



# The Bribe Factory

[HOME](#) > PART 1

## UNAOIL: THE COMPANY THAT BRIBED THE WORLD

**In the list of the world's great companies, Unaoil is nowhere to be seen. But for the best part of the past two decades, the family business from Monaco has systematically corrupted the global oil industry, distributing many millions of dollars worth of bribes on behalf of corporate behemoths including Samsung, Rolls-Royce, Halliburton and Australia's own Leighton Holdings.**

**Now a vast cache of leaked emails and documents has confirmed what many suspected about the oil industry, and has laid bare the activities of the world's super-bagman as it has bought off officials and rigged contracts around the world.**



A massive leak of confidential documents has for the first time exposed the true extent of corruption within the oil industry, implicating dozens of leading companies, bureaucrats and politicians in a sophisticated global web of bribery and graft.

After a six-month investigation across two continents, Fairfax Media and *The Huffington Post* can reveal that billions of dollars of government contracts were awarded as the direct result of bribes paid on behalf of firms including British icon Rolls-Royce, US giant Halliburton, Australia's Leighton Holdings and Korean heavyweights Samsung and Hyundai.

The investigation centres on a Monaco company called Unaoil, run by the jet-setting Ahsani clan. Following a coded ad in a French newspaper, a series of clandestine meetings and midnight phone calls led to our reporters obtaining hundreds of thousands of the Ahsanis' leaked emails and documents.

The trove reveals how they rub shoulders with royalty, party in style, mock anti-corruption agencies and operate a secret network of fixers and middlemen throughout the world's oil producing nations.

Corruption in oil production - one of the world's richest industries and one that touches us all through our reliance on petrol - fuels inequality, robs people of their basic needs and causes social unrest in some of the world's poorest countries. It was among the factors that prompted the Arab Spring.

Fairfax Media and *The Huffington Post* today reveal how Unaoil carved up portions of the Middle East oil industry for the benefit of Western companies between 2002 and 2012.

In part two we will turn to the impoverished former Russian states to reveal the extent of misbehaviour by multinational companies including Halliburton. We will conclude the three-part investigation by showing how corrupt practices have extended deep into Asia and Africa.

*The leaked files reveal that some people in these firms believed they were hiring a genuine lobbyist, and others who knew or*

*suspected they were funding bribery simply turned a blind eye.*

The leaked files expose as corrupt two Iraqi oil ministers, a fixer linked to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, senior officials from Libya's Gaddafi regime, Iranian oil figures, powerful officials in the United Arab Emirates and a Kuwaiti operator known as "the big cheese".

Western firms involved in Unaoil's Middle East operation include some of the world's wealthiest and most respected companies: Rolls-Royce and Petrofac from Britain; US companies FMC Technologies, Cameron and Weatherford; Italian giants Eni and Saipem; German companies MAN Turbo (now known as MAN Diesel & Turbo) and Siemens; Dutch firm SBM Offshore; and Indian giant Larsen & Toubro. They also show the offshore arm of Australian company Leighton Holdings was involved in serious, calculated corruption.

The leaked files reveal that some people in these firms believed they were hiring a genuine lobbyist, and others who knew or suspected they were funding bribery simply turned a blind eye.

Advertisement

But some knew much more. A handful of senior insiders at firms such as Spanish company Tecnicas Reunidas, French firm Technip and drilling giant MI-SWACO, not only actively supported bribery but pocketed their own kickbacks; US defence giant Honeywell and Australia's Leighton Offshore agreed to hide bribes inside fraudulent contracts in Iraq; a Rolls-Royce manager negotiated a monthly kickback for leaking information from inside the British firm.

Many of those revealed to have been culpable, including the wealthy Ahsani family itself, which runs Unaoil, continue to operate with impunity.

The files expose the betrayal of ordinary people in the Middle East. After Saddam Hussein was toppled, the US declared Iraq's oil would be managed to benefit the Iraqi people. Today, in part one of the 'Global Bribe Factory' expose, that claim is demolished.

## THE BRIBE FACTORY

---



It is the Monaco company that almost perfected the art of corruption.

It is called Unaoil and it is run by members of the Ahsani family - Monaco

millionaires who rub shoulders with princes, sheikhs and Europe's and America's elite business crowd. At the head are family patriarch Ata Ahsani and his two dashing sons, Cyrus and Saman. Their charities support the arts and children, and Ahsani family members sit on the boards of NGOs with ex-politicians and billionaires. Ten years ago, a spreadsheet showed they had cash, shares and property worth 190 million euros. They are members of the global elite.



