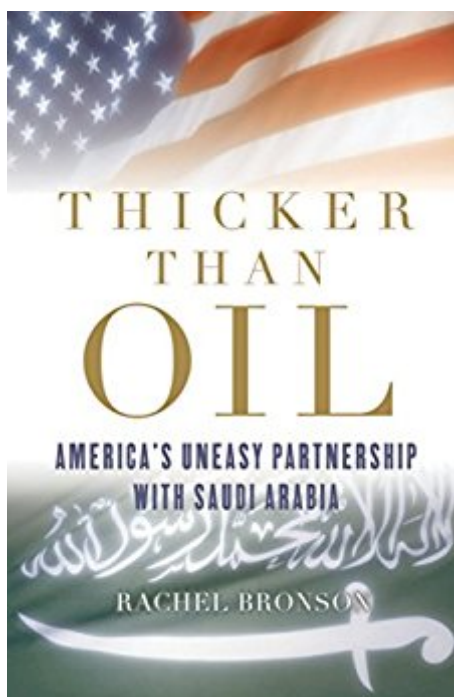


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Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia



Synopsis

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, and including many colorful stories of diplomatic adventures and misadventures, 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. Looking forward, Bronson 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.

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Customer Reviews

Reducing bilateral relations between America and Saudi Arabia to oil alone is a mistake, argues Rachel Bronson, director of Middle East and Gulf Studies at the Council of Foreign Relations, in this provocative book. Contrasted with recent titles on US-Saudi relations, her target is not the malevolence of the House of Saud or the supposed infesting character of America's alliance with the sentry of the Muslim faith; instead, Ms. Bronson asks: how could two countries as different as America and Saudi Arabia forge such a close alliance for so long? Two parts form the answer: the first is that the alliance has not been airtight, much less free from squabble. Over the years, America and Saudi Arabia have clashed repeatedly, not least over America's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ms. Bronson's thorough research elucidates the ups and downs of America's rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, clarifying times when America's leaders have wanted closer ties with the kingdom and others when distance was warranted. Dispelling the myth that America and Saudi Arabia have always been close, Ms. Bronson pulls together the different strands of the story and highlights the conditions under which the two states have been attracted to one another. From the close examination of history comes the second part to the answer: that the alliance was always about more than oil. Anti-communism and real-estate were equally important factors that brought the two countries together. America's anti-Soviet agenda found a natural partner in a devout country that was awash with money; time and again, America would turn to Saudi Arabia to finance anti-communist struggles the world over. The Saudis often obliged, for their own anti-communist reasons.

I honestly find this book very hard to criticize and give "only" a 4 star rating to. As far as a work of history goes this is pretty impressive. The author clearly researched the living heck out of her subject and has more than ample footnotes to prove it. There's no reason to doubt any of her facts as anything but 100% true, and mostly comprehensive. She has a dispassionate writing style letting the facts she has uncovered speak for themselves, untempered by either leftist or rightist interpretation. And although her topic itself can be a bit dry at times, she writes quite well and the book is not a chore to finish. All of these things are like rare sparkling gems in most works of history geared towards popular audiences (i.e. as opposed to textbooks . . . in which case the above traits would probably be even more precious.) You will learn some good information in this book. It has a

brief review of Saudi Arabia's history, but the focus of the book is really on the relationship between the US government and the Saudi government so it doesn't really start until the '20's or '30's where America first begins exploring for oil in the peninsula, and doesn't get meaty until the '40's when official government relations are upgraded to embassy level and FDR and Abdel Aziz met onboard the USS Quincy. True to her title the US Saudi relationship has been about more than oil, and has taken on an air of surprising friendship in many cases, where both sides really are genuinely helping themselves out by helping out each other. On the oil front Saudi Arabia has used it as a weapon against America far less so than it's neighbors and other OPEC nations, being a reliable source to counterbalance what OPEC is doing, and covertly supplying the US military even during periods of embargo.

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