
Book Reviews

Lifting the veil on the secret government

by Dean Andromidas

In the Public Interest

by Gerald James

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In the fall of 1995, a regiment of Iraqi troops surrounded a villa on the outskirts of Baghdad. Their mission: eliminate Hussein Kamil, the son-in-law of Saddam Hussein. Kamil had just returned from Jordan, where his attempt to defect was apparently rebuffed by both Jordan's King Hussein and the United States. Kamil and several members of his family were killed that night. The whole affair seems strange. Here was the son-in-law of Saddam Hussein, who at one time was one of his top intelligence chiefs, and no doubt knew more of the Iraqi President's comings and goings than any other man in Baghdad: Why, if U.S. and British policy is to rid the world of Saddam, would they not whisk this prize off to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, for thorough debriefings? Why was he forced back to Iraq, to his certain death?

James's new book, a personal account of the massive, illegal arms sales to Iran and Iraq during their eight-year-long war, offers some answers. During that war, Gen. Hussein Kamil was in charge of Iraq's military-industrial sector, and clearly knew of all these dealings. He was not the first, nor most likely the last, to die because he "knew too much."

The value of *In the Public Interest*, lies in James's personal account of the illegal arms trade during the Iran-Iraq War, which was kept going by the Anglo-Americans under a geopolitical policy of "dual containment." That murderous strategy has resumed since the end of the Gulf War.

As chairman and founder of the arms manufacturer Astra Holdings, James was intimately involved in many of these arms deals, not just as a profiteer, but also as a very real victim. His is an account of an outsider who entered the world of the international arms trade seeking to establish a profitable

business concern, but found himself in the middle of the arms industry's deadly mix of military-intelligence and political intrigue. This is an extremely serious book, which, in going to the heart of the matter, makes these key points:

- The selling of arms and munitions to Iran and Iraq, including the so-called "weapons of mass destruction," at the very least, was known about and encouraged, and more likely was the design of the highest levels of the British and U.S. governments, including Margaret Thatcher and George Bush.

- These illegal arms sales were central to what Margaret Thatcher pointed to as her economic miracle, which wiped out the traditional manufacturing base of Great Britain, and turned it into the second-largest arms exporter in the world.

- The same international cabal that violated the export bans and sold the weapons, organized the scapegoating of minor players, such as Astra Holdings, as part of the coverup of the higher command structure. James demonstrates how this coverup did not stop at judicial frameups, but involved intimidation and murder as well.

In 1981, Gerald James led a group of businessmen in the takeover of the Astra Fireworks company, turning it into a multimillion-dollar arms producer. By 1989, it had subsidiaries in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Belgium, with an order book of over \$450 million. By 1990, through what James very convincingly describes as a "cabal," involving the highest levels of the British government, intelligence and military-industrial establishment, and the City of London, he and his colleagues were forced out of the company, some put into jail, others victims of violent intimidation, and still others murdered. The cabal helped build up James's firm as part of their strategy of maximizing covert arms sales. Then, when the end of the Iran-Iraq War ushered in an intensification of geopolitical policy, culminating in the Gulf War—George Bush's "finest hour"—Astra was chosen as one of the sacrificial lambs, whose destruction would serve to cover the truth: Astra was forced into bankruptcy, with its constituent parts sold off to companies such as British Royal Ordnance, which, as the real insider companies, were major profiteers of the arms sales of the 1980s.

Who did it, and how

James takes the reader, step by step, through who organized the covert arms exports and how they did it to circumvent the arms sanctions which had been imposed. He is not afraid to name names in describing a network of individuals, that reaches to the highest levels of the Anglo-American establishment. Some examples:

Sir John Cuckney, as chairman of the 3i group, an institutional investor comprising the Bank of England and the top City banks, headed one of the three institutional investors backing Astra. But Sir John was much more: A former intelligence officer for MI-5 (the British domestic security service,

responsible for intelligence operations in the former colonies), he was a member of Margaret Thatcher's inner circle. As director of Midland Bank and its secret Midland International Trade Services, and the Ministry of Defense's International Military Services Ltd., Cuckney was one of the architects of the British covert arms policy, and key in establishing the Iraqi arms procurement network in Great Britain. As chairman of the TI group, he oversaw the sale of its Matrix Churchill machine tool subsidiary to the Iraqi government, with full knowledge that the company would be involved in the manufacture of "weapons of mass destruction."

