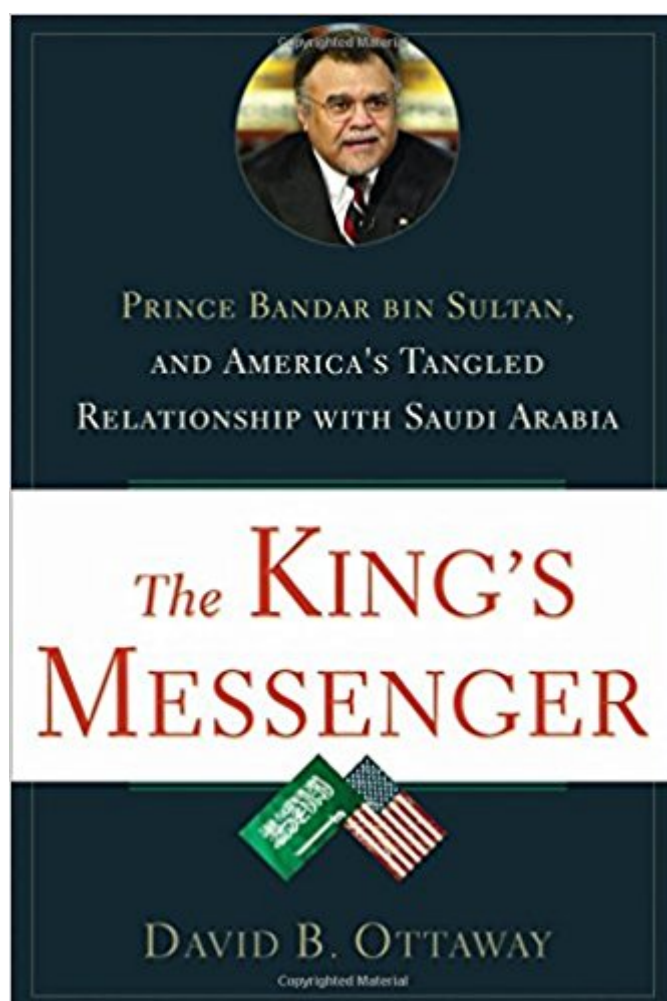


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The King's Messenger: Prince Bandar Bin Sultan And America's Tangled Relationship With Saudi Arabia



Synopsis

The story of the last thirty years in the complex relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia centers around its principle actor: Prince Bandar, the controversial longtime Saudi ambassador. "Just how oil, arms, and Allah have served over time either to bind or sunder the United States—Saudi Arabia relationship is the focus of this book," writes David Ottaway, who has chronicled the "special relationship" over the course of more than three decades at the Washington Post. No two governments and societies could be more different, and yet we have been bound together since 1945 by vital national security interests, based on a simple quid pro quo: Saudi oil at reasonable prices in return for U.S. protection of the House of Saud from all foreign foes. However, the balance points of the relationship—often tenuous even in peacetime—have been fractured by the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Iraq: the price of oil has skyrocketed and Saudi Arabia has been powerless to stop its rise; the Iraq war has unleashed the prospect of a Shi'ite-dominated regime allied to Iran on Sunni Saudi Arabia's borders; and militant elements within Saudi Arabia are ever more threatening. Not since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran has the House of Saud felt itself in such peril, and the Saudis have not forgotten the inability, or unwillingness, of the United States to save the Shah. Nobody has been more emblematic of the Saudi-U.S. relationship, nobody has been at its center for longer, than Prince Bandar, the first Saudi royal ever to serve as ambassador to Washington. David Ottaway's frequent access to the prince has allowed him unparalleled insight into the complex geopolitics that govern and have governed Saudi Arabia's long dance with the United States, and his book, coming at a crucial juncture, explores what new common ground may be found between the two countries, and what may ultimately pull them apart.

