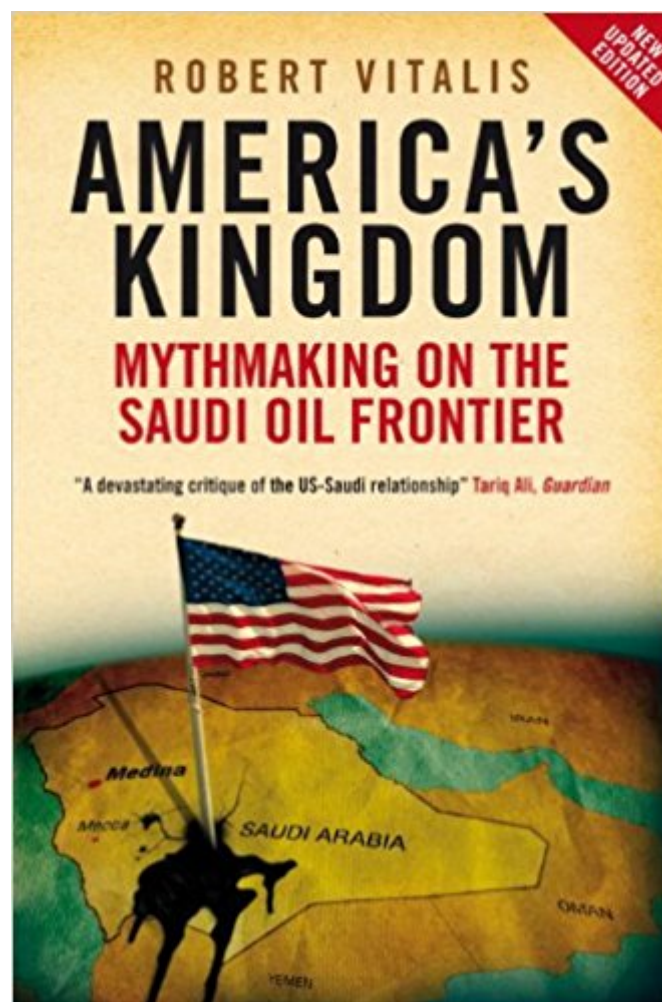


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America's Kingdom: Mythmaking On The Saudi Oil Frontier (Stanford Studies In Middle Eastern And Islamic Studies And Cultures (Paperback))





Synopsis

Now newly updated, *America's Kingdom* debunks the many myths that now surround the United States' special relationship with Saudi Arabia, also known as "the deal": oil for security. Exploding the long-established myth that the Arabian American Oil Company, Aramco, made miracles happen in the desert, Robert Vitalis shows how oil led the US government to follow the company to the kingdom, and how oil and Aramco quickly became America's largest single overseas private enterprise. From the establishment in the 1930s of a Jim Crow system in the Dhahran oil camps, to the consolidation of America's Kingdom under the House of Fahd, the royal faction that still rules today, this is a meticulously researched account of Aramco as a microcosm of the colonial order.

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Customer Reviews

"A devastating critique of the US-Saudi relationship." —Tariq Ali, *Guardian*
"A scholarly and readable book on the interaction between Saudi society and Aramco, the US oil giant that had its beginnings when the Saudi government granted its first concessions to Standard Oil of California in 1933. Combining history with political geography, Vitalis sheds a bright light on the origins and less savory aspects of the Saudi-US relationship." —*London Review of Books*
"Groundbreaking is a word too often used in assessing historical scholarship. Yet its application to Robert Vitalis's book is

nothing less than a necessity. The result of painstaking research in not only heretofore unused but previously unknown records, the book makes a major contribution to a variety of fields: international history, US-Saudi relations, business history, American race history, and more ... Those seeking to explain the present US place in the world should consider it essential reading.

•American Historical Review

America's Kingdom debunks the many myths that now surround the United States's "special relationship" with Saudi Arabia, or what is less reverently known as "the deal": oil for security. Taking aim at the long-held belief that the Arabian American Oil Company, ARAMCO, made miracles happen in the desert, Robert Vitalis shows that nothing could be further from the truth. What is true is that oil led the U.S. government to follow the company to the kingdom. Eisenhower agreed to train Ibn Sa'ud's army, Kennedy sent jets to defend the kingdom, and Lyndon Johnson sold it missiles. Oil and ARAMCO quickly became America's largest single overseas private enterprise. Beginning with the establishment of a Jim Crow system in the Dhahran oil camps in the 1930s, the book goes on to examine the period of unrest in the 1950s and 1960s when workers challenged the racial hierarchy of the ARAMCO camps while a small cadre of progressive Saudis challenged the hierarchy of the international oil market. The defeat of these groups led to the consolidation of America's Kingdom under the House of Fahd, the royal faction that still rules today. This is a gripping story that covers more than seventy years, three continents, and an engrossing cast of characters. Informed by first hand accounts from ARAMCO employees and top U.S. government officials, this book offers the true story of the events on the Saudi oil fields. After America's Kingdom, mythmakers will have to work harder on their tales about ARAMCO being magical, honorable, selfless, and enlightened.

