

“Our Faith and Your Iron”

A teaching unit designed to help community college students comprehend the complicated US and Saudi Arabian relationship.

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If you have any questions, please email me at dlee2@jeffco.edu.

What is included in this unit?

- PowerPoint slides
- Three classroom activities:
 - Country Comparison Activity
 - Video Questions
 - Timeline Activity
 - Point of View Activity
 - Lecture Notes
- List of sources — these sources help the instructor and students to complete the activities. Word document.



Saudi Arabia

- [Saudi Introductory Video](#)
- Video from Country Watch
- Scroll down to the bottom of the page for Saudi Arabia.
- This contains basic information on the Kingdom.



The formation of a religious-political alliance in 1744

- Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab joins local emir Muhammad ibn Saud, head of the Al Saud tribal family.
- Saud will protect and endorse al-Wahhab's version of Islam.
- Al Wahhab will support Saud's rule and give tithes to help support the local government.
- This alliance continues in Saudi Arabia.
- The Ottoman Empire takes control of Riyadh in 1818. Most of the Empire's influence was in Mecca and Medina. There was less Ottoman control in the rural areas.
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saud/cron/>. Accessed 7-13-21.

The struggle for control of the Arabia Peninsula in 1902

- In 1902, a direct descendent of Muhammad ibn Saud, twenty-year-old Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud, rides out of the desert with 60 of his brothers and cousins to restore the rule of Al Saud.
- He captures Riyadh, the ancient capital of the Saudi kingdom.
- He seeks the help of nomadic Bedouins, the Ikhwan, or Muslim brothers.
- Renowned warriors, the Ikhwan, support Wahhabi Islam.

Abd al-Aziz's control over the peninsula grows

- Abd al-Aziz captures provinces in the vast desert. He captures Mecca and Medina by 1925,
- He is now the ruler of the Two Holy Cities of Islam.
- Ikhwan want to spread Wahhabism beyond Arabia. Abd al-Aziz tries to restrain them, they rebel. To survive, Abd al-Aziz realizes he has to destroy the Ikhwan. But how?
- Abd al-Aziz seeks the approval of the ulama, the religious authorities and moral guardians. With the ulama's endorsement, he crushes the Ikhwan.

The Modern Saudi State

- Saudi Arabia was under limited control of the Ottoman Empire until end of World War I.
- Great Britain supported their independence from the Ottoman Empire.
- After World War I, Britain and France played a role in the affairs of the Middle East. Britain wanted to control coastal areas of Saudi Arabia to protect its ships going to India.

- “Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean, 1800–1900 A.D.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/?period=10®ion=wap> (October 2004)

Consolidating control of the peninsula

- Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud declares himself king and gives his name to the country: Saudi Arabia. To keep his new kingdom united, he marries a daughter from every tribe and influential clerical families—more than twenty wives, although never more than four at one time, in accordance with the Quran.
- He has 45 legitimate sons and an unknown number of daughters (daughters are not counted).
- Abd al-Aziz consolidates power away from those who helped him conquer the peninsula to his own sons.
- Every Saudi King since has been a son of Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud.

• <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saud/cron/>. Accessed 7-13-2.

The new Saudi government was in a weak position

- The government owed a lot of money, and getting loans was difficult.
- Border conflict with neighbor, Yemen.
- Little money was spent on public goods, mostly on the royal family.
- Mecca pilgrimage revenues had collapsed due to the Great Depression.
 - 1926: 129,000 pilgrims
 - 1932: 20,000 pilgrims

• Wynbrandt, James. *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*. 2nd ed. New York: Facts on File Publishing, 2010, pg. 187.

The demand for oil grows

- The number of cars in the US skyrockets:
 - 1916: 3.4 million *
 - 1929: 23 million*
- Oil is an important resource during World War II.
 - Germany invades Russia to gain access to oil in Caucus regions in 1941.^
 - Aircraft Carriers, submarines, planes, tanks and land transports were powered by oil.^

• *Painter, David. "Oil and the American Century". *The Journal of American History*. vol. 99, no.1, pgs. 24-39, June 2012.