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Customer Reviews

Though Prince Bandar bin Sultan is the titular subject of this engrossing book, its real focus is the special relationship that developed between the United States and Saudi Arabia in the period following WWII, which began to unravel during the administration of George W. Bush. While pursuing a career in the Saudi Royal Air Force, Bandar emerged as a crucial broker of this diplomatic relationship, inadvertently falling into the role of messenger between King Fahd and President Jimmy Carter. Bandar retained this central role through the Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Clinton years, before finally leaving Washington in the summer of 2005. Ottaway (Chained Together) draws on interviews with many of the book's principals in writing this history, including Bandar himself, who proves a compelling figure but an unreliable source (the author makes special note of his tendency toward embellishment and self-aggrandizement). Aside from extremely brief forays into Bandar's personal life, Ottaway remains most interested in the unique political role the prince played, using Bandar's story to relay a rich, nuanced history of recent U.S. Saudi relations. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Several recent books have narrated the unique relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia (Rachel Bronson's *Thicker Than Oil*, 2006, and Robert Vitalis's *America's Kingdom*, 2007, for example), and at least one has narrated the life of Saudi Arabian prince and longtime U.S. ambassador bin Sultan (William Simpson's *The Prince*, 2006), but Ottaway's book is unique in noting that the two narratives are inextricable from each other. The peasant royal fighter pilot with unparalleled access to several U.S. presidents and a tendency to veer off the approved diplomatic script, bin Sultan was the custodian of a delicate yet enduring status quo—U.S. arms and military protection in exchange for cheap and plentiful oil. But, blindsided by 9/11 and powerless to hold down oil prices amid soaring global demand, even the living embodiment of the U.S.-Saudi relationship for nearly three decades could not prevent the unraveling of that relationship. Drawing on several interviews with bin Sultan (including lengthy conversations with an anguished bin Sultan not long after 9/11), Ottaway emphasizes bin Sultan's centrality yet resists the temptation to mythologize. --Brendan Driscoll

Ottaway did an excellent job in telling the readers, the 30 year old Saudi-US oil for security pact. In 1933, King Abdulaziz granted SOCAL (predecessor of Chevron) the right to prospect oil in the kingdom, and allowed the US to build the Dhahran air base to defend the kingdom. The purchases of the Airborne Warning and Control System, F-15s, tanks, missiles, etc gave US defense industries billions of dollars. At the same time, Saudis sold US millions barrels of oil, at the ongoing basis. Of course, Israel was not happy about this situation. Congress always fought against selling arms to the Saudis, from the lobby of American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Enter Prince Bandar, the King's messenger. Serving five presidents: Carter, Regan, Senior Bush, Clinton and Bush W. He was able to make deals with US on behalf of the Saudi King Fahd and King Abdullah. He contacted stakeholders of McDonnell Douglas, maker of F-15: contractors, subcontractors, and labor unions. He got the union members, their cousins, related family members, to flood congress with telegrams, telephone calls in support of the sale. How did he deal with the Israel request? American will sell F-16 fighter planes to Israel as part of the package. Israel was concerned that these weapons may be target for Israel. Bandar assured Israel, that these are only used to defend Saudi for possible Wahhabi or Iran conflict. Finally the vote was 55-44, favoring the sale. Carter was the big hero, with Bandar's help. To play leverage, King sent Bandar to UK for the Tornado purchase. Thatcher relied: you have a deal, without asking any details. This al-Yamamah deal was worth \$86 bn, covering 72 jets, 2 air bases, and service contracts. It was much easier making deal in UK than in US, where it takes months to US congress to agree for the sale. Soviet Union and Afghanistan were at war. Dealing with Gorbachev, it was very interesting. Gorb said, "You give Afghanistan \$200 million worth of arms to fight." Bandar said, "You are wrong, Mr. President. We are paying them \$500 million. If you leave Afgan, we will pay you \$1 bn." Soviet troops left, amazing! During the Bush senior era, US sold more F-15, Strike Eagles, etc to Saudis. Bandar is very close to Colin Powell. As the oil price dropped, there was a cash flow payment problem for the Saudi. Bandar simply said, "No problem. Stretch the payment to 20 or 30 years. As the oil price comes up, you will get all the money". In dealing with Gaddafi, Libya president, Bandar made a case that the 270 Pan Am crash families needed to be taken care of. Gaddafi wanted to get out of the terrorism business, and paid \$2.7 bn to the 270 families. It was so easy. Clinton and Bandar never clicked. As a result, US lost much business with the Saudi. George W. Bush was so much into the Iraqi war, after 9/11. King Abdullah was only interested in resolving issues between Israel and Palestinian Liberation Army (PLO). With Y. Arafat gone, Abbas was not able to fight off Hamas. Bush and Abdullah were never on the same page. Bandar tried everything to no avail. As more youth worshiped Bin Laden, it was

