others were convicted, the charges against Moscatiello – identified by federal authorities as a former Gambino bookkeeper – were dropped.

White House Ties

Abramoff's influence has reached into Bush's White House, too, where chief procurement officer David H. Safavian resigned last month and then was arrested on charges of lying to authorities and obstructing a criminal investigation into Abramoff's lobbying activities.

Rep. Ney and former Christian Coalition leader Ralph Reed were among influential Republicans who joined Safavian and Abramoff on an infamous golf trip to Scotland in 2002. Safavian is a former lobbying partner of anti-tax activist Grover Norquist, another pillar of right-wing politics in Washington and another longtime Abramoff friend. [Washington Post, Sept. 20, 2005]

Abramoff also has boasted of his influence with Bush's top political adviser Karl Rove.

While helping the scandal-plagued conglomerate Tyco International Ltd. fend off new taxes and insure continued federal contracts, Abramoff cited his influence with Rove as well as powerful congressmen, including DeLay, according to a written statement by Tyco general counsel Timothy E. Flanigan.

Abramoff told Tyco officials that "he had contact with Mr. Karl Rove" about Tyco's concerns, said Flanigan, who made the disclosures to the Senate during his confirmation hearing as Bush's nominee to be deputy attorney general.

A White House spokesman said Rove had no recollection of a discussion with Abramoff about Tyco, but Rove's personal assistant Susan Ralston had previously worked as Abramoff's secretary. [Washington Post, Sept. 23, 2005]

College Republicans

The roots of these latest scandals reach back a quarter century to the early days of the Reagan Revolution. During that heady period for young conservatives, Abramoff and Norquist won control of the College Republicans organization in Washington, with Abramoff as chairman and Norquist as executive director.

In the book, *Gang of Five*, author Nina Easton wrote that the Abramoff-Norquist leadership transformed the College Republicans into a "right-wing version of a communist cell - complete with purges of in-house dissenters and covert missions to destroy the enemy left."

Under Abramoff and Norquist, the College Republicans also allegedly began tapping into Rev. Moon's mysterious well of nearly unlimited cash. In 1983, Rep. Jim Leach of Iowa, then chairman of the GOP's moderate Ripon Society, released a study saying the College Republican National Committee "solicited and received" money from Moon's Unification Church in 1981.

Leach said the Korean-based Unification Church has "infiltrated the New Right and the party it wants to control, the Republican Party, and infiltrated the media as well."

Before Leach could finish the press conference, Norquist disrupted the meeting with accusations that Leach was lying. For its part, Moon's Washington Times dismissed Leach's charges as "flummeries" and mocked the Ripon Society as a "discredited and insignificant left-wing offshoot of the Republican Party."

To this day, largely through lavish spending on right-wing causes, Moon has made his cult-like movement a political powerhouse within conservative circles. However, evidence has continued to mount that Moon's operation is a complex web of secretive businesses and groups that launder millions of dollars from suspicious sources in Asia and South America into the U.S. political system.

Moon has subsidized not only media outlets, such as the pro-Republican Washington Times, but conservative infrastructure, including direct-mail operations, think tanks and political conferences. Moon's organization also has funneled money directly into the pockets of former President Bush and other leading politicians. [For details, see [Secrecy & Privilege](#) .]

Abramoff and Kidan, the co-defendants in the SunCruz fraud case, also became friends from

their time with the College Republicans.

After leaving the College Republicans, Abramoff and Norquist moved over to a Reagan-support organization called Citizens for America, which sponsored a 1985 “summit meeting” of anti-communist “freedom fighters” from around the world.

The Nicaraguan contras – who were gaining a reputation for brutality, corruption and drug trafficking – were represented at the summit, as was Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi, who was condemned by human rights groups for gross abuses, including widespread murders, rapes and mutilations.

As the Cold War was ending in 1989, Abramoff tried his hand at movie producing, churning out an anti-communist action thriller called “Red Scorpion,” which was subsidized by South Africa’s white-supremacist regime. [For details, see Salon.com’s [“The Tale of Red Scorpion.”](#)]

In Power

The Republican conquest of the U.S. Congress in 1994 gave Abramoff’s career another twist as he found himself in position to exploit his close ties to hard-line conservatives, such as DeLay and House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Abramoff signed up with the lobbying firm of Preston Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds before moving to Greenberg Traurig.

Last year, on the tenth anniversary of the Republican takeover, conservative writer Andrew Ferguson lamented Abramoff’s key role in getting Republicans to forsake their rhetorical war on big government and corruption, in favor of dividing up the spoils.

“For 25 years Abramoff has been a key figure in the conservative movement that led to the 1994 Republican Revolution, which once promised ‘to drain the swamp’ in Washington, D.C.,” Ferguson wrote.

But instead, Abramoff became “the first Republican to discover that pretending to advance the interests of conservative small-government could, for a lobbyist, be as insanely lucrative as pretending to advance the interests of liberal big-government,” Ferguson wrote. “The way a winner knows he’s won is by cashing in his chips.”

Abramoff scored big by representing Indian tribes that needed political clout for their gambling operations.

Ferguson wrote, “Abramoff’s ingenuity quickly earned him a reputation as the premier lobbyist for Indians in Washington – though he only worked for casino-owning tribes, who were, after all, the only ‘free market laboratories’ that could afford Washington lobbyists. He regularly arranged fact-finding trips for congressmen and their staffs to the casinos, especially those with golf courses.”

Branching out, Abramoff represented the textile industry in the Marianas islands, a U.S. protectorate that could stick “Made in the USA” labels on clothing produced in sweatshops free from U.S. labor regulations. Abramoff flew in congressmen for tours and a chance to play golf at a scenic course. DeLay was so impressed that he hailed the islands as “a perfect Petri dish of capitalism.” [[Weekly Standard, Dec. 20, 2004](#)]

Abramoff had learned the flexible ethics of Washington politics during the final days of the Cold War when ideology justified rubbing shoulders with corrupt “freedom fighters.” But he and his legion of protégés managed to adapt those dubious lessons to the “free market” era of Republican rule.

The end result has been a noxious “crony capitalism” that has seeped into nearly all U.S. government policies, from the War on Terror to the Iraq War to the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort.

Now the ground under George W. Bush and the Republican congressional majority is beginning to shake as fissures crack the surface, warning of a volcanic eruption that could transform the political landscape of Washington.

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