



The united states' threat to saudi arabia over crude oil production cuts in 2022

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Article

The united states' threat to saudi arabia over crude oil production cuts in 2022



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ABSTRACT

The United States' threat to Saudi Arabia following the 2022 decision by OPEC+ to cut crude oil production by two million barrels per day reveals the complex interplay between domestic political pressures and international energy geopolitics. This study aims to analyze the underlying internal and external factors influencing the U.S. response, using the Internal-External Setting theory developed by Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin. Employing a qualitative policy analysis approach, the research utilizes data from peer-reviewed journals, official government reports, and credible media coverage to examine U.S. foreign policy behavior. The findings show that internal factors such as public opinion, inflationary pressures, the upcoming midterm elections, and media framing played a critical role in shaping Washington's confrontational stance. Simultaneously, external dynamics, including Saudi Arabia's leadership within OPEC+, post-pandemic energy market volatility, and shifting global power relations, further escalated diplomatic tensions. The study reveals how domestic political needs intersect with international strategic interests in driving foreign policy decisions. By applying the Internal-External Setting theory, this research highlights the interdependence of domestic and global considerations in modern energy diplomacy. The implications are significant for understanding U.S. geopolitical behavior in an era of energy insecurity and shifting alliances. This study contributes to the broader discourse on global energy governance, international economic stability, and the evolving nature of U.S.-Middle East relations.

Keywords:

United states foreign policy
Saudi arabia
Crude oil production
Energy geopolitics
Internal-external setting theory
Oil production cuts

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Introduction

Oil occupies a pivotal position in the global economy and constitutes a significant aspect of international relations. Due to its strategic importance, oil often serves a dual function, acting both as a catalyst for geopolitical conflicts and as a means of conflict resolution (Colgan, 2010). However, the role of oil in creating conflicts tends to be greater, and is usually determined by the political situation of the oil-producing country. Oil has a key role in driving economic growth in a country. Oil prices in the international market are a key indicator for the evaluation of economic performance, because of their important role in the production process. The increase in oil prices can have an impact on the economic activities of the global community (Tjahjaprijadidi, 2013).

The existence of international organizations can make it easier for many countries to carry out import and export cooperation activities. One of them is in the world oil sector, where countries that have large oil resources are in a group of organizations OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries). OPEC is an organization that focuses on coordinating and determining policies

regarding oil among its member countries, with the aim of maintaining oil price stability in the global market ([Indirasardjana, 2014](#)).

In 2022, global oil prices have increased, this is the impact of the policy announced by OPEC+ in October 2022 which will reduce the amount of oil supply by 2 million barrels per day, and will come into effect in November 2022 (Sitorus, n.d.). According to Saudi Arabian officials, the OPEC+ policy is based on considerations to stabilize the global economy which is experiencing a crisis due to COVID-19, causing import exports and oil production to be disrupted ([Martin, 2021](#)). However, according to Janet Yellen (US Treasury Secretary), this policy does not have a good impact on the global economy, especially for markets in developing countries that suffer from high energy prices (Wijaya, 2024).

This OPEC+ policy raises pros and cons from its own member countries ([Martin, 2021](#)). Many member countries are hesitant to agree to this policy, because there are many internal conflicts from several member countries. In addition, this policy also attracted the attention of the superpower of the United States, this caused the relationship between the two to heat up after President Joe Biden asked for increased oil production was rejected by Saudi Arabian Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman ([CNN Indonesia, 2022](#)).

The United States as an industrialized country makes oil a vital source of power, because oil is the main source of power to encourage the progress of industry, transportation, and various other economic sectors. Because its dependence on oil is very large, it makes the United States vulnerable to facing rising global energy prices which can have an impact on inflation and consumer purchasing power. As a result of the policy taken by OPEC+ and Saudi Arabia, the United States issued a strong threat because the move is considered to threaten the country's economic stability, especially amid inflationary pressures and its dependence on stable energy supplies.

