

# IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

A Devastating Account of the arms-to-Iraq affair – by the man who turned Astra Fireworks into a £100 million arms manufacturer



**GERALD JAMES**

Updated to include Scott Report findings



**'James' information ... contributed as much as any other single factor to the sense of public outrage which led eventually to the Scott Inquiry. The astonishing nature of that inquiry, too – above all its access to information which has traditionally been kept secret – owes not a little to his persistence.'**

*Paul Foot, London Review of Books*

*In The Public Interest* is an extraordinary account of the arms- to-Iraq affair that rewrites the Thatcher years and makes a mockery of the British democratic process.

As chairman of one of Britain's leading arms manufacturers, Gerald James was uniquely placed to witness how a Thatcher government that had publicly outlawed the illegal weapons trade – in line with UN resolutions – involved the City, civil and intelligence services in long-term covert dealings with both sides in the Iran-Iraq war; but whose strategy, once the defence industry's own arms were turned against British troops during the Gulf War, changed to make scapegoats of the companies it had once welcomed.

Raising serious questions about the nature of Britain's 'economic miracle' and the accountability of our leading politicians, *In The Public Interest* reveals for the first time how the defence industry was used to serve the interests of the few at the expense of the interests of the nation.

**'For those who are daunted by the prospect of reading the 1,800 pages of the Scott Inquiry, then I recommend this book as a primer. It lifts the veil on a small corner of Britain's secret state.'** *Yorkshire Post*

NON-FICTION

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Illustration: David Scutt



it was for weapons and other military goods, they dressed up all the expenditure to make it seem that Margaret Thatcher's part in it had to do with building a hospital and a university.

In fact, as J. Martin-Martin has confirmed – he was the first person to finger Mark Thatcher on television and really started the whole investigation into his arms 'facilitating' activities – the nub of the deal was the building of weapon silos to store American PGMs (precision guided missiles), the result of US strategy in the early 1980s, which was to stop a thrust by Russia into the Gulf, using Afghanistan as a springboard from which to control the world oil industry.

The Al Yamamah deal is in three parts. Initially 132 Tornado aircraft and Blackhawk helicopters were due to Saudi. Al Yamamah II was signed in 1988 but not proceeded with until 1992. More Tornado strike aircraft, BAe Hawk trainer jets, Sandown class mine-hunters and Blackhawk helicopters were to be sold. Al Y I and II together were worth some £40bn. Al Y III, yet to come, is valued at a further £20bn. Part II called for a £1.5bn down payment in cash, the rest in oil, a deal designed by Peter Levene of the MoD calling for payment of as much as 500,000 barrels of oil per day, which were then to be traded by Shell and BP. There are various question marks hanging over Al Yamamah that concern the real destination of the goods, and the commissions allegedly up to £12m to Mark Thatcher and around £240m in total to his group.<sup>6</sup>

The Indonesian contract is going on now. The government sold Indonesia £500m of British Hawk military training jets and God knows how much other military equipment just two months after the Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd visited Jakarta to announce a 'soft loan' for a power station to be built by a British company.

The pattern had been set in September 1988 by Margaret Thatcher's £1.3bn arms deal with Malaysia, with its 'sweetener' attached – £234m to build a hydro-electric dam at Pergau, again by British companies such as Trafalgar House/Cementation, who were also involved in Oman and a number of other arms-related deals through Cementation and their South African associate company Blockberg.

What then of the economic bonuses to the economy supposed to have flowed from these contracts? Certainly Thatcher was certainly aggravated that in the arms deals were being outsold everywhere, by the French in particular, determined to put that right, which she did. From No. 4 or 5 in the world she made us No. 2 to the world. But that this effort benefited the nation is not so clear. A single penny has been paid on Thatcher's Jordan deal. IMS played a central role in managing the deal. Package of £75m in 1985–6, but by 1989 King had already defaulted on payments and many companies in deals had to resort to ECGD for settlement. Jordan is still for hundreds of millions and the debt is being rolled over in fresh credits to pay the interest.

