

Cheney and Netanyahu Pushing For War Against Syria

by Jeffrey Steinberg

An ever-more-desperate Dick Cheney is pulling out all the stops to install “Clean Break” hawk Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu as the next Israeli Prime Minister, to push for an immediate confrontation between Israel and Syria. Israeli sources report that Cheney, as of Jan. 11, had an emissary in Israel, exploring the means to put “Bibi” and the Likud back in power, despite collapsing Israeli popular support for the extreme rightwing policies of the neo-con faction that Netanyahu represents.

Part of Cheney’s growing desperation stems from the fact that the recent plea agreement between U.S. Justice Department prosecutors and super-lobbyist Jack Abramoff, threatens to bring down the entire political dirty-money empire of former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), which has been Cheney’s principal power base since coming in as Vice President and de facto head-of-state in January 2001. Cheney and DeLay were shown by a recent *EIR* exclusive story to be politically “joined at the hip” (see *EIR*, Dec. 30, 2005). The Vice President is so deeply implicated in the DeLay/Abramoff dirty-money machine that the legal defense funds of DeLay and Cheney’s ex-chief of staff Lewis Libby are headed by the same two Republican lobbyists, Wayne Berman and former Congressman Bill Paxon (R-NY).

But Israeli sources report, and Washington insiders confirm, that Netanyahu himself is so closely tied to Jack Abramoff that the fallout from Abramoff’s plea may bring him down as well, as the international web of money-laundering fronts, tax-exempt charities, and no-bid contractors put together by Abramoff unravels under U.S. prosecutors’ scrutiny.

West Bank Story

The first published clue about the Netanyahu/Abramoff links actually surfaced last year, when *Newsweek* reporter

Michael Isikoff revealed on May 2, 2005 that one of Abramoff’s tax-exempt charities, Capital Athletic Foundation, had funnelled \$140,000 to a West Bank settlement, to finance the purchasing of security equipment, including “camouflage suits, sniper scopes, night-vision binoculars, a thermal imager, and other material.”

Funds for the Capital Athletic Foundation, ostensibly an Abramoff family charity dedicated to helping inner-city youth, came largely from Indian tribe clients of Abramoff.

The security gear was provided to the West Bank town of Beitar Illit, which Isikoff described as “a sprawling ultra-Orthodox outpost whose residents have occasionally tangled with their Palestinian neighbors.”

Beitar Illit is the home of Schmuel Ben-Zvi, a rightwing American who moved to the West Bank, and who was a close high school pal of Abramoff in Hollywood. The \$140,000 was paid to an Israeli group called Kollal Ohel Tiferet, which is not publicly registered in Israel.

While Ben-Zvi denied any links to the \$140,000 West Bank payoff, an exchange of emails between him and Abramoff told a different story. On receiving the money, Ben-Zvi wrote to Abramoff: “I feel like the tank commanders in the Yom Kippur war, who when hearing over the radio that reinforcements were coming, felt so great that they raised their seats higher out of the tank hatch and went forward.” To which Abramoff wrote back: “If only there were another dozen of you the dirty rats would be finished,” referring to the Palestinian neighbors of Beitar Illit.

When questions arose over what Israeli entity to pass the money to, Ben-Zvi proposed to write a letter to the Capital Athletic Foundation, on the letterhead of his Snipers Workshop, which he described as “an educational entity of sorts.”

Informed of the West Bank funding, Indian tribal lawyer Henry Buffalo told *Newsweek*, “This is almost like outer-

limits bizarre. The tribe would never have given money for this.”

FBI sources told *Newsweek*'s Isikoff that the bulk of the \$4 million listed as the Abramoff fund's tax-exempt gifts went to a now-defunct Maryland yeshiva where Abramoff's two sons went to school.

Wiring Congress

Another contributor to the Capital Athletic Foundation was an Israeli telecom startup company, Foxcom, which kicked in \$50,000 to the Abramoff fund. Foxcom received a \$3-million contract to install wireless antenna systems at the U.S. Congress, in a deal pushed through by Abramoff crony Rep. Bob Ney (R-Ohio), chairman of the House Administration Committee. The *Washington Post* revealed on Oct. 18, 2005 that Foxcom had paid Abramoff \$280,000 in lobbying fees around the time they got the Congressional contract. An American company, LGC Wireless, which had lost the bid to Foxcom, went to the FBI and charged that the bidding process had been rigged by Ney.

Newsweek reported on Aug. 22, 2005 that U.S. officials had rushed to indict and arrest Abramoff on Aug. 11, because they feared he would flee to Israel, as two of his business partners had already done.

And still to be unravelled are the Abramoff connections to the Russian oil company Naftasib, which laundered \$1 million to another Abramoff “charity,” the U.S. Family Network, through a London law firm, James and Sarch, in 1998. Two top Naftasib executives, Marina Nevskaya and Alexander Koulakovsky, spent “quality time” with Tom DeLay in Moscow, shortly before the laundered payoff to Abramoff. The Russian “oil company” lists the Russian Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior as Naftasib's two main clients. Some of the military equipment delivered to the West Bank settlement of Ben-Zvi came from Russia, hinting at Russian Mafiya ties in the background of the Abramoff saga.

Senior Washington sources have cautioned that it would be a mistake to presume that the Abramoff money flow to Israel and Russia primarily went out of the United States. Abramoff's takeover of the gambling cruise ship line Sun-Cruz gave him a perfect instrument for laundering millions of dollars a day through the offshore gambling tables.

Syria War Diversion

The Cheney push to install Netanyahu as Israel's next Prime Minister, replacing the now-incapacitated Ariel



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Dick Cheney's (right) power base, based on the political dirty-money empire of former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, is on the verge of collapsing because of Jack Abramoff's plea agreement. As a result, he is desperate to make “Clean Break” hawk Bibi Netanyahu (left) the next Israeli Prime Minister.

Sharon, is, according to Israeli sources, part of Cheney's desperate move to “change the subject” from his growing political problems in Washington.

Netanyahu is pledged, according to the Israeli sources, to a war with Syria, to divert attention, and to move ahead with the decade-old “Clean Break” scheme, drafted for Netanyahu in July 1996 by a group of American neo-con allies of Cheney. The “Clean Break” strategy paper was co-authored by Richard Perle, David Wurmser, Douglas Feith, and others, and called for the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, followed by similar “regime changes” in Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. David Wurmser, the single most vociferous advocate of “regime change” in Damascus, is now a senior Middle East policy aide to Cheney. He previously served under Doug Feith at the Pentagon, when Feith was Undersecretary of Defense for Policy in the first Bush-Cheney Administration.

Cheney's war scheme against Syria also implicates Abramoff, according to a Jan. 11, 2006 story by Justin Raimondi, posted on antiwar.com. “One investigator, eager to obtain information about the neo-con-sponsored Reform Party of Syria, led by one Farid Ghadry, the Syrian version of Ahmed Chalabi” Raimondi wrote, “stumbled on the Abramoff connection: ‘When repeated calls to [Ghadry's] organization went unanswered, I visited the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the RPS. Reform Party of Syria is in the office of super-Zionist lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Middle Gate Ventures, Abramoff's political advisory company, partners with RPS.’”