Stephanus Adolphus Kock played a central role as the cabal's point man for the penetration and destruction of Astra. Kock, of Czech origin, worked in various military and intelligence capacities in Rhodesia, and, more importantly, was a protégé and bagman for the First Viscount Monckton of Brenchley, chairman of Midland Bank. Monckton, who had held a portfolio in Winston Churchill's wartime government, led the so-called Maidstone Mafia (Maidstone was the family estate), one of several elite circles that control British postwar policy. Kock was an intimate of Margaret Thatcher, and played a leading role in organizing the multimillion-dollar British arms deals, including with the Saudis and Malaysians. Kock worked alongside Sir John Cuckney and French Trilateral Commission member Count Hervé de Carmoy, at Midland Bank on these huge operations.

James mentions others, including City bankers, arms dealers and manufacturers, and former and current MI-5 and MI-6 officers, but stresses that these people were only carrying out a policy that had been crafted at the highest levels of the British establishment, higher than elected officials or even the prime minister. In detailing this relationship, James points out that every arms deal in Britain, if not in the world, is first known by the government's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which is responsible for coordinating intelligence from all government agencies, including MI-5 and MI-6, the Foreign and Colonial Offices, etc. The intelligence is then passed on to the chief of the cabinet office, a civil servant, a member of the "permanent government," who may or may not pass it along to the prime minister. Also, every week, the JIC makes a full presentation, in person, to the Queen, who, James underscores, takes a far more active role in governing her empire than the "soap opera" camouflage she is provided by the press.

James shows how this secret government acts with impunity: While flagrantly violating the laws of the elected government in furthering its policy goals, it does not hesitate to use the power of the state to silence its opponents and victims.

Where the trail of bodies leads

James's book makes an important contribution to exposing the secret government, international in scope and still

at the service of those who stand behind George Bush and Margaret Thatcher. Its exposé aids in understanding the breaking Contra cocaine-trafficking scandal, in which George Bush was the kingpin in the U.S., and bears immediately on the interlocked scandals engulfing Belgium centering on the 1991 murder of political boss André Cools and the discovery of a pedophile ring run by Marc Detroux (see *EIR*, Sept. 27, 1996).

The key to unravelling the Cools murder and the web of what seems to be endless corruption in Belgium, is the unsolved murder of Canadian Gerald Bull in 1990. When it became overwhelmingly clear that Astra and its board of directors were on the cabal's chopping block, Astra board member Chris Gumbley met with Bull, on the night of March 22, 1990, only a few hours before the latter's death. That meeting grew out of Astra's 1989 acquisition of the Belgian munitions manufacturer PRB, then a subsidiary of Société Générale de Belgique, a holding company that controls one-third of the Belgian economy. As part of the so-called "explosives cartel," PRB was fully integrated with the leading NATO munitions companies, including Royal Ordnance, ICI Nobel, and Muiden Chemie.

PRB, from the 1970s up through the mid-1980s, had been part-owner of Bull's Space Research Corporation in Brussels, and financed much of his research, including in projects involving British firms. Among these projects was what became known as the "super-gun," which was, in any case, insignificant compared to far more lucrative sales of conventional weapons. Bull's murder can only be seen in the context of his direct involvement and knowledge of a whole range of illegal deals, involving Britain, the United States, and other countries, rendering absurd the attribution of his assassination to Israel's Mossad.

At that March 22 meeting, Gumbley and Bull agreed to begin cooperation on exposing these operations, as their only means of self-defense. After the cabal got Bull out of the way, Gumbley was arrested by the British government, and was convicted on trumped-up charges of corruption. He was packed off to jail.

André Cools is said to have known Bull, and was fully knowledgeable of the dirty international arms dealings; many, including James, were prepared to use what they knew, for whatever reason, to politically damage the cabal. Notably, Cools was murdered in July 1991, at the same time that the evidence of the U.S. and British dirty arms operations to Iraq and Iran was being covered up by UN inspections of Saddam's "weapons of mass destruction." But perhaps the most compelling piece of evidence that puts Cools among the 20 or 30 others who have been permanently silenced to cover for the cabal's illegal arms sales, is the fact that the same judicial, security, and political establishment that forms the Belgian branch of this secret government, is responsible for keeping both his and Bull's murder cases unsolved.