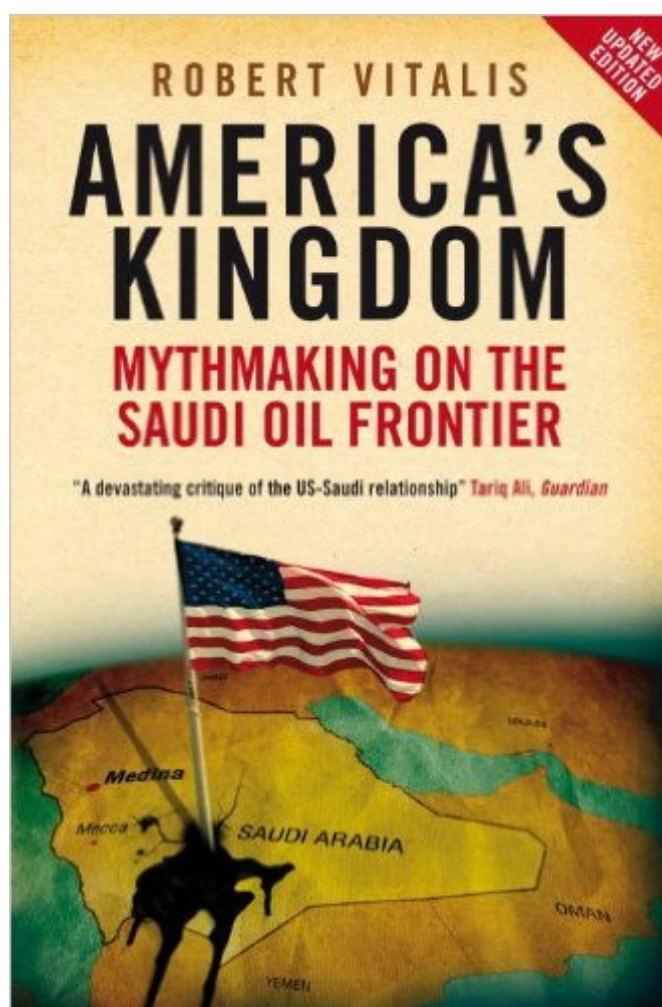


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America's Kingdom: Mythmaking On The Saudi Oil Frontier (Stanford Studies In Middle Eastern And Islamic Studies And Cultures (Paperback))



Synopsis

Now newly updated, *America's Kingdom* debunks the many myths that now surround the United States's 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

"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.

Most accounts of the establishment of the Saudi oil bonanza, and this one in particular, concentrate on the manipulative power of Aramco and the U.S. government in bringing a sweet deal to American investors and creating an unequal alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia. They analyze a transaction that unfolded over three quarters of a century in terms of colonial aggrandizement by the west and articulately the United States. This although Saudi Arabia was never colonized, and eventually nationalized its supposed colonizer (Aramco) on favorable terms. These accounts consistently fail to grasp is the brilliance that the Saudis, and especially Ibn Saud, demonstrated in the long dance which brought such great wealth to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi kingdom was politically fragile and militarily weak. It completely lacked the financial and technical ability to locate and develop its resource. Their choices were the British, who they had previously found unreliable, the French, the Dutch and the Americans. The French and the Dutch were pitifully weak financially, militarily and technologically compared to the Americans. And with the Americans they could deal with Aramco, a private corporation, which was an independent force not directed or controlled by the American government. Indeed, through Aramco, the Saudis could influence American policy in ways they never could have achieved directly. In addition Aramco delivered the goods technologically and financially, and was an ideal temporary instrument for the Saudis to increase their leverage and power through their oil resource. The winner in this elaborate game was Saudi Arabia. It's success in the world oil market is due in part to the richness of the resource that is located in their country.

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