



## **Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia**

*Rachel Bronson*

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## **Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia** Rachel Bronson

For fifty-five years, the United States and Saudi Arabia were solid partners. Then came the 9/11 attacks, which sorely tested that relationship. In *Thicker than Oil*, Rachel Bronson reveals why the partnership became so intimate and how the countries' shared interests sowed the seeds of today's most pressing problem--Islamic radicalism.

Drawing on a wide range of archival material, declassified documents, and interviews with leading Saudi and American officials, Bronson chronicles a history of close, and always controversial, contacts. She argues that contrary to popular belief the relationship was never simply about "oil for security." Saudi Arabia's geographic location and religiously motivated foreign policy figured prominently in American efforts to defeat "godless communism." From Africa to Afghanistan, Egypt to Nicaragua, the two worked to beat back Soviet expansion. But decisions made for hardheaded Cold War purposes left behind a legacy that today enflames the Middle East.

In this landmark work, Bronson exposes the political calculations that drove this secretive relationship. Her lively narrative is interwoven with colorful stories of diplomatic adventures and misadventures--including details of high-level backchannel conversations, awkward cross-cultural encounters, and a bizarre American request for the Saudi government to subsidize Polish pork exports, a demand the U.S. Ambassador refused to deliver. Looking forward, she outlines the challenges confronting the relationship. The Saudi government faces a zealous internal opposition bent on America's and Saudi Arabia's destruction. Yet from the perspective of both countries, the status quo is clearly unsustainable. This book shows how this crucial relationship evolved, and suggests ways to chart its future course.

## **Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia Details**

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## **From Reader Review Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia for online ebook**

### **Kingertz says**

Why did the emerging nation of Saudi Arabia choose to give the United States the monopoly on extracting oil from its soil? This accessible book answers that question clearly and concisely, and explains how shared Cold War sentiments and geopolitics helped forge this relationship even closer. Every petroleum user should read this book. Having lived in the Kingdom for five years, it helped me understand the back story of why I'm there....

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### **Uwe Hook says**

Without shying away from problems in Saudi Arabia, or within the US-Saudi relationship, Bronson treats all parties involved fairly.

She carefully points out that for most of its history, Saudi Arabia and the US had mutual interests, primarily in fighting the Cold War against the Soviet Union. These mutual interests overrode differences. For example, using religion as a weapon in that war was something both the Saudis and the American governments--from Eisenhower through the early Clinton administration--saw as desirable and useful. But due to domestic political pressures, as well as those from a revolutionary Iran, the Saudi government let things go too far.

Important read for anyone interested in understanding geopolitics better.

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### **Linda says**

Very well written. Lots of detail on foreign policy decisions and their impact.

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### **Thomas says**

The author is the director of Middle East Studies at the prestigious Council for Foreign Relations. The book is a nuanced history of diplomacy between the US and Saudi Arabia -- which did a lot to shape the modern Middle East. Readable prose + powerful scholarship + fascinating topic = great.

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### **Steven Kaminski says**

Not the easiest topic to learn about but well worth it in this book. Our relationship with Saudi Arabia has not exactly been about shared values but has been about interests. And this book goes from the founding of Saudi Arabia with the House of Saud to the modern day where strangely their interests are finally lining up in more ways than we would think...

- From the 1950's to the 80's the fear of communism was a shared interest that rallied US and Saudi interests.

The Saudis used their profits from oil to bank roll religious schools specifically to counter Soviet influence in countries like Egypt and Angola. We endorsed this policy and helped the Saudis when they wanted to fight the Soviets with weapons in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other theaters to counter Soviet influence.

- Since 1951 we have had a mutual defense agreement with Saudi Arabia and no doubt oil resources were an interest. After Saddam invaded Kuwait the Saudis underwrote the Desert Shield/Storm operation to the tune of \$60 BILLION dollars. In the 1970's oil revenues for the Saudis were measured at \$113,000 per SECOND. They even extended a credit line to the Soviets of \$4 Billion to buy their UN vote to authorize the invasion. They amassed so much cash that even their own fund managers had no idea where to put it all. In a deal with Reagan they reinvested it in US companies.

- When the Saudis purchased missile launchers that could carry nuclear warheads from China Washington freaked out. So much so that to counter balance they supplied advanced weapons to Israel. The Saudi use of religion and their public support of the Palestinian state only muddied these waters.

- The book gets into a lot of the internal politics of the House of Saud where brothers often fought for influence and control (this was recently shaken up again with Salman after the book was published).

- The 9/11 attacks knocked the relationship between the Saudis & the US sideways. But the silence from the Saudis was deafening and when they did speak they didn't help themselves...a year after 9/11 the Saudi interior minister publicly speculated that 9/11 could have been planned by Jews in the US. But the Saudis have started to change their tune now that they are getting hit by terror attacks from inside the kingdom. This is now leading to closer cooperation with our military and their intelligence.

Interesting book that showcases that because of where our interests have met we have been sometimes all too eager to help the House of Saud and also that cooperation has advanced our interests. The future I think is still murky for the relationship between both countries...

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### **Daniel says**

I liked this quote from early on:

In 1939, King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia remarked "Do you know what they will find when they reach Mars? They will find Americans out there in the desert hunting for oil."

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### **Steve says**

Insightful analysis of the evolution of Saudi-US relations over the past 60 years, and how the fall of the Soviet Union has changed the game.

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