The United States threatened Saudi Arabia in the event of a crude oil cut by OPEC+ in 2022. The threat was declared by President Joe Biden in October 2022 at the White House. Biden stated that there will be consequences for the suspension of arms sales cooperation, so it could have an impact on the relationship between the two countries between the United States and Saudi Arabia ([CNN Indonesia, 2022](#)).

Based on the background explanation above, the problems in this study can be formulated as follows, why is the United States threatening Saudi Arabia in terms of cutting crude oil production in 2022? To answer this question, this study will use the Internal-External Setting theory developed by Richard Snyder, H.W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin in the 1960s. This theory explains that a country's foreign policy is influenced by two main factors, namely the internal setting and the external setting ([Snyder et al., 1954](#)). The internal setting includes various domestic factors such as public opinion, domestic politics, geographical conditions, and national strength. Meanwhile, the external setting consists of non-governmental factors and the dynamics of relations between countries that affect a country's foreign policy decision-making ([Wangke, 2021](#)).

In the context of the United States' threat to Saudi Arabia regarding crude oil production cuts, this theory can be used to understand how internal and external factors contribute to Washington's policy-making towards Riyadh ([Zieff, 2022](#)). Internally, public opinion in the United States towards rising oil prices as well as pressure from the industrial sector and domestic politics are factors that also affect the government's policy response. Meanwhile, externally, the global economic and political dynamics triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as global energy policy influenced by Saudi Arabia's membership in OPEC Plus are important elements in the interaction between the two countries.

Based on this analysis, a hypothesis can be formulated that the United States threatens Saudi Arabia in terms of cutting crude oil production in 2022 because it is influenced by internal factors in the form of public opinion as well as external factors involving the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the influence of Saudi Arabia's membership in OPEC Plus on the global energy policy of the United States. Taking into account this combination of internal and external factors, this study aims to

uncover how complex interactions in the international political and economic system shape the United States' foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach utilizing the library research method to examine the United States' foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia in response to the 2022 crude oil production cuts. The use of literature study enables the researcher to explore a wide range of academic and non-academic sources, providing comprehensive insights into the underlying factors that shape the formulation of such foreign policy decisions (Tokar, 2022).

Types and Approaches of Research

A qualitative approach is used to study and understand the internal and external factors that contribute to the United States' decision against Saudi Arabia in the context of global energy geopolitics (Paravantis et al., 2019). This study is based on the Internal-External Setting theory developed by Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, which explains that a country's foreign policy is influenced by domestic factors and broader external factors.

Data Source

This study uses secondary data obtained from various reliable sources, including: (1) A scientific journal that discusses international relations, global energy policy, and the dynamics of oil politics between the United States and Saudi Arabia; (2) An academic book that explains foreign policy theory, oil geopolitics, and economic and political factors that influence a country's decision-making; (3) The official reports of international organizations, such as OPEC, U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), and the World Bank, provide data on global oil production and energy policy; (4) News articles from trusted media, such as The Guardian, CNN, CNBC, and The New York Times, which provide up-to-date insights into global energy policy and the United States government's response to Saudi Arabia's policies.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study is carried out through the documentation method, namely by identifying, collecting, and analyzing documents relevant to the research topic. Inclusion criteria in reference selection include: (1) Publication in the last five years to ensure the latest information; (2) Credible academic sources and official reports and have gone through a peer-review process; (3) An article that discusses firsthand global energy policy, oil geopolitics, and U.S.-Saudi Arabia relations.

Data Analysis Methods

The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis: (1) Content analysis is used to identify patterns, themes, and trends in the United States' foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia based on a variety of sources; (2) Thematic analysis is used to group information based on internal factors (public opinion, domestic politics, and national economic dynamics) as well as external factors (global oil market stability, Saudi Arabia's membership in OPEC+, and international geopolitical relations).