Left to right: Saman, Cyrus and Ata Ahsani

How they make their money is simple. Oil-rich countries often suffer poor governance and high levels of corruption. Unaoil's business plan is to play on the fears of large Western companies that they cannot win contracts without its help.

*The multi-million dollar fees Unaoil takes from its clients are*

*funnelled into an industrial scale bribery operation which further entrenches corruption among the powerful few.*

Its operatives then bribe officials in oil-producing nations to help these clients win government-funded projects. The corrupt officials might rig a tender committee. Or leak inside information. Or ensure a contract is awarded without a competitive tender.

If you believe Ata Ahsani, it's all above board: "We are not in the business of fixing jobs for people. Our work is basically very basic. What we do is integrate Western technology with local capability," he told Fairfax Media and *The Huffington Post*.

Did Unaoil bribe public officials? "The answer is absolutely no".

But the evidence of their own internal email cache, leaked to Fairfax Media and *The Huffington Post*, clearly demonstrates that the multi-million dollar fees Unaoil takes from its clients are funnelled into an industrial scale bribery operation which further entrenches corruption among the powerful few.

Bankers in New York and London have facilitated Unaoil's money laundering, while the Ahsanis have built a major property investment business in central London. Since 2007, Unaoil has been certified by anti-corruption agency Trace International. This in itself raises serious questions about the worth of such international accreditation.

But for the Western companies confronted with questions under anti foreign bribery laws in their own jurisdictions, Unaoil appears to be a reputable and discrete middle-man, giving listed businesses what is known as "plausible deniability".

Companies approached by Fairfax Media and *The Huffington Post* about their contracts with Unaoil have emphasised they have strong anti-corruption policies, and are committed to investigating their dealings with Unaoil.

## IRAQ

---

*Unaoil paid at least \$25 million in bribes via middlemen to secure the support of powerful officials — while complaining*

*internally that they were “assholes, and greedy”*

**A**

fter the US led coalition won the second gulf war, it went to guard the oil ministry - leaving the Baghdad museum undefended to be looted of its treasures.

But they did not save the oil industry from thieves. The Unaoil files reveal that Western companies, in concert with Iraq’s new elite, themselves began a sustained campaign of looting.

Unaoil paid at least \$25 million in bribes via middlemen to secure the support of powerful officials - while complaining internally that they were “assholes, and greedy”.

Between 2004 and 2012, Unaoil corruptly influenced a Who’s Who of the country’s oil industry: the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq turned education minister Hussain al-Shahristani; Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi (who was replaced in 2014); the Director General of the South Oil Company, Dhia Jaffar al-Mousawi, who in 2015 became a deputy minister; and top oil official Oday al-Quraishi.

**Iraq**

The bad old days of corruption were meant to be over

**PLAY VIDEO**

The most senior politicians received multi-million dollar lump sums, while those lower down the food chain were paid lesser amounts. Quraishi, who oversaw Iraq's most important oil industry expansion project, pocketed a monthly kickback of \$US6000 – “\$5K for him, and \$1k he needs for presents to people within” – along with additional large pay-offs.

The minister, Dr Shahrastani, who is now Iraq's education minister, denied he had been involved in any wrongdoing. Other Iraqi officials did not respond to requests to comment.

Unaoil also bribed senior insiders working for the international oil companies which were contracted by Iraq to manage its oil fields. The leaked files reveal rampant corruption inside Italian oil giant Eni, which ran the tender processes for contractors working on the giant Zubair oil field.

Unaoil's clients in Iraq included British giant Rolls-Royce, US firms FMC Technologies and Cameron, Italy's Saipem, German company MAN Turbo, the US listed Weatherford, Dutch company SBM Offshore and Australia's Leighton Offshore.

## IRAN

---

**E**verything works and progresses on connections, relations with special talent”. So wrote an Iranian fixer, part of Unaoil's remarkable network of insiders dedicated to paying and pocketing bribes. After the recent relaxing of United Nations, US and European sanctions, this network has become even more valuable.

In 2006, this Unaoil operative complained in emails that one of the company's clients, UK firm Weir Pumps (now owned by US firm SPX), owed him hundreds of thousands of dollars which he had promised to use in part to sling to others in Iran.