It is not widely realised that Thatcher's economic success was largely a conjuring trick that turned North Sea oil revenue into cash dispensed by ECGD to the City (and fat commissions on arms deals that had essentially failed. In a memo to the Home Office Foreign Affairs Inquiry into the Malaysian Pergau aid-for-arms affair, Mr K.H. Harrison, a former industrial manager in the oil industry (BP), pointed to the close linking overseas aid to arms deals as but one strand, a strand that proved necessary, in an economic strategy based upon the investment of North Sea oil revenue and the plundering of these to finance Thatcher's various arms packages when customers didn't pay up.

In 1988 Lord Young boasted to a government committee that with £120bn of North Sea oil revenue overseas, bringing in £5bn dividends, and with City and other industries similarly poised to bring in dividends from oil, we no longer needed the traditional economic base of manufacturing, shipbuilding, etc.

Mr Harrison corresponded with the Treasury on this and was informed in a letter written by Mr David Layman of the Public Sector Finances Division on 14 December 1992 that Young's boast related to the figures for 1986, 'when the



was to despatch Mark to Dallas, away from the limelight, where he started work as a car salesman for Lotus Cars and British Car auctions, then run by David Wickens, a family friend. Wickens was until 1986 principal shareholder in Attwoods, the waste disposal firm where Sir Denis Thatcher was deputy chairman from 1983 and which has been rumoured to have Mafia connections.<sup>42</sup>

Tipping meanwhile was set back on his feet in a new career as arms facilitator with the help of powerful people in the Thatcher inner circle of businessmen and senior Defence Ministry officials, including Colin Chandler, then chief of defence sales at the MoD. There is every reason to believe that the Stephen Tipping/Mark Thatcher double act never faltered during the Thatcher years.

In February 1993 in *Business Age* magazine Kevin Cahill published an analysis of Mark Thatcher's finances: 'On 14th December 1992 Mark Thatcher had 93,142,139 Swiss francs in 11 bank accounts deposited at 3 different Swiss financial institutions. £41,581,312 in sterling. In addition he has unidentified shareholdings in South Africa and substantial personal assets worldwide. Estimates of the total value of his fortune vary from £50million to £100million, putting him amongst Britain's super rich and approx 80th richest man in the UK.'

Tipping has been named as a facilitator in part of the £1.3bn defence deal signed by Margaret Thatcher and Dr Mahathir Mohamed, the Malaysian prime minister, in September 1988. He helped to fix the sale of laser-guided British Starburst anti-aircraft missiles, worth £70m, to the Malaysian defence ministry, and was also involved with a Malaysian company in the supply of parts for Hawk aircraft from British Aerospace.<sup>43</sup>

It is further alleged that Mark Thatcher was rewarded with a commission of some £12m in the biggest deal inspired by his mother, the £60bn package destined for Saudi Arabia and known as Al Yamamah.<sup>44</sup>

Although this allegation was made by the *Sunday Times* in 1994, it first appeared in an extraordinary document received anonymously five years earlier by Jeffrey Rooker MP, who was

involved in a Public Accounts Committee inquiry into the use of public money in the financing of Thatcher's defence packages. It is extraordinary, because over the years the astonishing claims have proved increasingly correct.

The document, dated 2 May 1989 and marked 'Classified - Restricted', is in the form of a memo to the chairman of a company whose name has been blacked out, as has the sender. It is set out under the headings of Thatcher's three large defence packages - Jordan, Saudi Arabia [Al Yamamah] and [Pergau].

*Inter alia*, the memo is concerned with the over-inflated price of British Aerospace of Tornado fighter-bombers up to 11 per cent more than the going rate to the RAF (in the case of the Saudi Package) and 120 per cent in the case of the Saudi Package.

Commissions reaching 'over 45 per cent' are said to be the way to explaining the inflated price, but in the case of Al Yamamah the mark-ups are described, apparently by an executive, as 'proper profit margins on unprofitable business in the past'.

The system of payment, however, makes this seem unlikely. The Saudis were invoiced by Colin Chandler of British Aerospace Sales, and Defence Procurement under Peter Levene. If BAe were invoiced by BAe, the principal contractor. If BAe were to inflate invoices to Levene, he would know that they were inflated because the MoD were buying basically the same aircraft from BAe for RAF use.