difficult to contain the al-Qaeda activities in the kingdom. As Bush departed from Abdullah, US dependence on Saudi oil decreased to seven percent. At the same time, Saudi got Lukoil, Sinopec, ENI, Repsol YPF to start drilling in the kingdom. China is the new customer for Saudi oil. The world is full of new international business (oil, weapon) players. For the sales of weapon, and working in US for 30 years, Bandar got \$50 bn or more? Then he is the richest person in the world. Forbes just missed him. But with endless oil money, who worries? As a college professor teaching International Business, I recommend this book to everyone. It is well researched and written.

This is an insightful book for people wanting to understand the divorce of Saudi and American policies since it was found out that the 9/11 hijackers at least 15 of them were from Saudi Arabia.

A very comprehensive and well-detailed factual account to understand us and Saudi relations, but also its future. I highly recommend!

arrived on time, great price.

interesting from start to finish. Learned a lot not only about Prince Bandar himself but also about Saudi Arabia. highly recommended

This is an excellent source for understanding the recent volatile changes in Saudi-U.S. relations and for insight into where the Saudi-U.S. alliance is headed. It provides cultural, historical and personality insights into recent events in succinct detail. It also gives a biographical account of a fascinating person, Prince Bandar, a diplomat par excellence.

it shows how Prince Bandar is so ego centric and unprofessional, mostly about US-Saudi relationship and, good to read if interested in the subject.

The King's Messenger, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan and America's Tangled Relationship with Saudi Arabia is not a book that one reads in a night. The book details the complex machinery that underlies the relationship between America and Saudi Arabia. It is best consumed in small amounts with time to reflect in between. An upfront disclaimer: I am not a Middle East expert nor can I vouch for David B. Ottaway's research. This is, however, one of several excellent books that I have read on the Middle East and Saudi Arabia including The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, 600+ page edition. The

book reads like a PBS Frontline special without all the visuals. Most of it is tightly written with concrete insider details yielded through research and interviews. Prince Bandar's life and career as the former Ambassador to the United States becomes a vehicle to explore the developing relationship with Saudi Arabia before and after 9/11. It is not simply a biography. A straight biography would not be so critical of Prince Bandar and would end on a more upbeat note. Instead, we get an excellent glimpse into the agendas of both governments, its major players, and the moving components within the relationship like oil production, weaponry, the state of Israel, the massive export of Wahhabi Islam, and the rise of Islamic extremism. My impression is that Ottaway pulls no punches in his expose. He belongs to the cause-and-effect school of how and why 9/11 happened. In a logical, direct manner, he builds a case for a relationship that sank into autopilot before being reawakened by terrorist violence. Bandar is portrayed as a major player within Washington initially sent to get Saudi Arabia's weaponry upgraded and then asked to stay on for three decades as a diplomat. A man of extraordinary talents, insight, and perseverance, he is also seen as engaging in freelance diplomacy for his own purposes--a dangerous and high risk process to engage in and which probably contributed to the end of his diplomatic career in Washington. The other dynamic explored is how each country became more independent from one another and at the same time failed to be able to control or corner markets in oil or weaponry because of an emerging global marketplace. China, Russia, Britain -- all become background influences. I enjoyed the book very much--mainly, because it provided so much inside detail into what goes on both in the White House and the King's palace in Riyadh and by extension the evolving cultural values of each country. I would definitely recommend it to others. It should be read in concert with other sources and books because no one book can fully explain the complexity of Saudi Arabia or the Middle East.

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