“[It] is the end of Iranian new year here, expectations high, I am short in cash, and about five million pounds of business with Weir [is] in danger... Because I can not fulfill my obligations to my team of Supporters.”

If the money was not forthcoming, he warned, Weir Pumps risked “melting like a piece of ice, day by day.”

“...over half a million dollars of my consultancy fee... I have already spend it for the

promotion of their businesses in Iran.”

A separate set of leaked memos from 2006 said Unaoil would pay “10 k/month” to secure the support of the managing director of a firm chaired by a high ranking Iranian official, part owned by an Iranian government entity and overseen by a board with “political influence.”

“MD [managing director]... wants \$10k/month. AA [Ata Ahsani of Unaoil] agree to this given his excellent connections.”

Unaoil’s Iranian network – which was also used to assist firms such as ABB, Elliott and Japan’s Yokogawa – extends beyond the oil industry. In 2011, Unaoil helped solve a dispute involving one of its Australian clients by reaching out to “several influential contacts... including the head of the Iranian Police”.

Prior to the recent easing of sanctions, Unaoil used strategies including front companies to avoid the scrutiny of Western officials. It advised its corrupt fixers to not wire funds using US dollars and to use companies “not having the name Iran in it”.

## LIBYA

---

*“ ... what type of Baksheesh is needed to present to these men in order to get work”*

**I**n 2004, when the West began removing sanctions against Libya, and the regime of Colonel Gaddafi started dealing with foreign companies, Unaoil stood ready. By 2011, its network of corrupt insiders included officials and front men able to influence the dealings of many of Libya’s most important oil and gas agencies.

In late 2008, a Canadian drilling firm, Canuck Completions, told Unaoil it was “curious about ... what type of Baksheesh is needed to present to these men in order to get work” in Libya.

Advertisement

Among Unaoil’s corrupt insiders was the powerful Libyan official, Mustafa Zarti, a confidant for the Gaddafi regime. Unaoil’s files describe Zarti as “good friends of President



Ghadafi's [sic] son of Libya and have lot of influence in lobbying the jobs in Libya". Unaoil agreed to secretly pay Zarti millions of dollars. In return he would use his influence to advantage Unaoil's clients.

"MZ [Zarti] sits on the board of LFIC [Libyan Foreign Investment Committee] ... which controls... Oil fund (\$6bn) ... He sees his role as us executing and him fixing issues we come across. MZ has agreed to bring all his oil & gas work to us," a September 2006 Unaoil memo said.

Unaoil's multinational clients in Libya included Malaysian giant Ranhill, Korean conglomerate ISU and Spanish company Tecnicas Reunidas.

## SYRIA

---

**I**n Syria, Unaoil turned to a middleman close to the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

In 2008 and 2009, Unaoil promised the man 2.75 million euros who helped its British client Petrofac win contracts from Assad regime petroleum companies. "Strictly confidential" emails from 2008 show this middleman promised to pay others to win these contracts.

But when he was not paid on time, he complained the delays were causing problems with "friends" in Syria.

"It is becoming very unpleasant [sic] for me not delivering as expected," he wrote to Unaoil in December 2009.

Petrofac is understood to be unaware of Unaoil's involvement in its Syrian dealings and in response to questions said it "aspires to the highest standards of ethical behaviour".

## KUWAIT AND THE UAE

---

**I**n Kuwait, Unaoil had on its payroll a powerful official who they called "the big cheese."

To direct a contract to Unaoil's long term client in the Middle East, US firm

FMC Technologies, Unaoil wanted a payment of \$2.5 million. It then planned to assign a middleman to handle “the big cheese in Kuwait and to decide what portion... should go to that man”.

In the UAE, Unaoil’s network included a public official with links to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. The leaked Unaoil files reveal this official had commercial dealings with the Ahsanis who, in return, were seeking the official’s backing in the region. This included an entree to a project funded by the office of “His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed”.

Unaoil corrupted a senior official in a subsidiary of Abu Dhabi’s National Oil company. This insider rigged a tender panel for a Unaoil client, Indian conglomerate Larsen & Toubro.