Further, since it is known that the lion's share of oil from Saudi Arabia is in heavily discounted oil (as much as 50 per cent) which must then be traded through Shell and BP, then the hidden profit margin, no mention of which has ever been made,

The memo suggests that this profit area from the Saudi arrangement was of particular interest to Margaret Thatcher. 'There are constant phone calls between Mrs T and Sir Peter Levene [MoD] and Prince Sultan.'

So commissions of 45 per cent were coming from



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*Inter alia*, the memo is concerned with the overpricing by British Aerospace of Tornado fighter-bombers up to 112 per cent more than the going rate to the RAF (in the case of the Jordan Package) and 120 per cent in the case of the Saudi Arabia Package.

Commissions reaching 'over 45 per cent' are said to go some way to explaining the inflated price, but in the case of Al Yamamah the mark-ups are described, apparently by an executive of BAe, as 'proper profit margins on unprofitable business in the past'.

The system of payment, however, makes this seem at best unlikely. The Saudis were invoiced by Colin Chandler of Defence Sales, and Defence Procurement under Peter Levene were invoiced by BAe, the principal contractor. If BAe were issuing inflated invoices to Levene, he would know that they were inflated because the MoD were buying basically the same aircraft from BAe for RAF use.

Further, since it is known that the lion's share of payments from Saudi are in heavily discounted oil (as much as 500,000 barrels a day have been flowing into Britain on Al Yamamah II), which must then be traded through Shell and BP, there is another hidden profit margin, no mention of which has ever been made.

The memo suggests that this profit area from the crude oil arrangement was of particular interest to Margaret Thatcher. 'There are constant phone calls between Mrs T and King Fahd and Sir Peter Levene [MoD] and Prince Sultan.'

So commissions of 45 per cent were coming from the inflated



department of Midland. Stephan Adolph Kock, who was one of their special arms consultants, was, said Weaver on that occasion, 'a man with influence and contacts at the highest level, including Mrs Thatcher'.

This first suggestion by Midland that Kock might be useful to us occurred at about the same time as we committed to the Aba Chemical deal in Canada, which you will recall marked the first resolution of the overtures made to us there by the US defence establishment via Roger Harding of the British embassy and Dick White.

At the time we completed the deal with Unwin, we were taking financial advice from the corporate side of Hong Kong Bank Ltd (a subsidiary of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank), which was really the old Anthony Gibbs firm. A fellow subsidiary was the broker, James Capel. They told us that the Stock Exchange requirement for a fully listed company was to have at least two non-executive directors. We had inherited Edward Album from a deal with a company called Francis Sumner Holdings PLC in our pursuit of a Stock Exchange listing. This will be covered in due course. But now, it appeared, we needed one other. So, as it turned out, Unwin's friend Kock suddenly became a serious proposition and I decided to ask Midland in more detail what they thought of him.

Midland agreed to send me some information and back came a brochure which contained a short biography of the man. That sounded fine. 'But I want a reference,' I said. So Robson signed a reference, and then I received a letter from Head Office also recommending him.

Apart from being a little uneasy that there didn't seem to be a proper *curriculum vitae* available, with information about nationality, where Kock had gone to school and so on, I felt that if the Midland was content, he must be OK, and of course Unwin said he was a friend - 'my best friend!' So, in October 1986, I rang up this Stephan Adolph Kock and told him that he had been recommended by the Midland and Unwin as a non-executive director on the Astra board. Would he like to consider joining?

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'Well,' he said, 'it is very good of you to ask me,' and concluded that he would let me know shortly.

He spoke with a relaxed, bluff and hearty tone, but like some other immigrants to the English boardroom from Eastern Europe, who believe that they have mastered the cultured English manner, his performance on that first occasion went a little too far. Nevertheless, I had no serious second thoughts. I had consulted all the people I should have consulted, who were in agreement that it would be politic to have a representative of the bank on our board, particularly one who was an arms expert.

When I met him, I believe at the 'In and Out', the Naval and Military club in Piccadilly, he had a perfect picture of the company in every conceivable way. I assumed naturally that this had come to him via Unwin. I remember being quite irritated at one stage because he made some comment about his only being prepared to join a company which was wholly reputable (the irony of this will become clear, and is almost too bitter to take even at this distance in time).

