



***Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance*, by
Victor McFarland, New York: Colombia University
Press, 2020. 357 pp. ISBN: 9780231197267**

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(Received: Apr. 27, 2020 Revised: May. 21, 2020 Accepted: Jun. 19, 2020)

In *Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance*, Victor McFarland explores the US-Saudi relationship through an investigation of not only the contemporary US relationship with Saudi Arabia, but also the historical affiliations of the two countries, the nature of the relationship, as well as the role of fossil fuel in the establishment and development of this relationship. The book provides novel and interesting topics about the political economy of energy based on the author's impressive and informative knowledge and academic skills.

Saudi Arabia, as a significant oil producer in the Middle East, has highly been addressed in the mainstream economic and political literature due to its profound ability to form the global political-economic order. The Middle East has historically been used as a launchpad for fossil fuel trade with developed nations such as the US; yet, the US military involvement in the region has considerably expanded in the last few decades. The book offers an

interesting academic debate on the reasons for the strong alliance of the US and Saudi Arabia in the last few decades despite the existence of keen ideological differences between the two countries.

McFarland's book highlights the fact that the Yum Kippur war at the beginning of the 1970s brought new wealth from fossil fuels to Saudi Arabia, leading to the chief motivation of the US to invest in this country and the region of the Middle East, which provided a significant wealthy market for the US military equipment and oil exporter to the US local market. The book also highlights the rising position of the Saudi Arabia in the world market, since it was one of the first countries in the Middle East to be invested by the US, promoting strong US-Saudi ties and increasing US influence in the Middle East. The US-Saudi alliance can be called a military-energy cooperation, which has brought various opportunities and advantages for both countries. This confluence of alliance, energy security and political opportunity has inspired Victor McFarland to explore this relationship in his brilliant new book, *Oil powers*.

McFarland's work is a timely addition to both the literature addressing the nature of the US-Saudi relationship, as well as the increasing number of approachable books which clarify the economic and political dynamics of the changing policies of the US in the Middle East. Timely is a golden key here as to a certain degree, this book rectifies the thus-far neglected nature of the US-Saudi political and energy relationship in the current literature.

The book starts with an overview of the 1974 events in Jeddah, when the Kingdom's oil revenues skyrocketing happened and the US found Saudi as a double-targeted economy from the viewpoint of oil-importing and military exporting target. Moreover, the US valued Saudi alliances on oil, financial affairs, and regional

security. This clear viewpoint defined the start of militarized US foreign policy in the Middle East, as well as the US invasions in 1991 and 2003 of Iraq and the “War on Terror”, respectively. According to McFarland, the historical view of the Saudi dynasty paved the way for modern creation of regionalism in 1902. The modern Saudi state sought economic reform and the development of international engagement with the military and political powers of the world, a trend which coincided with the role of oil in the American economic and political hegemony. As mentioned by the author, “oil fueled the rise of US power in the early 20th century” (32), during World War I when the most influential military machines in the war were fueled by oil and during the World War II when oil made strong motifs for the US to expand its global reach.

The contents of chapters 2 and 3 were probably my favorites of the book, which highlight the political tensions, the modernization, and the regional hegemonic factors in the US-Saudi alliance. These two chapters justify that despite the existence of certain tensions such as Zionism and the ideological differences between the US and Saudi Arabia, the oil revenue-based military contracts among these two countries surprisingly developed over 1960-1980.

In the following chapters, the book addresses the new situation of the oil market, namely the oil market transformation, in which, as global oil price increased, the power of the US oil production was reduced, and the US dependency on foreign crude oil was increased. Oil market evolution resulted in the gradual transformation of oil from an economic commodity into a political weapon for the Saudi kingdom, and by the Saudi’s threats to restrict oil sales to the West, the US portrayed a new role for the Saudi Arabia, as a new oil market leader with whom the US needs to rapidly re-manage and reshape the relationship.

In the rest of the chapters of book, McFarland investigates the various aspects of militarizing the US-Saudi alliances. On the one hand, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the seizure of Marxist regime power in Afghanistan strengthened the alliance between the US and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the Carter doctrine of pivot to the Gulf to manage the global oil market and the demand of Saudi Arabia from the US to help reduce Soviet influence in the region formed the alliance's pillars among these two countries and further reinforced their relationship.

Despite the book's title "Oil Powers", McFarland does not offer a significant debate on the impacts of oil shocks on the US-Saudi alliance. However, this does not impair the book and its contributions to the existing literature. Among the books I have read in 2020, this book stands out as one of the most impressive and enjoyable pieces of literature offering impressive content in a well-organized manner. The author avoids fruitless spectacles by explaining the nuanced reality of the US-Saudi alliance and the history of the two country's relationship; he does not assume a reductionist position that sees the US presence in the Middle East as an invariable malign. This book could be of interest to a wide range of readers, from those seeking to expand their knowledge on how oil trade might influence on the US-Saudi future alliance, to dedicated political watchers interested in understanding more about US-Saudi regional cooperation. Furthermore, McFarland's close attention to the way in which such alliance among the two oil powers have historically formed, offers a worthy model for the social sciences historians to explore the historical origins of economic and political alliances among countries and regions.