## RELATED STORIES



**How the West bought Iraq**



**Leighton: The Australian angle**



**The Ahsanis: Monaco bribe masters**



**Codenames, subterfuge and the global money trail**

Libya

Syria

UAE

Iran

The players

Do you know more? [Let us know anonymously here.](#)

## CREDITS

**REPORTERS** Nick McKenzie (chief reporter), Richard Baker, Michael Bachelard & Daniel Quinlan **EDITOR** Michael Bachelard **COPY EDITORS** Michael Coulter & Kate Cole-Adams **DESIGN** Mark Stehle & Joe Benke **BUILD** Matthew Absalom-Wong, Nathanael Scott & Soren Frederiksen **VIDEO** Tim Young & Kelly Bergsma **CONSULTANT** Luke McMahon **ADDITIONAL IMAGES** Getty Images

**THE AGE**  
INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

Independent. Always.  
Get unlimited access today.  
**SUBSCRIBE NOW**



# The Bribe Factory

[HOME](#) > PART 2

## UNAOIL: POLICE LAUNCH JOINT GLOBAL INVESTIGATION

**A Fairfax Media and Huffington Post investigation has uncovered an extraordinary story of bribery and corruption in the oil industry, centred on Monaco-based company Unaoil. This is the story of Unaoil's penetration of the former Soviet states.**

[Nick McKenzie](#), [Richard Baker](#), [Michael Bachelard](#), [Daniel Quinlan](#)

T

he FBI, US Department of Justice and anti-corruption police in Britain and Australia have launched a joint investigation into revelations of a massive global bribery racket in the oil industry.

The news comes as Fairfax Media and The Huffington Post can reveal that US giant Halliburton and its former subsidiary Kellogg, Brown & Root are embroiled in the Unaoil bribes-for-contracts scandal through their operations in former Soviet states.

The biggest leak of confidential files in the history of the oil industry also unveils rampant corruption inside Italian oil giant Eni in many of the countries in which the firm has been contracted by national governments to manage their oilfields.

*Managers from Eni, Spanish Firm Tecnicas Reunidas, French firm Technip, drilling giant MI-SWACO and Rolls-Royce not only actively supported bribery but were offered, or pocketed, their own kickbacks.*

Texas firm National Oilwell Varco, Singapore conglomerate Keppel, Norway's Aker Kvaerner and giant Turkish joint venture GATE are also implicated. Information from hundreds of thousands of emails to Unaoil's chief executive, Cyrus Ahsani, show individual executives and managers from Halliburton and Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR), which split in 2007, knew or suspected that Unaoil was acting corruptly to win contracts in Kazakhstan.

Managers from Eni, Spanish Firm Tecnicas Reunidas, French firm Technip, drilling giant MI-SWACO and Rolls-Royce not only actively supported bribery but were offered, or pocketed, their own kickbacks. And US defence giant Honeywell and Australian firm Leighton Offshore agreed to hide bribes inside fraudulent contracts in Iraq.

Companies approached by Fairfax Media and The Huffington Post about their contracts with Unaoil have emphasised their strong anti-corruption policies and have committed to investigating their dealings with Unaoil. Unaoil also denied any corruption.

## THE CASPIAN STATES

---

To win contracts for its clients in Kazakhstan, Unaoil paid multiple bribes to Eni and Kazakh officials overseeing tenders in the giant Kashagan oilfield and elsewhere.

It appears from the leaked files that senior managers from KBR were pushing Unaoil hard to win favour. One email written from a KBR manager told Unaoil to concentrate its efforts on “a good spaghetti house” and “a little shashlick”. The code refers respectively to the officials from Italian company Eni and the Kazakh government who were overseeing the contracts KBR wanted to win.

The leaked files show Unaoil sought to corrupt a number of influential figures, including senior Eni manager Diego Braghi and Kazakh senior official Serik Burkitbayev, to give its clients an advantage over rival companies.

The formula was repeated in neighbouring Azerbaijan, where KBR also paid Unaoil millions of dollars to help it win contracts. A leaked KBR file said Unaoil’s key middleman in Azerbaijan was “very close to the President and his family ... [and] has an access to every office in the country”.

This middleman, Reza Raein, received millions of dollars from Unaoil in multiple bank accounts. In return, he leaked highly confidential information from senior Azeri government officials to Unaoil, which was fed back to its multinational clients.

Unaoil also sought to build its shady empire in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, including by liaising with a middleman who promised access to “the company of the [Uzbek] President’s daughter, Gulnara Karimova”.



## POLICE BEGIN PROBES, FACE QUESTIONS ABOUT PAST FAILINGS

---

The US Department of Justice, FBI, UK National Crime Agency and Australian Federal Police are now jointly investigating Unaoil and some of its multinational clients. The probe is likely to be one of the world's biggest, given the number of companies and countries involved.

