

Victor McFarland. *Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Illustrations. x + 357 pp. \$140.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-19726-7.

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In *Oil Powers: A History of the US-Saudi Alliance*, Victor McFarland, an associate professor of history at the University of Missouri, examines the foreign policy of the United States toward Saudi Arabia, analyzing their relationship during the 1970s and beyond to place the relationship in historical context. The author argues that the oil crisis of the 1970s and Saudi Arabia's oil embargo on the US during the Nixon administration led American leaders to seek to collaborate with the Saudi Arabian kingdom. In *Oil Powers*, McFarland highlights the ultimate significance and inevitable US partnership with Saudi Arabia in maintaining its global economic hegemony. McFarland presents a persuasive argument regarding the US-Saudi alliance even though both American leaders and Saudi royal elites attempted to publicly deny or hide their alliance out of fear of outrage or criticism from their people. McFarland's book relies primarily on archival materials from Saudi Arabia and the United States along with numerous interviews conducted with US and Saudi foreign officials. The author also depends on several libraries, including the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Over the last two decades, particularly after 9/11, people have raised questions regarding the US-Saudi relationship, and many Americans have wondered why the US did not take tangible action

against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, especially since several Saudis, including Osama Bin Laden, were involved in the 9/11 attack. McFarland elucidates reasons beyond the alliance. The American government expressed its desire to maintain its relationship with Saudi royal elites due to Saudi's oil reserves. The US government essentially cannot relinquish its interests with Saudi Arabia. In fact, their alliance has influenced the role of the American military in the Middle East for decades and has shaped US foreign policy in the larger region well into the present. American global energy demands coupled with Saudi Arabia's benefits from their collaboration—including the investment of millions of dollars in US markets, access to advanced weapons and technical expertise, and protection from adversaries—have affected and prejudiced the American hegemony over the Middle East.

The book is organized chronologically and divided into eight chapters. Each chapter enhances McFarland's study and argument. In the first two chapters, McFarland argues that during the 1940s and 1960s, King Faisal was deeply impressed by American technological equipment, including automobiles, water pumps, cars, and oil machinery. Although reinforcing ties with the Saudi royal family was not a top priority for the US, Saudi Arabia did allow the US government to ex-

pand its influence within the kingdom and to extract natural resources and access the Saudi oil refinery, despite the US being one of the largest nations in petroleum resources during World War II. However, in chapters 3 and 4, McFarland highlights that US government leaders sought greater economic stability following the Saudi-imposed oil embargo of 1967 when Saudi Arabia cut off oil to the United States due to its military assistance to Israel during their war with Arab countries. The US-Saudi alliance faced numerous challenges, including Zionism and critics of Arab countries regarding close ties between Riyadh and Washington. Congress denounced the US-Saudi relationship due to Saudi anti-Semitism and condemned Saudi Arabia's conservative autocratic regime that suppressed the human rights of the Saudi people.

Furthermore, McFarland illuminates in chapters 5 and 6 that the US-Saudi rapprochement strengthened by the end of 1978. US policymakers insisted on the importance of maintaining ties with the Saudis. In fact, Saudi Arabia played an essential role in the US shift in foreign policy. Saudi Arabia demanded more US involvement in the region to fend off communists, requiring more advanced weapons like F-215 aircraft; AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control System) planes; and additional development programs, such as the US Saudi Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation (JECOR), which deployed three hundred American advisors and roughly two hundred billion dollars. Conversely, Congress criticized the White House policy of providing Saudis with new and advanced military equipment, which might threaten Israel. McFarland claims that the diplomatic action without congressional approval, secret ties with Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia's investment of billions of dollars in the US Treasury Department increased the power of the executive branch and pushed public consensus further to the right.

In chapter 7, McFarland examines the significance of "petrodollars" and the stability of oil prices that attracted US policymakers since the

1970s and throughout the Carter administration, aimed to enhance defense oil dollars. The petrodollars policy is an example of the development of Saudi financialization toward the US. The Carter administration confirmed that falling dollar values would weaken US national security. Strengthening America's relationship with Saudi Arabian oil producers would reduce the risk of another oil crisis and secure the American economy. As a result, the US government worked to captivate billions of Saudi moneys to be invested in US markets.

In chapter 8, McFarland examines Saudi influence on US foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. Although Carter's doctrine claimed to support Arab-Israel peace, Saudis pressured the Carter administration to adopt a more hawkish strategy in the Middle East, when hawks ended détente during the Cold War and the US and Saudi Arabia intervened in the Iran-Iraq War in 1980-88. Surprisingly, even the American Congress supported the hawkish shift by increasing the military budget and reducing restrictions toward the White House. This shift is evidenced by US involvement in wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq after 9/11.

The most significant and critical consequences of the US-Saudi rapprochement is their mutual support of the Mujahedeen and Afghan insurgents against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1979. The Carter administration covertly provided millions of dollars in financial aid and deliberated secretly to avoid congressional oversight. Covert aid dramatically increased during Ronald Reagan's administration through supporting propaganda of Jihadism, which led thousands of Arabs and Saudis, including Osama Bin Laden, to join the fighting in Afghanistan. Saudis also cooperated with Reagan's administration in the Iran-Contra scandal when Congress revealed arms deals to Iran during the American hostage crisis.

McFarland ends his book with a convincing and fascinating conclusion by posing that US-Saudi relations began in the 1970s and persist into

the twenty-first century. McFarland surmises that US military involvement in the Middle East came by the preference of Saudi Arabia to make the US more engaged in defending Saudi Arabia's interests by declaring its "global war on terrorism." He criticizes the US spending roughly six trillion dollars toward those wars when those funds could have been spent serving the American healthcare and education systems. He mentions that the US government during George W. Bush's presidency hid records that alleged the involvement of the Saudi government in the 9/11 attack. These secret reports remained missing until 2016. More importantly, he elucidates that the US government under President Donald Trump gave top priority to Saudi Arabia as indicated during Trump's first foreign visit to Saudi Arabia. He also charges that the US-Saudi alliance negatively affected the entire planet as it contributed to the US, under Bush and Trump, withdrawing from the Kyoto and Paris agreements regarding climate change and global warming, refusing to stop green gas emissions due to fossil fuels. The US and Saudi Arabia ignored warnings of global warming and continued their political and economic agreements.

McFarland's book is the first account that explicitly illustrates the deep origins and extraordinary depths of the US-Saudi relationship. It illuminates the scale of the alliance and its continued ramifications. It is a fascinating and significant work that could be recommended for those who are interested in international relations, the political and economic policy of the US, oil politics, and US foreign policy in the Middle East.

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