Using this method, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into how a combination of internal and external factors affect the United States' policy towards Saudi Arabia on the issue of cutting crude oil production in 2022. The findings of this study can also contribute to understanding the dynamics of global energy policy and international politics in the context of the relationship between oil-producing and consumer countries.

Results and Discussion

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East positions Saudi Arabia as a vital strategic ally. This bilateral relationship is founded on mutual interdependence: the United States relies heavily on Saudi oil

supplies, while Saudi Arabia benefits from U.S. involvement in its economic development, defense, and regional security. However, the 9/11 attacks, which involved several Saudi nationals, have contributed to growing suspicion within the U.S., potentially altering the diplomatic and political dynamics between the two nations.

Bilateral relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have illustrated the complexity of the interaction, including tensions triggered by global energy policy and the public response to it. The establishment of cooperation since the 1940s is based on economic, political, and military security interests, and includes strategic cooperation in oil exports, investment, and collaboration in maintaining regional stability in the Middle East region (Taufiq & Utama, 2017). However, the relationship between the two countries also faces challenges, such as differences in values, human rights issues, and competing interests in global energy policy.

As a key actor in OPEC, Saudi Arabia plays a crucial role in determining global oil price policy, which significantly impacts the dynamics of its bilateral relationship with the United States. This policy is designed to maintain global economic stability. However, OPEC+'s decision to cut oil production by 2 million barrels per day (bpd) has sparked threats from the United States, which criticized the move as an unwise move amid an unstable global economic situation.

OPEC+'s actions in tightening crude oil supply have raised serious concerns in Washington, as it is considered potentially raising fuel prices ahead of the midterm elections in the United States (Antara News, 2022). Nevertheless, the Saudi Arabian government emphasized that the decision aims to maintain the stability of oil prices in the global market in accordance with economic principles. This dynamic reflects the complexity of bilateral interactions between the two countries, where economic and political interests intersect.

Through the application of Richard Snyder's internal-external setting theory and a qualitative research approach, this study identifies two primary factors influencing the United States' threat toward Saudi Arabia. The first is an internal factor, public opinion within the United States, which exerts considerable pressure on policymakers. The second is an external factor Saudi Arabia's decision, in coordination with OPEC+, to reduce oil production. These findings highlight the intricate interplay between domestic and international forces in shaping foreign policy, demonstrating how internal dynamics and global developments are mutually influential in the context of U.S.-Saudi relations.

Internal Factors Influencing the United States' Threat to Saudi Arabia

United States Public Opinion

An American political scientist, V.O. Key, in 1961 explained public opinion as the opinion held by individuals who are considered wise to be noticed by the government (Davison, 2024). There must be at least four conditions that can be considered as determining indicators in public opinion, namely; (1) the existence of an issue, (2) the existence of a large number of individual perspectives on the issue, (3) the existence of an agreement reached from the discussion process on the issue, (4) and the influence of the agreement, either directly or indirectly. Overall, public opinion can trigger both pro and con reactions, because it is formed from various individual opinions.

On the issue of crude oil production cuts by Saudi Arabia and OPEC+, public opinion in the United States plays an important role in influencing the US government's policy. The reason is that the decision of Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to reduce the amount of crude oil production to 2 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2022, has caused unrest for the global community, especially in the United States. This anxiety arises because the decision of Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ can have a negative impact on American domestic energy prices, which are likely to increase, thus putting an economic burden on the US people.

Oil production cuts made by Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ ahead of the midterm elections in the US further strengthen public concerns, as they could affect economic stability and fuel prices. American public opinion is formed from various factors, such as media reports, politicians' statements, and first-

hand experience of rising energy. This public pressure is an important factor in shaping the US government's reaction to the policy of cutting oil production.

Statements by United States politicians

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the decision of Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to reduce oil production is an action that can have a negative impact and can be detrimental to the global economy which is experiencing an economic crisis (Feni Freycinetia, 2022). The decision to cut also puts pressure on markets in developing countries that suffer from high energy prices. Yellen's statement also strengthened the United States' criticism of Saudi Arabia's actions.