The leaked Unaoil files show that in the Middle East Unaoil bribed two Iraq oil ministers, Iranian oil chiefs and the right hand man of Colonel Gaddafi's son, among others.

Questions are emerging about how Unaoil operated for so many years with impunity, using bank accounts in New York and London to launder funds and pay bribes between 2000 and 2012, possibly more recently.

Unaoil has its headquarters in Monaco and is controlled by the wealthy Ahsani family, led by patriarch Ata Ahsani and sons Cyrus and Saman. The trio all have British passports. Many of Unaoil's crooked deals were organised in London, or used UK and US linked middlemen, bank accounts and shelf companies. British authorities appear to have been in the dark about Unaoil and the Ahsanis, who also operate a London property investment company. The British foreign office has even assisted Unaoil overseas, giving Unaoil and its executives briefings and support.

The Ahsani family meanwhile has mixed freely with Britain and Europe's elite political and business crowd. Saman Ahsani sits on the board of an Iranian NGO in London alongside former chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont. The Ahsanis host charity events with Prince Albert and Princess Caroline of Monaco, and have paid Prince Albert's good friend, Mike Powers, to sit on Unaoil's advisory board.

There is no suggestion that Powers, Lamont or the Monaco royals are aware of Unaoil's corruption.

But the leaked emails reveal several British businessmen and middlemen, including oil executives Peter Warner, Stuart K Steele, Basil Al Jarah and Leo Bortolazzo, have facilitated Unaoil's corruption.

## RELATED STORIES



### The dirty executives





**Leightons**

**Kazakhstan: buying a piece of the 'Spaghetti House'**

**Azerbaijan: the best-dressed middleman**

**Trace: how the Ahsanis fooled the world**

Do you know more? [Let us know anonymously here.](#)

## CREDITS

**REPORTERS** Nick McKenzie (chief reporter), Richard Baker, Michael Bachelard & Daniel Quinlan **EDITOR** Michael Bachelard **COPY EDITORS** Michael Coulter & Kate Cole-Adams **DESIGN** Mark Stehle & Joe Benke **BUILD** Matthew Absalom-Wong, Nathanael Scott & Soren Frederiksen **VIDEO** Tim Young & Kelly Bergsma **CONSULTANT** Luke McMahon **ADDITIONAL IMAGES** Getty Images

**THE AGE**  
INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

**Independent. Always.**  
**Get unlimited access today.**  
**SUBSCRIBE NOW**



# The Bribe Factory

[HOME](#) > **PART 3**

## UNAOIL: DARK SECRETS OF ASIAN POWERS

**Asian companies such as Hyundai, Samsung, Sinopec and Petronas are household names. But they have dark secrets. In the latest in Fairfax Media and The Huffington Post's global bribery expose, these firms and more are implicated for paying kickbacks, money laundering and corruption.**

[Richard Baker](#), [Michael Bachelard](#), [Daniel Quinlan](#) and [Nick McKenzie](#)





As Asian companies expand their global power and influence, the Monaco-based bribe factory Unaoil has been quick to sign them up to its corrupt business model.

A trove of leaked emails from inside Unaoil show it working closely with Malaysia's national oil company Petronas, as well as South Korean titans Hyundai and Samsung, and even the Chinese government giant Sinopec. The oil industry's biggest ever scandal has also exposed Asian conglomerates Yokogawa of Japan, South Korea's ISU, Singapore's Keppel and Malaysian firm Ranhill.

The emails show some Asian executives are enthusiastic participants in graft, underscoring the pervasive culture of corruption across the region. It's an alarming proposition as Asian companies develop into some of the most powerful and influential players in global business.

The massive leak of files from Unaoil this week has already sparked investigations by the US Department of Justice, the FBI, Britain's National Crime Agency and other authorities.

Today, we reveal how Unaoil's corrupt dealings with its multinational clients has also infected the fast-growing African oil industry.

## **SOUTH KOREAN GIANTS IN LIBYA AND ALGERIA**

---

*"You are requested to come to see him as you told me at a hotel... I suggest to you with around 20,000 Euro [euro] at this visit,"*

Thousands of leaked files reveal that managers inside South Korean conglomerates paid millions of dollars in commissions to Unaoil, which funded corruption to win major contracts in Libya and Algeria.