• ^Yergen, Daniel. *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

The start of the US and Saudi relationship

- May 1933
- Southern California Oil Company offered \$50,000 in gold and \$5,000 in in gold for annual rent to explore.
- Formation of the Arab American Oil Company (ARAMCO)
- After five years of exploration, commercial production of oil starts.
- Saudi Arabia qualifies for US Lend Lease Program and foreign aid.
- US gets access to Saudi ports and builds an air base at Dhahran.

Saudi oil production takes off...

- 1939: 500,000 barrels
- 1945: 21,000,000 barrels
- US oil consumption continues to grow.
 - Automobiles
 - Need oil to project US military power across the globe to combat the Soviet Union after World War II

Issues that Divide and Unite

Unite

- Ally against Iran
- Ally against Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan
- Saudi government purchases US-made weapons
- US defends Saudis against Saddam Hussein of Iraq
- Ally against ISIS and Al-Qaeda
- Investment in the US

Divide

- Palestinian question and support for Israel
- September 11, 2001
- Support for the spread of Wahhabi Islam
- Murder of Jamal Khashoggi
- Saudi citizens committing terrorist acts against the US
- Saudi human rights record

US and Saudi Arabia: Allies against Iran

- Neither wants a nuclear-armed Iran.
- Saudis see themselves as the Guardian of Islam due to the Holy Sites of Mecca and Medina. The Iranians are Shia while Saudis are part of the Sunni Sect.
- Oil rich areas of Saudi Arabia are home to a lot of Shia. The Royal Family is worried the area could become rebellious.
- Iran is supporting the Houthi (Shia) in neighboring Yemen. Saudis worry Iran could support a group to create problems within the Kingdom.

Allies against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

- Carter Doctrine — After the Soviet Invasion, the US would defend the oil fields in the Middle East and, if necessary, with military force.
 - The US supplied the arms and training camps inside Pakistan, Saudis provided money and transportation to Pakistan. The soldiers trained then went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union. Osama bin Laden ran the base camps (al-Qaeda) in Afghanistan.
 - However, those who fought the Soviets later conducted deadly attacks in Europe, America and Saudi Arabia.
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- Enazy,Askar. "Saudi Wahhabi Islam in the Service of Uncle Sam." Middle East Institute. October 1,2009. <http://education.mei.edu/content/saudi-wahabbi-islam-service-uncle-sam>. Accessed 3-11-21.

Saudi purchases of US-made military hardware

- Saudi Arabia is the most important foreign market for US defense industry and the US's largest customer.
- Proposed deals since 2010 are \$134 billion in potential arm sales to the Kingdom.*
- Saudi Arabia spends more on defense annually than Russia.^

• *Ottoway, David. "Dawn of a New Era in US-Saudi Relations." Wilson Center—Points of View. March 1, 2021. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/dawn-new-era-us-saudi-relations>. Accessed on May 10, 2021.

• ^Cordesman, Anthony H. Report. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2018. Accessed July 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep22439>

Fight against terrorism

- Saudi Arabia condemned the attack on 9-11-01 even though 15-19 attackers were Saudi.
- March 2011: Saudi government provides arms to the opposition forces in Syria.
- Sept. 2014: Saudi aircraft join the US and other Arab States to strike against ISIS targets in Syria.[^]
- Saudi Arabia maintained a high cooperation tempo with US and international partners in terrorist information sharing, border security, and countering unmanned aerial systems (UAS). The Saudi Arabian government worked to disrupt, and supported US and international sanctions against, terrorist finance networks.*

• [^]Keily, Robert, and Spencer Tucker. "Saudi Arabia." *Modern Conflict in the Greater Middle East*. Santa Barbara, CA, ABC-CLIO, 2017, pgs. 284-285.