The reaction of US politicians to this decision was quite harsh, including Senator Robert Mendez who called for an end to arms sales and security cooperation with the Middle Eastern country (Nur Pakar, 2022). The move reflects a strong U.S. political reaction, as it considers Saudi Arabia's actions as support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Saudi Arabia and OPEC+'s decision adds to the complexity of the United States' bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia, which has been built on strategic interests in the fields of energy and security.

American Consumers

US consumers are the most powerful group of public opinion in influencing government policy in response to oil production cuts carried out by Saudi Arabia and OPEC+. The US people feel the impact directly on these actions, such as the increase in global oil prices that cause inflation, increases in energy costs, transportation, and the production of goods and services, so that in the end this affects people's purchasing power and threatens economic stability (UMA, 2024). This condition not only causes dissatisfaction in the public, but also has the potential to influence people's preferences towards the government ahead of the midterm elections in the US, which then has an impact on the political and economic stability in the country.

Medium Mass

Mass media is a means of information for the public regarding various issues that occur in the world. For example, in the dissemination of political information, the mass media can disseminate its information to various age groups and socio-economic backgrounds which can allow the political issue to become a concern in various circles (Choiriyati, S., 2015). With its ability to reach the wide dissemination of information, mass media is considered an instrument that can influence public opinion.

Media exposure has a significant impact on shaping people's views, attitudes, and behaviors related to certain issues. Issues covered by the media increase public attention, especially when the issue is considered important and highlights issues that are considered important by the public (Liao C. H., 2023). In the political context, the mass media plays a role in conveying, creating, and disseminating information and political ideas from political actors to the public (Nurma Juwita, 2014).

In 2022, the decision of Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to reduce the amount of crude oil production has quite an effect on the global energy market. Oil production cuts of up to 2 million barrels per day (bpd) were agreed by Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to stabilize global oil prices post-COVID-19. The media highlights this as an action that can actually harm the global economy.

Reporting from, President Biden's interview with CNN media said he was disappointed with Saudi Arabia's decision, because it was considered to affect the global economy (CNN Indonesia, 2022). The arrival of this information from the mass media has also become a trending topic on social media such as twitter to get so much attention from influencers. According to an analysis from GlobalData's social media, Smitarani Tripathy, that influencers consider the decision of Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ as an effort to damage the oil price order which can affect global economic inflation (Prismo, 2022).

This proves that the United States mass media also plays a strategic role in influencing public opinion against the Government, related to Saudi Arabia's and OPEC+ policies in cutting oil production. They influence the public through effective reporting, and this can trigger pressure on

the U.S. Government's decisions. As a result, public pressure triggered by the media could prompt the U.S. government to take a firm stance, and review its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

Domestic Politics of the United States

President Joe Biden's popularity

In the conditions of oil cuts by Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ in 2022, it has brought its own challenges for the president of the superpower of the United States. The reason is that the decision has cut oil production by up to 2 million barrels per day (bpd), causing global oil prices to increase, not only in the US but also in various countries. This certainly affected the popularity of President Joe Biden, where at that time President Joe Biden was leading the superpower.

On the other hand, the decision is considered to have gone against US interests regarding energy policy in the country, especially when President Joe Biden emphasized reducing domestic fuel prices, so as not to burden the economy of the US people (Cantika, A.P, 2022). Biden's popularity as president is affected by a narrative from the mass media that highlights his failure to prevent oil production cuts by Saudi Arabia. President Biden is considered to have failed in lobbying Saudi Arabian leader Mohammad bin Salman to increase oil production in the global market (Arbar, 2023).

Overall, Saudi Arabia's and OPEC+ policies have influenced President Joe Biden's popularity with the US public perspective. Especially in dealing with the dynamics of the domestic economy and its foreign policy in the energy sector, which can directly affect its domestic political stability. This shows that the issue of cuts not only affects the global and domestic economy, but is also an important factor in fostering a sense of public trust in the leaders of a country.