In one email, Korean ISU vice president Joon Lee, writing from a private address, urged Unaoil to bring cash to a meeting to pay a senior Libyan government official who could help ISU win a construction contract.

"You are requested to come to see him as you told me at a hotel... I suggest to you with around 20,000 Euro [euro] at this visit," the email to Unaoil said.

At the time, Joon Lee was not only ordering pay-offs, but pocketing his own bribes. He set up his own offshore company, the Monaco based Sun Holder, into which he agreed to receive kickbacks from Unaoil. In return he passed on confidential information he had received and also ensured the company he worked for, ISU, kept paying Unaoil as its agent. Joon Lee could not be contacted.

The leaked files also reveal that a senior Samsung manager, in cahoots with executives from Hyundai and Hanwha, agreed to pay bribes worth millions of dollars to rig oil-refinery contracts in Algeria.

Advertisement

Unaoil engineered the corrupt deals. The two South Korean companies conspired to share the \$1.8 billion contracts between them, even though they were apparently competing.

Stuart K. Steele, an executive from a third company, Spanish multinational Tecnicas Reunidas, was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars via offshore accounts. The cash ensured the Spanish company ran dead in the three-way bidding contest: a manoeuvre described in the emails as a "tripartite agreement".

"I understand your friend [from Tecnicas Reunidas] is not comfortable, if his name is specified in the agreement," an email to Unaoil from a senior Samsung executive said.

"Your obligation shall be to maintain three commercial bids to be submitted and to have the contract awarded to any bidder from our place [South Korea]".

Unaoil also sought to bribe officials from Algeria's state-owned oil company Sonatrach.

## **MALAYSIAN MILLIONS: PETRONAS AND RANHILL**

---

Oil for many countries is by far the biggest game in town. Many struggling oil-producing nations hire international companies to manage their fields, hoping this will deliver the best

value for their people.

The Iraqi government was hoping for such a result when it appointed the Malaysian government-owned oil company Petronas to help manage huge oil fields in Iraq's south in 2010.

Then Unaoil stepped in. Unaoil had a client that wanted to secure a large contract Petronas was overseeing. So Unaoil bribed Petronas executives to rig the contract. Unaoil's client was British oil services firm Petrofac.

Leaked emails reveal that Unaoil agreed to pay millions of dollars to a Malaysian middle man who claimed he could influence a top Petronas' executive and other Malaysian officials in 2010. "I'll make [an] arrangement for us to see Mr [Petronas executive] when I'm in Dubai," middle man Affandi Yusuf wrote to Unaoil.

"As you are aware the situation is very sensitive at the moment. I'll have to meet Mr [Petronas executive] personally to make him comfortable to meet up with your team."

In a later email from Affandi, the middleman claims that, in return for the bribes, his corrupt Petronas contacts had "fed us" inside information from a tender committee. This ensured that Unaoil's client Petrofac qualified for a large contract.

"They have lived up to their obligation to get PF [Petrofac] qualified technically. According to them, PF would have been initially technically disqualified," Affandi wrote in an email in which he demanded money.

Petrofac responded that it did not condone bribery in any of its operations.

And so it went. In Libya, Malaysian company Ranhill offered Unaoil \$40 million to convince senior Libyan officials to award it a large housing construction contract. The leaked emails reveal Ranhill approached Unaoil after former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad had failed to convince Colonel Gaddafi to help.

Unaoil succeeded where Mahathir had failed. Unaoil paid a high ranking Libyan official, Mustafa Zarti, to assist Ranhill. The leaked files also suggest Unaoil promised a \$200,000 personal kickback to a Ranhill executive if he helped Unaoil extract large commissions from the Malaysian company.

Unaoil also paid up to \$2 million (along with further payments for a rug and a collection of fine wines) into offshore accounts to two mysterious Algerian middle men, Tewfic Guerbato and Omar Harbour. It appears these payments were made to increase Unaoil's influence inside Petronas and other Asian firms.

## **SNARING THE DRAGONS: UNAOIL IN CHINA**

---

And then there was China. As Chinese multinationals rapidly evolved into major oil industry players, Unaoil keenly sought their business.

In 2010, Unaoil agreed to become the agent for a subsidiary of the Chinese government-controlled behemoth Sinopec. Under the deal, Unaoil would pocket 5 per cent of the value of any contract it won for the Chinese firm.

