

## OILCRAFT: THE MYTHS OF SCARCITY AND SECURITY THAT HAUNT U.S. ENERGY POLICY

*By Robert Vitalis*  
*Reviewed by William A. Mogel\**

*OILCRAFT*'s catchy title is a bit misleading if one is seeking a book about the workings of the oil industry. This is not a book about energy. Instead, *OILCRAFT* is about debunking the linked myths of scarcity and security that “haunt” U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia,<sup>1</sup> which produced almost 10% of the world’s crude in 2019.<sup>2</sup> According to the author, “the point of this book is to demonstrate how . . . [beliefs] that the U.S. military assures the country’s continued access to . . . energy . . . are [] false.”<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Vitalis argues that the foregoing has been a policy of the United States since 1924 and was based on the “bogy of the rapid exhaustion of our domestic supplies of petroleum.”<sup>4</sup> In so concluding, he ignores the fact that oil production did not peak years ago, and the important role today of domestic production of shale petroleum, which has contributed to making the United States one of the world’s largest current producers.<sup>5</sup>

Much of *OILCRAFT* appears dated. For example, there is an extended critique of this country’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. Mr. Vitalis implies that the idea of a so-called “special relationship” between the United States and Saudi Arabia is misguided because the Saudis are dependent upon the sale of oil to the United States and may not be able to forego such sales for an extended period because oil is essentially the Kingdom’s only source of income (not true today).<sup>6</sup> Referencing the 1973 U.S. boycott, the author concludes, without citing support, that the Saudis quietly continued to supply the United States with oil in order not to lose market share.<sup>7</sup> He also asserts that administrations from Gerald Ford on were “obsessed by a false problem, that of access, and a misplaced solution, energy independence . . .”<sup>8</sup> That may have been true, but Mr. Vitalis provides no support. Surprisingly, *OILCRAFT* makes no mention of a major current event—

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\* William A. Mogel, Esq., is a principal in an energy consulting group based in south Florida. Mr. Mogel founded and serves as Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of the Energy Law Journal and is a former and past President of the Foundation of the Energy Law Journal. He can be reached at wamogel@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> See generally ROBERT VITALIS, *OILCRAFT: THE MYTHS OF SCARCITY AND SECURITY THAT HAUNT U.S. ENERGY POLICY* (2020).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. ENERGY INFO. ADMIN., *WHAT COUNTRIES ARE THE TOP PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS OF OIL* (2019), <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=709&t=6>.

<sup>3</sup> VITALIS, *supra* note 1, at 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 26.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. ENERGY INFO. ADMIN., *supra* note 2.

<sup>6</sup> VITALIS, *supra* note 1, at 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 123.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 14.

the Kingdom's high profile "Vision 2030" to diversify its economy, including taking Aramco public with a \$1.3 Trillion IPO for 1.5% ownership.<sup>9</sup>

This quirky little book is littered with extended references to arguments made decades ago by then-prominent academics and professionals such as the 1920s Columbia School of thinkers, and the New Left progressives at MIT.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, the *Wall Street Journal's* (Aug. 23, 2020) review of *OILCRAFT* noted that its value was diminished by its revival of a discredited argument that "Saudi Arabia's oil [has] mattered more to the [U.S.] national interest than Israel" and that the U.S. backing of Israel "has driven jihadism."<sup>11</sup> *OILCRAFT* also notes that the more recent changes in Saudi Arabia's approach have led to an "evolving rapprochement with Israel."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, *OILCRAFT* fails to provide the analysis and fresh insight that one would hope for and expect from a book that claimed to tackle U.S. energy policy.

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Fawthrop, *Attention Turns to Saudi Crown Prince's Vision 2030 Strategy after Record-Breaking Aramco IPO*, NS ENERGY (Dec. 9, 2019), <https://www.nsenegybusiness.com/features/saudi-aramco-vision-2030/>.

<sup>10</sup> See generally VITALIS, *supra* note 1.

<sup>11</sup> Mark P. Mills, 'Oilcraft' Review: *That Old Black Magic*, WALL ST. J. (Aug. 23, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/oilcraft-review-that-old-black-magic-11598214998>.

<sup>12</sup> VITALIS, *supra* note 1, at 119.