'For goodness' sake,' I had laughed, dispersing my irritation, 'you have been helping out Unwin's company, how can you possibly doubt us?'

Unwin had been an agent, an arms facilitator like Mark Thatcher, and then had spread his wings a bit with the Kent site. He had been in at the 'glamorous' end of the industry, all fast money, big commissions and so on, and this man Kock, Unwin's friend, was playing for the moral high ground. It was a bit ridiculous.

It pinpoints something about Kock which marks him down in even the most objective appraisal of the man. He played these grand strategies, employed all sorts of ingenious tactics, but because he was trading so transparently on the gullibility of all around him, these tactics appeared almost patronising.

I asked him which major companies he had been connected with, and he mentioned Biddle Holdings and Shell Oil, which had been on the Midland brochure, and bluffed his way through, saying he had been connected with so many. One of his great



expressions, I remember, was 'Africa is my parish.' He reckoned all Africa was his. I knew he had connections with Rhodesia and South Africa, and later I discovered that he was connected with Zambia, when at one of the military shows a whole delegation of Zambians suddenly descended on him, and one man in particular came forward and said, 'My father will be so glad that I have seen you.' Kenya was also important; and he had knowledge of Zaire and Nigeria. But he never told me that he spoke Arabic, although according to the *Observer* he was an Arabic-speaker, which was why he had been used as a bagman (besides other things) on Thatcher's Middle East contracts.

Kock is the sort of person who, if he goes out of his way to be pleasant, most people would not question, but would go along with the performance. John Anderson was the first explicitly to question his credibility. I remember him saying that he had a feeling there was something not right about him from the start. 'If you ask Kock what he has done before a certain date,' he said to me, 'you never got an answer - "I've done quite a lot of things in my time, ho ho!"'

It did cross my mind that he might be connected with Intelligence, but I have to counter that with the view of our lawyers, Baileys, Shaw & Gillett, and of our accountants, Stoy Hayward, who were wholly taken in and used to laugh and think he was a drunken old buffer; Laurence Kingswood of Baileys collapsed in hysterics every time he had to enter his middle name in a prospectus. To these people, at the start, Stephan Adolph Kock was something of an object of fun.

Kock has been described by Dr Mark Phythian of the Political Sciences department of Wolverhampton University, who has done a great deal of research into the activities of Intelligence operatives in the defence establishment in the 1980s, as 'one of the more mysterious figures to emerge from "Iraqgate" and the often shadowy world of arms packages and financing.'

Apparently Kock was born in May 1927 in Czechoslovakia. The Midland Bank brochure claims that he served with the Royal Air Force, then worked in civil aviation, and 'subsequently he

carried out specialised duties for the British government in various parts of the world, including as Political Secretary to the Rhodesian Prime Minister in the early sixties during the constitutional change. He had further military service with the intelligence corps as an infantry officer, and spent some years in the SAS regiment.'

There is in fact no trace of his ever having served in the SAS. Research by Phythian and Tim Laxton, who has done extensive work on the affairs for accountants Stoy Hayward and his associates, has exposed the extent of Astra's manipulation and victimisation. His failure to front-line journalistic investigation into the activities of Astra in the arms industry, points to Kock's military service in Southern Rhodesia, where fourteen years before he joined Astra (in 1962) he did indeed serve as Political Secretary to the Rhodesian Prime Minister Sir Edgar Whitehead.

During his Rhodesian period, Kock was also involved in other activities that determined his future, one particularly important being his stand in good stead. Walter Mondale, then Secretary of State, visited of Brenchley, one of Churchill's Cabinet Ministers, who was then at the Midland Bank, headed the Advisory Commission on the Rhodesian Constitution. Kock's patrons when Kock came to Astra were the 2nd Viscountess of Monckton, who bordered Monckton's estate near Northampton.

It appears more likely that Kock's military service with the RAF was in fact in the Rhodesian army. Kock's own assertion in the Inquiry into Exports to Iraq, that he served in the SAS in Rhodesia, is more than likely that the SAS were formed by 'Mad Mike' Calvert in Rhodesia, a Rhodesian ex-SOE and SAS commander who fought communists in the jungles of Malaya. Kock was an Intelligence liaison man who worked for the SAS in Rhodesia.