This book has a labor-history focus that transcends traditional breaks between diplo and social history. The title does not capture the book's incredible scope and synthesis. WOW! People should, IMO, get this book now. WOW! Hard to imagine a book with the more disparate intersections of key themes in 20th century US AND ALSO international history! The only book I could compare it to is the incredible *Thy Will Be Done: Nelson Rockefeller, Evangelism, and the Conquest of the World* in the Age of Oil, a title which ALSO completely fails to capture the essence of its intersections. That and of course, the best book yet written on the history of the US National Security State, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*, a book that Charlie Rose censored from PBS when RFK Jr. held it up in Dallas, January 11, 2013. Among other things this book helps you understand

key buried Big Inch and Little Inch moments that run through the history of the 20th century Democratic Party. There is too much money to be made in our not seeing this longer term view, so this book is necessary.

The history and ideas laid out in the book are not simple, nor are they simply presented. The author makes a compelling case for completely re-evaluating the commonly understood relationship between America and Saudi Arabia, and in doing so challenges commonly held beliefs for what makes America "great". I am struck by how relevant this book is to everything going on in the United States - and the rest of the world - today.

"America's Kingdom" by Robert Vitalis is a deeply fascinating history of the U.S. in Saudi Arabia in the mid 20th century. Mr. Vitalis, who is an Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, seeks to correct the mythmaking that has obscured the real story for far too long, dedicating many years of research to this project. The result is an exacting piece of scholarship that produces remarkable insight into the forces that have shaped U.S. relations with the Middle East. The book is divided into two parts. The first section focuses on the labor practices of ARAMCO in Saudi Arabia. Mr. Vitalis astutely compares and contrasts the industrial practices of other U.S.-based extractive industries to find that ARAMCO simply imposed upon its Saudi clients what had already been learned elsewhere: namely, to divide and conquer the local labor force; control the political process; and extract maximum profits. In this particular case, of course, Mr. Vitalis details how ARAMCO's efforts were fully supported by a U.S. government intent on pursuing its geopolitical ambitions on the world stage, in which the control of oil played no small part. The second part tells the story of worker struggle, politics and power. Debunking the myths that had been carefully constructed by corporate public relations professionals and sympathetic government officials, Mr. Vitalis decisively shows how worker's rights were gained by popular struggle and not from enlightened corporate policies. Through Mr. Vitalis' engrossing narrative, we see how American interests came to ally itself ever more closely with the Kingdom as a means to ensuring a steady flow of oil and projecting American power into the region. Throughout the text, the reader is introduced to a cast of sometimes colorful characters ranging from labor agitators, royalists, secret CIA operatives, Soviet double agents and more. Mr. Vitalis excels at uncovering obscure source documents that help him weave these players into the narrative and bring history to life. While there is no doubt that the overall thrust of the book is towards a high degree of historical accuracy, profound insight and professionalism, the character profiles and world-shaping events that are narrated by Mr. Vitalis

result in a surprisingly readable and informative account. I highly recommend this exceptional book to educated readers who have a keen interest in 20th century American and Middle Eastern history.

If you are interested in transnational American exceptionalism and big oil politics, this is the book for you. It's not about Saudi Arabia or al Saud's dirty secrets but rather about the relationship between power, oil, money, and politics.

In all public debates about Middle Eastern politics, what is often left out in the vitriol and pontificating is the strong economic, military and political alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia. A relationship born towards the end of the Great Depression, this alliance evolved through the tumult and convulsions of the 20th century, shaping how the US controlled political evolution in countries like Iraq, Egypt, Iran and the Gulf, unwittingly (or wittingly) abetting the Saudis in how they use the prestige of this relationship to push the region and the wider Muslim world closer to its own ideological conception, tearing apart these societies in the process. This may be the key reason for the political instability and social decay that is destroying the Muslim world today, be it Islamist violence in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the plague of Boko Haram in Nigeria, the sway of Islamists in the Maghreb, the increasing gap between the traditional masses and a power hungry secular elite in Egypt and the ISIS menace that is destroying Iraq and Levant, not to mention spitting out radicals to Europe. Rather than wailing again about "Why do they hate us", read this book and understand how one of our oldest alliances in the region has held this region back for so long, along with its people. An alliance of oil and blood.

If you're looking for a discussion of the nature of the U.S.-Saudi political relationship, I would recommend *Inside The Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. This book, "America's Kingdom," is really just focuses on the American influence on Aramco, and Aramco's influence on Washington. There's another, far less excellent history of Aramco out there, from several years ago, the error-filled *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings*.

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