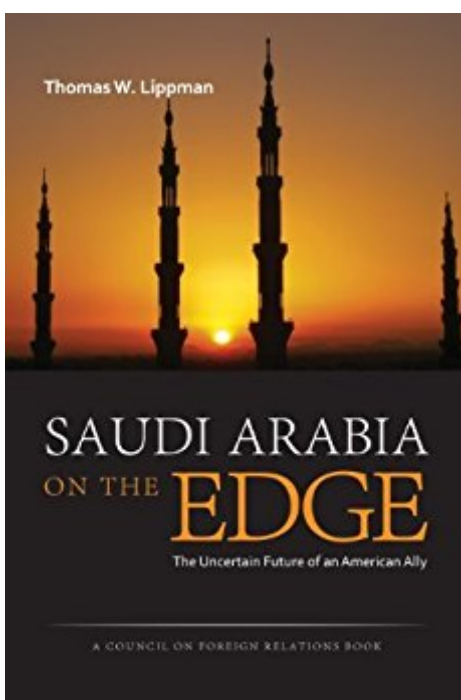


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Saudi Arabia On The Edge: The Uncertain Future Of An American Ally (Council On Foreign Relations Books (Potomac Books))



Synopsis

Of all the countries in the world that are vital to the strategic and economic interests of the United States, Saudi Arabia is the least understood by the American people. Saudi Arabia's unique place in Islam makes it indispensable to a constructive relationship between the non-Muslim West and the Muslim world. For all its wealth, the country faces daunting challenges that it lacks the tools to meet: a restless and young population, a new generation of educated women demanding opportunities in a closed society, political stagnation under an octogenarian leadership, religious extremism and intellectual backwardness, social division, chronic unemployment, shortages of food and water, and troublesome neighbors. Today's Saudi people, far better informed than all previous generations, are looking for new political institutions that will enable them to be heard, but these aspirations conflict with the kingdom's strict traditions and with the House of Saud's determination to retain all true power. Meanwhile, the country wishes to remain under the protection of American security but still clings to a system that is antithetical to American values. Basing his work on extensive interviews and field research conducted in the kingdom from 2008 through 2011 under the auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations, Thomas W. Lippman dissects this central Saudi paradox for American readers, including diplomats, policymakers, scholars, and students of foreign policy.

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Customer Reviews

It is a serious examination of the many omnidirectional, formidable and foundational obstacles and problems facing the government of Saudi Arabia, many potentially civilization-ending (for them, their entire way of life, which is utterly unsustainable on pretty much every aspect and level.) As an American living in the Trump administration, this is one of the only places that makes me feel like the U.S. is not the most effed up place on the planet (the other is North Korea.) But because Saudi Arabia is home to both Mecca and Medina, the central holy places to nearly one third of Earth's population, and much of the world has dependency of Saudi oil, how these problems are dealt with concerns literally everyone. The monarchy believes it can gradually but steadily transform itself from within. If it goes too fast, it will destroy itself and chaos will ensue. If it goes too slow, it will devour itself from within and chaos will ensue. The clock is ticking like a time bomb. In fifty years not only will it be, but it HAS TO BE, virtually unrecognizable, from the way it is today. Its population is young and thirsty for change, growth, meaning, a future they have a significant part in. So are half its population-- its women. It would take the wisdom of Solomon and the vision of the Prophet Mohammed (and his courage too) to pull off this level of massive change with their identity as Saudi Arabian intact; a reinvention never seen before. Can they do it? On some level the whole world must make and embrace fundamental change or none of us will survive. Mr. Lippman wants to believe Saudi Arabia can do it. Personally I think it can be done to but not without the country (and maybe the world also) staring into the abyss. The abyss will look back at us. But we will not fall in.

I was impressed by the fact that this author rejected the frequently held opinion regarding Saudi Arabia--- the narrative which suggests that oil reserves are rapidly being depleted and the Saudi monarchy is on the verge of imminent collapse. Instead, the author provides a measured and realistic analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the kingdom and concludes that the Saudi princes have supported initiatives and developed strategies which (if effectively implemented) could ensure the nation's economic viability and the longevity of the anachronistic monarchy. This book is recommended reading for anyone who seeks to understand the challenges faced by the Saudi ruling elite, as they struggle to maintain national political and economic stability in a region

characterized by sectarian strife and heightened expectations from restive constituencies.

I would recommend anyone interested in learning about Saudi Arabia's history, culture and society to read this book. It provides a great overview of the challenges the country faces going forward in the 21st century.

Saudi Arabia can be a place of myths and legends (many "urban") but Thomas Lippman presents a comprehensive picture of a country that has had, and will continue to face an incredibly unique set of development challenges. As an Australian who experiences the joys of a Govt trying to manage for the aspirations of 23 million, I think the rate of change in Saudi Arabia (with about 23 m Saudis) is astonishing. Even with my small snapshot of the Kingdom (about the last 3 years) the influence of King Abdullah is everywhere in the society, economy and environment of the country. Everyone who has an interest in Saudi Arabia and its people can benefit from Lippman's writings - while his style provides useful historic reference points, I am sure that the speed of change will see the need for a good revision within 5-8 years. Not sure of the politics, but it would be nice to see an Arabic translation!

I am half-way reading this book. Although I disagree with the author on some aspects of the economic section, this book is very informative about Saudi Arabia. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested into Saudi Arabia.

This book should be required reading for anyone who lives/works in Saudi Arabia. It is very up-to-date and relevant, and extremely informative. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed reading it, I think because it went into enough detail to be useful, but didn't delve so deep to the point that my eyes started glazing over (which is what I assumed would happen when reading a book from the Council on Foreign Relations). The book is very well researched and gives a good overview of the geopolitical and historical contexts in Saudi, which filled in the gaps of my understanding about the country and its culture. I was impressed by the author's breadth and depth of knowledge about the Kingdom. Thank you, Mr. Lippman, for putting this book out there!

Fact filled and with fair minded analysis this book tells me everything I did not know but needed to know about this kingdom with one foot in the past and one tentative foot in the present. I have recommended it to least three of my Nigerian friends.

Another excellent book by a well-respected and long-time "Saudi-watcher".

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