



[OPEC+ with Pressure from Saudi Arabia Cuts Oil Production by 2 Million Barrels a Day Prompting White House Officials to Announce that President Biden is Open to Re-Evaluating the United States' Relationship with the Gulf Country](#)

In light of OPEC+'s infuriating decision last week to cut daily oil production by 2 million barrels, President Biden stated his intent to work with Congress to change the nature of U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia. Although the president has not yet reached out to Congress, some members are already on board. Most outspoken among them has been Senator Menendez (D-NJ), who is also the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a role that holds significant sway and power in international affairs. In a forceful statement against Saudi Arabia in which he accused them of supporting the sale of Russian oil with the OPEC+ decision, Menendez proclaimed that he would refuse to sign off on the sale of any more U.S. arms to Saudi Arabia until the Gulf country re-evaluates its relationship with Russia. Senator Durbin (D-IL) also spoke strongly in favor of curtailing support to the Saudis, as did Senator Blumenthal (D-CT) and Representative Khanna (D-CA), who are co-authoring a bill that would limit arms sales. A second course of action that Congress is considering is the introduction of legal proceedings against Saudi Arabia for the oil cut decision. For years, an antitrust bill known as NOPEC (No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels Act) has been floating around the floor, which would enable lawsuits to be levied against them. OPEC+'s decision may galvanize Congress to take the bipartisan bill more seriously. As far as immediate actions go, President Biden decided to pull out of an upcoming meeting for the time being with Saudi Arabia as a part of the U.S. Gulf Cooperation Council Working Group on Iran.

Most of the conversation this week, though, has not been about specific action, but rather about the general state of the relationship between the United States and its long-time ally, Saudi Arabia. Many Democrats and some experts believe that OPEC+'s cut was an "October Surprise" instigated by Saudi Arabia to impact the results of U.S. midterm elections next month. Bruce Riedel, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, for example, said that Saudi Arabia is attempting to win re-election for former President Trump and other MAGA Republicans. Khalid Aljabri, an outspoken Saudi political figure close to the government, also expressed his belief that they wanted to hurt Biden and his party at the polls. President Biden's relationship with Saudi Arabia has been strained from the beginning. On the campaign trail, Biden referred to the kingdom as a "pariah" and vowed to make reforms to the U.S.'s relationship with it. He also ordered that some U.S. missiles being used to aid them be removed from the country. When President Biden seemed to soften his stance in favor of geopolitical considerations and visited Saudi Arabia this past summer, he therefore drew justifiable criticism for the trip from human rights and social justice activists. Biden was also condemned for a now infamous fist bump with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), after previously rebuking MBS for orchestrating the heinous 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi – a determination that has even been verified by impartial U.S. intelligence officials.

Additionally, with former President Trump, MBS had an extremely close relationship that was criticized for its biased and partial nature. In a break with tradition, President Trump's first international trip was to the kingdom, where he signed a weapons deal worth \$350 billion. The royal family has of course unsurprisingly denied that the OPEC+ decision had anything at all to do with U.S. midterm elections, and while the Saudis seem to have a vested interest in undermining President Biden, there is no assurance that a change to Republican leadership would necessarily be beneficial. At the end of the day, as an array of observers have highlighted, there is valid reason to suspect that one of the underlying motivations behind the OPEC+ decision was to try and impact upcoming U.S. elections.



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Furthermore, what is certain is that OPEC+'s decision appears to be almost completely Saudi Arabia's brainchild, with a little not-so-subtle nudging from Russia. Upon hearing that OPEC+ intended to make a large cut (thought to be 1 million barrels at the time), U.S. officials immediately began contacting Saudi officials to share their concerns that OPEC+'s decision could be viewed as siding with Russia. Additionally, they implored OPEC+ to wait another month before making their decision to see if oil prices adjusted themselves on their own. Naturally, there is speculation – including within the Saudi government – that the attempt to move the OPEC+ vote was an effort to save Democrats in the upcoming midterms, which U.S. officials have refuted. That being said, American voices were far from the only ones raised in protest of OPEC+'s production slash. OPEC+ member states, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Iraq, and Bahrain all opposed the decision, citing the oncoming recession and potential for weaker demand. The UAE was especially vocal, going so far as to send a delegate to Saudi Arabia to deliberate with leaders. In the end, they went along with the decision in order to preserve unity. In the face of pushback, Saudi Arabia has claimed that the cut is an important economic decision for the country's future, despite the fact that the data may say differently. Before OPEC+ began making cuts this fall, Brent crude was at about \$83 a barrel. While it was possible that it may have continued to fall, economists estimate that oil will only need to sell at somewhere between \$76-\$78 a barrel for Saudi Arabia to balance their budget. Brent crude currently sits north of \$92.