But there was a catch. A senior manager from Sinopec subsidiary ZPEB asked for a personal kickback from Unaoil for signing the consultancy agreement.

The manager “is a player,” wrote Unaoil's Steve Hunter to his bosses in Monaco, “and asked initially for 2% to cover all the ZPEB players, then over the 3 days [they] agreed to 1%”.

“We will have to honour this if we want to go further. From these 3 days it became clear that the Chinese have personal agendas. [The manager] told me [they are paying bribes to] ... ZPEB man.”

The corrupt senior manager is described as having powerful family connections in Sinopec, and “full access” to senior officials – access the manager used to help Western companies.

The corrupt manager “has registered a company in US and is active agent for other Chinese business”.

Unaoil’s Chinese ventures began in 2003, when the company teamed up with an Asian businessman called [Mr] Wang. Wang promised Unaoil access to China’s most influential officials in return for large payments.

“[Wang] does have some access to Sinopec ... and says that he has clear access to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Deputy President, and, if he wants, the ‘Emperor’ – ie. Jang Zei Ming ... who is the real power still in China despite giving up the Presidency,” wrote Unaoil employee Peter Willimont in an internal briefing.

“As our deal stands with him now, it is 50/50 with him taking care of his end and us doing our bit.”

## **SINGAPORE'S KEPPEL AND JAPAN'S YOKOGAWA**

---

Japan and Singapore are considered among the least corrupt – and least corruptible – countries in Asia. But Unaoil’s tentacles extend to multinational oil service firms in both countries.

The leaked files reveal that Unaoil was paying bribes in Kazakhstan to help Singaporean conglomerate Keppel win contracts.

A confidential 2007 Unaoil memo details its plans to help Keppel win offshore oil rig and barge contracts on the massive Kashagan oil field. Unaoil regarded Keppel as an ideal client because Keppel had lax anti-corruption controls compared with Unaoil’s other multinational clients. Unaoil also believed Keppel had its own connections to allegedly corrupt Kazakh government officials.

“In my opinion we have a lot at stake here, apart from the \$30m [in fees from Keppel] – we could set-up a long term association with these guys [Keppel].... The problems of working

with a US or European outfit do not apply here,” a Unaoil executive wrote in a 2007 memo.

The leaked emails provide specific details of just how helpful Unaoil was to Keppel. In 2006, when Keppel was competing with French multinational Technip to win a contract to build an offshore oil rig in Kazakhstan, Unaoil used a corrupt contact codenamed “small D” to leak inside information on bidding strategy. “Small D” appears to be an Italian oil executive working with the Kazakhstan government.

“Please ask small D what does [he] understand [about the bid]... currently offered by the French,” said one email.

“Any news from little D on the outcome of the T [Technip] mtg [meeting]?? -- I need to go back to [Keppel senior manager],” Unaoil’s Kazakhstan manager Peter Willimont wrote in yet another message.

In Japan, meanwhile, the Tokyo based electrical engineering and software giant Yokogawa had also hopped into bed with Unaoil.

Leaked emails from 2006 reveal Unaoil paying middlemen to reveal confidential information on the tender strategies of Yokogawa’s competitors in the middle east – information that Unaoil then fed to Yokogawa.

“I just had the Japs on the phone [looking for information]”, a Unaoil manager wrote to a middleman who was leaking them information in 2006.

“Y[okogawa] France wants to visit us here next week if we have the info to review,” the manager wrote in another email.

Yokogawa responded to questions saying they had never working with Unaoil.

## RELATED STORIES





**Tony Kazal: The Sydney Connection**



**Unaoil in Africa**

**Asia's corruption tigers**

**Why we must act**

Do you know more? [Let us know anonymously here.](#)

## CREDITS

**REPORTERS** Nick McKenzie (chief reporter), Richard Baker, Michael Bachelard & Daniel Quinlan **EDITOR** Michael Bachelard **COPY EDITORS** Michael Coulter & Kate Cole-Adams **DESIGN** Mark Stehle & Joe Benke **BUILD** Matthew Absalom-Wong, Nathanael Scott & Soren Frederiksen **VIDEO** Tim Young & Kelly Bergsma **CONSULTANT** Luke McMahon **ADDITIONAL IMAGES** Getty Images

**THE AGE**  
INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

Independent. Always.  
Get unlimited access today.  
**SUBSCRIBE NOW**