• *US Department of State. *Country Report on Terrorism: Saudi Arabia*. 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/saudi-arabia/>

Saudi investment in the United States

- In addition to arms purchases, the Saudis invest in US companies.
- Prince Alwaleed bin Talan owns stakes in Citigroup, Twitter and SNAP.*
- Saudi investment firms own stakes in Tesla and Uber.*
- Both countries have a lot of cross investment in each other.
- Finally, Saudis have boosted oil production when the US asks to keep the price manageable for Americans.

• Council of Foreign Relations. US-Saudi Arabia Relations. Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder. Dec 7, 2018. Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-saudi-arabia-relations>

Issues that divide:

The Palestinian question and US support for Israel

- The US has been a supporter of Israel. Israel occupies land that belonged to the Palestinians prior to World War I. Saudis do not support the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. This issue continues, but it is not a major obstacle to good US-Saudi relations.
- Arab Oil Embargo: 1973. Yom Kippur War. Arab countries and Israel fought a war. The US said it was neutral but gave Israel military aid.* Saudis felt betrayed and led a boycott of selling oil to the United States. Gas prices in the United States skyrocketed.

• *Keily, Robert, and Spencer Tucker. "Saudi Arabia." *Modern Conflict in the Greater Middle East*. Santa Barbara, CA, ABC-CLIO, 2017, pg. 282.

Watch CNN's Kingdom of Secrets

This video explains several topics:

- Arab Oil Embargo
- Spread of Wahabbi Islam throughout the Islamic World
- 9-11-01
- Murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Issues that divide: September 11, 2001

- 15 of the 19 airplane hijackers were Saudi citizens. The leader of the group was Osama bin Laden.
- Around 3000 Americans died in the attacks on the Pentagon, World Trade Center and a plane crash in Shanksville, PA.
- Should the US be allies with a country whose citizens attack the US?

- Photo credit: <https://www.dia.mil/News/Articles/Article-View/Article/567016/dia-remembers-911/>



Issues that divide: Saudi financing for spread of Wahhabi Islam

- Enazy, Askar. "Saudi Wahhabi Islam in the Service to Uncle Sam." Middle East Institute. October 1, 2009. <http://education.mei.edu/content/saudi-wahabbi-islam-service-uncle-sam>. Downloaded on March 11, 2021.
- This article explains how Saudi financing of Wahhabi Islam has changed in the last forty years. It has become more hostile towards non-Wahhabi followers of Islam and non-Muslim world powers.
- Some of the Wahhabi followers the US recruited to fight the USSR in the 1980's later turned against the United States.

Murder of Jamal Khashoggi — October 2018

- Worked for the Washington Post
- Saudi citizen
- Critic of some Saudi government policies but had connections to Royal Family
- Murdered at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey
- Should the US be allies with Saudi Arabia?
- Photo by April Brady / POMED - Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Arabia: A Deeper Look, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73742140>



Saudis who commit terrorist actions against the US

- 9-11-01 hijackers
- Dec 6, 2019: Death of US service members in Pensacola, FL by Saudi Airman who was receiving pilot training at Pensacola Naval Air station.
- This pilot had expressed hostile US views on social media before coming to the US for training.

President Biden and Saudi Arabia

- President Biden has not ended ties with Saudi Arabia.
- Saudis are a partner for furthering America's interest in the Middle East.
- Saudi's oil production and supplies can have an enormous impact on the daily lives of Americans.

- Shavit, Eldad, and Yoel Guzansky. Report. Institute for National Security Studies, 2021. Accessed July 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep30656>



President Biden and Saudi Arabia

- Stopped offensive military aid to Saudis being used in the Yemen Civil War. Allows sale of defensive weapons.
- US sanctioned those who were directly involved in the Khashoggi murder.
- Would like the Saudis to give more rights and freedoms to their people.



- Shavit, Eldad, and Yoel Guzansky. Report. Institute for National Security Studies, 2021. Accessed July 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep30656>