

# Stephen gaghans syriana

Sociology



Gaghan described his inspiration for the film beginning with his work on *Traffic*<sup>3</sup>, where he felt that America's dependency on foreign oil had distinct similarities with drug addiction. Indeed, a fundamental issue reiterated in *Syriana* is how the role of oil is central to US policy towards the Middle East and the US position within the contemporary framework of international relations. In turn, the relationship between Matt Damon's character Bryan Woodman and Prince Nasir also presents a different insight into Middle Eastern politics through Prince Nasir's frustration at American control in the area and his desire to undertake national reform and develop the economy for sustainability in the long term.

Additionally, the increasing work of Bryan Woodman's character with the Prince comes at the sacrifice of his marriage due to the death of Bryan's son. Bryan's payment of \$175 million from the Prince and role as an economic advisor causes his wife to accuse him of exploiting his son's death for commercial gain. To this end, the death of Bryan's son and sacrifice of his marriage is arguably symbolic of the central theme of *Syriana* regarding the interrelationship between oil, globalization, and the balance of power in international relations. For example, it is submitted that the oil industry symbolizes the sacrifice of ethical concepts of morality as the control of oil in the Middle East is seen as fundamental to the balance of power within the international framework. This is highlighted by the American unease with Prince Nasir giving a natural gas drilling rights contract to China.

The three central stories that interweave throughout the film purposively depict three very different men operating over various continents to highlight the long term and immediate consequences of pursuing wealth and power. On the one hand, George Clooney's character Bob Barnes is betrayed

by his own country to whom he was loyal and doing his duty as a CIA operative. Bob's discovery of the assassination attempt on Prince Nasir and finding out why he was depicted as a rogue agent not only leads to his personal salvation, but it also serves to highlight the US' primary interest being to secure and maintain power over petroleum in the Middle East at all costs. It further highlights the unilateralist approach of the US to foreign policy and affairs where the national interest as a whole justifies the means, which in this case is a betrayal of a loyal CIA agent acting on behalf of his country.

To this end, Bob's narrative highlights the impact of global corruption in the oil industry from an individual's perspective, which engages the audience directly and provides a novel perspective on petroleum politics. Similarly, Gaghan highlights the individual impact of the oil industry through Wasim's storyline. Wasim's storyline not only highlights the reliance on the oil industry for employment, but it also shows how the battle for power at the top impacts the little person trying to feed their families at the bottom. In turn, Wasim's narrative operates to offer a lateral perspective on terrorism and motive in order to highlight the intrinsic complexities of the terrorism phenomenon and the multiple causal factors. For example, Wasim is desperate for work and has come from Pakistan with his father but cannot get work due to the language barrier. In his desperation for food and shelter, he is then exploited by a fundamental cleric whose objective is to undertake a suicide attack on the Connex-Killen tanker.

Whilst Wasim and Bob's narratives depict them as pawns in the overall battle for power in the oil industry, the corporate lawyer Bennett Holiday's viewpoint in the questionable merger and corruption not only highlights the

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reality of international corruption in corporate transactions; it further highlights the dichotomy between commercial interests and application of ethics and corporate social responsibility in business. To this end, each parallel narrative in *Syriana* operates as a microcosm of the multiple issues raised by the global oil industry.

Furthermore, in presenting snapshots of corruption and challenges to preconceived assumptions about terrorism and the oil industry, *Syriana* highlights the complexity of the international relations framework and how the main issue at the heart of diplomatic relations between the US and the Middle East is oil. This is utilized as a backdrop to highlight the numerous interests at play along with the reality of global corruption both at the government and business levels. Arguably, Gaghan highlights through the characterization of the idealistic prince how it arguably suits the US for there to be continued conflict in the Middle East in order to ensure its continued stronghold and dominance in the region to control oil under the guise of peacemaking.

Additionally, the use of the backdrop of the oil industry in the film is the sole factor unifying the three central narratives in the film. In using this through the parallel narratives, flashbacks, and differing locations; serves to highlight the juxtaposition of those controlling the oil industry and those impacted by it as effects as exemplified by Bob and Wasim. Indeed, the contrasting narratives reflect the different lives operating within the hierarchical chain of the global oil industry, which in turn serves to define societal status and economic survival.

Accordingly, the merger story and the depiction of the workers on the plant also serve to highlight two aspects of globalization. On the one hand, there is <https://assignbuster.com/stephen-gaghans-syriana/>

the development of the oil industry and the battle for contracts, which in turn leads to employment opportunities. However, on the other hand, corruption and poor working conditions demonstrate that commercial expansion of the oil industry has fuelled inequality at the worker level as highlighted by Wasim and his father.

Overall, Gaghan's *Syriana* can be confusing as at times the flashbacks and continual location changes can create a lack of order. Additionally, the use of multiple narratives also impacts character development throughout the film, leaving many questions unanswered. On the other hand, it is arguably these continuous questions that enable the audience to engage in the film and enables *Syriana* to be so effective in presenting a lateral perspective of the multiple factors impacting the global operation of the oil industry. In turn, this results in *Syriana* being an eye-opener by revealing some uncomfortable truths about the real issues influencing foreign policy and international relations and forces the audience to challenge some preconceptions.