'Following his retirement from the SAS, Kock worked for Astra. The brochure continues, Kock was involved in the



carried out specialised duties for the British government in various parts of the world, including as Political Secretary to the Rhodesian Prime Minister in the early sixties during the period of constitutional change. He had further military service abroad in the intelligence corps as an infantry officer. He also saw service for some years in the SAS regiment.

There is in fact no trace of his ever having belonged to the RAF. Research by Phythian and Tim Laxton, who worked on Astra's affairs for accountants Stoy Hayward and, following his experience of Astra's manipulation and victimisation, dedicated himself to frontline journalistic investigation into government corruption in the arms industry, points to Kock's emigrating, in 1944, to Southern Rhodesia, where fourteen years later (until December 1962) he did indeed serve as Political Secretary to the Rhodesian Prime Minister Sir Edgar Whitehead.

During his Rhodesian period, Kock picked up, among much else that determined his future, one particular contact that would stand him in good stead. Walter Monckton, 1st Viscount Monckton of Brenchley, one of Churchill's Cabinet and then chairman of Midland Bank, headed the Advisory Commission that undertook a review of the Rhodesian Constitution. Walter's son Gilbert, a former major-general, the 2nd Viscount Brenchley, would be one of Kock's patrons when Kock came to Britain in 1967. Kock's house bordered Monckton's estate near Maidstone in Kent.

It appears more likely that Kock's alleged earlier experience in the RAF was in fact in the Rhodesian Air Force, and if one is to believe Kock's own assertion to the 1991 DTI Select Committee Inquiry into Exports to Iraq, that he served as substantive captain and rose to major in the SAS 'in Rhodesia just before UDI'. It is more than likely that the SAS service he saw was in 'C' Squadron, formed by 'Mad Mike' Calvert at that time from a pool of 1,000 Rhodesian ex-SOE and SAS volunteers for action against the communists in the jungles of Malaya. Alternatively, he was an Intelligence liaison man who used the SAS.

'Following his retirement from the army', the Midland brochure continues, Kock 'was for a period International Director







and at the time that Aitken was a director of Astra's BMARC.<sup>2</sup>

During the DTI Select Committee Inquiry, in the final report of which Kock's evidence played a curiously insignificant part, our mysterious non-executive director denied ever being a member of MI5 or MI6, or an officer in MI6, but no one reading his evidence would be left in any doubt that he had these connections:

'If I find anything which I consider to be contrary to the interests of this country,' Kock said to Mr Stan Crowther MP, ever confident of his interpretation of our country's interests, 'I will report.'

'The question is, how do we report it?' pressed Crowther. 'How do we get in touch with them [the security services]? You certainly know how to get in touch with them all the time, do you not?'

'I know how to get in touch with some of them, yes,' was as far as Kock would go.

As Kock's crucial involvement in the arms-to-Iraq scandal began to fall clear, further attempts were made, this time in Parliament, to uncover information about the man. In April 1993, Allan Rogers MP asked the House 'what the official duties of Mr Stephen Adolphus Kock [*sic*] have been since 1980'.

The apparently definitive answer, 'None,' will do little to disperse the suspicions of the curious historian, however, for the date in question, '1980', has been entered in Hansard as '1990', although it was perfectly clear in the original question.

Other questions followed in February 1994 (MPs Menzies Campbell and Sir David Steel), and on 1 July 1994 Michael Meacher asked, 'for what reason Stephan Adolph Kock has Special Branch protection; and what other names he uses or has been known by.' Four days later the answer came, 'It is not in the public interest to disclose whether any person has received official protection or not. There is no Ministerial responsibility for names by which Mr Kock is known or has been known.'

Then, on 24 May, Meacher tried once more, digging deeper into his past, asking to know, 'what duties Stephan Adolphus Kock has performed for a. the Prime Minister, b. the Ministry of Defence, c. the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, d. the



Department of Trade and Industry, and e. any other Department between 1964 and 1979; and in which countries overseas each of these duties were carried out.'

Meacher was rewarded with an answer that at least seemed to verify that Kock enjoyed a protected status: 'Mr Kock performed no *official* [my italics] duties for any Government Department during the period 1964-79. It remains the Government's policy not to comment on the contacts which an individual may or may not have had with the security [MI5] and intelligence [MI6] agencies.'

But whether or not he is or was a member or an officer in MI6 or MI5 or was ever involved with Group 13, he was by his own admission 'a military intelligence officer in Rhodesia' with 'access to private information of a nature that might endanger the security of the state' and the 'capability to convey [such] information', whatever precisely that means in terms of job description.

The close connection between the SAS, MI6, industry/the City and politics will be seen to have formed the route by which Kock found his way to Astra in 1986.

Kock was active in these areas when British policy towards southern Africa was no less duplicitous over sanctions and apartheid and the pressing need to trade, than it became in the 1980s towards Iraq, over sanctions on arms and the desire to take advantage of the enormous economic opportunities offered by war in the Middle East.

When, in 1965, during Harold Wilson's government, Southern Rhodesia issued its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), civil servants in the Cabinet Office drew up sanctions with so many loopholes that subsidiaries of British oil companies were effectively encouraged to continue to supply.

The situation provided Kock with a perfect training ground for success in the British defence industry in the 1980s. With official government policy short-cut to economic expediency, the situation in both cases favoured the rise of clandestine operatives who, in the unlikely event that they were called upon to do so, could, with establishment backing, justify their activities with an appeal to patriotism and/or realism.

Kock proved himself in Rhodesia with others who helped him. He was rewarded with a position about cementing his connections in Intelligence circles here.

By 1973 he had a position in Holdings and the former was boasting that he had done so. At the time he joined Astra, and was available to co-ordinate the economic policy.

In 1978, when Kock was engaged in sanction-busting in Rhodesia, Accounts Adviser to British Petroleum with a man called [redacted] experience to good use.

Having served in the SOE during the Second World War, Kock was a member of the Special Operations Executive. The SOE trained resistance fighters engaged in sabotage, and after, its government-backed MI6, who out of pipe-smoking the war.

We know that [redacted] called Onedin Development, the Register of Companies. There is evidence of [redacted] appointment as a non-executive director in 1973 was, according to [redacted] Biddle's merchant bank, [redacted] the company. 'Commitment' Judd & Co., the reporting [redacted] time of the flotation.

In 1980 Mann Judd & Co. [redacted] eldest son, Egmout [redacted]



Kock proved himself in Rhodesia, and in 1969, as was the case with others who helped Britain's covert foreign policy at this time, he was rewarded with British citizenship. Once in Britain, he set about cementing his contacts in political and business and Intelligence circles here.

By 1973 he had a position as non-executive director of Biddle Holdings and the former chairman, Frank Biddle, recalls his boasting that he had dined out with Margaret Thatcher. By the time he joined Astra, and Thatcher had come to power, Kock was available to co-ordinate the major arms deals that underwrote her economic policy.

In 1978, when Kock gave evidence to the Bingham Inquiry into sanction-busting in Rhodesia, he described himself as National Accounts Adviser to British Petroleum. Later, through his friendship with a man called Bernard Wheeler, he could put this experience to good use.

Having served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during the Second World War, Bernard Wheeler is, like Kock, a member of the Special Forces Club, indeed a former secretary. The SOE trained resistance groups in the Second World War and engaged in sabotage, assassination and general mayhem; thereafter, its government-sponsored assassination duties passed to MI6, who out of pique or envy had betrayed SOE agents during the war.

We know that Wheeler and Kock operated through a company called Onedin Developments (Devon) Ltd until it was struck off the Register of Companies for failing to file accounts in 1978. There is evidence of mutual back-scratching before then. Kock's appointment as a non-executive director of Biddle Holdings in 1973 was, according to Frank Biddle, a pre-condition imposed by Biddle's merchant bank, County Bank Limited, for the flotation of the company. 'Coincidentally', Wheeler was a partner in Mann Judd & Co., the reporting accountants of Biddle Holdings, at the time of the flotation.

In 1980 Mann Judd merged with Touche Ross, where Kock's eldest son, Egmont Stephanus, served his articles as a trainee