Energy Policy

U.S. energy policy has always prioritized efforts to maintain stable energy availability at both domestic and international levels. However, the decision to cut crude oil production has triggered a reaction from the US government to take decisive steps in addressing the situation. To reduce its dependence on oil imports from OPEC+ and Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government began to strengthen its energy policy by developing shale oil production as a long-term solution.

The main oil trade association representing the US oil and gas industry, the American Petroleum Institute (API), took advantage of this situation to lobby members of Congress, in order to reduce dependence on the oil of OPEC countries (Chris McGreal, 2021). By providing a solution to the energy revolution in shale oil production that can have a positive impact on the US economy by creating jobs and lowering energy prices (Sekaringrat, A., 2017). This is in line with API's mission to influence energy policy in supporting a strong and viable U.S. oil and natural gas industry (De Smog, 2025).

Geographical Conditions of the United States

The United States has geographical conditions that favor domestic energy production, especially shale oil, which allows the U.S. to reduce its dependence on imports from Middle Eastern countries. With crude oil reserves spread across various regions, such as; Texas, North Dakota, California, Alaska, and Oklahoma which account for 57% of total domestic production. This has caused the US to experience an explosion in shale oil production since 2011, with production growth reaching an average of 26% and continuing to increase until oil prices fall due to oversupply in the global market (Sekaringrat, 2017).

In 2019, American shale oil production reached a total of 376 million tons or about 50% of its total crude oil production, this shows a significant increase in US shale oil which can affect the dynamics of the global oil market (Hui-Ying Tang et al., 2024). This increase in shale oil is supported by the drilling of shale oil wells and refracking activities by applying new technology to shale oil wells that have previously been extracted, this is able to reduce oil production costs by up to US\$2 per barrel. With this increase in shale oil production, it can be possible for the US to reduce oil imports from Saudi Arabia, thereby strengthening the country's position as an independent energy producer.

National Power of the United States

The United States created a No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels (NOPEC) bill related to petroleum, to protect U.S. consumers and businesses from soaring oil prices. It is known that the bill was made in response to the response of Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud, who rejected President Joe Biden's request to increase the amount of oil production. However, this was rejected by OPEC officials, and considered the US decision to worsen the energy market (Grace El Dora, 2022).

Meanwhile, Congressman Tom Malinowski, assessed Saudi Arabia's decision as a hostile act against the US. As a Democratic Party politician, Malinowski and his colleagues submitted a Bill to withdraw US troops and military equipment from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, due to Saudi Arabia's alignment with Russia (Muhaimin, 2022). The decision sparked controversy over U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia, and influenced public opinion on U.S. foreign policy.

The military power of the United States is significantly dependent on control over oil resources, given that oil is of strategic importance to Western countries. This is because industrialized countries such as the US are very dependent on oil imports, thus making oil supply security a top priority in foreign policy and national security (Normadiah, 2011). Therefore, the US is using its military power to protect global oil supply routes from external threats and maintain global energy stability.

External Factors Affecting the U.S. Threat to Saudi Arabia

The Organization of the Petroleum Countries (OPEC) is an international organization that plays a strategic role as an alliance of the world's major oil-producing countries. This organization was formed to regulate oil policy together with its member countries, through determining the amount of production, managing oil prices, influencing the global market, to achieve global economic stability and maximize the benefits of member countries (Fansyah, M. G., 2024). OPEC was founded in 1960 by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, and Venezuela.

In 2016, OPEC then expanded cooperation with non-OPEC countries, such as; Russia, Mexico, and Kazakhstan through the OPEC+ alliance (Adam Hayes, 2024). The expansion of this cooperation aims to coordinate oil production regulations more broadly, so that oil prices remain stable, especially in the face of price fluctuations in the global market. This alliance cooperation is expected to be a force to face energy pressures in the global market.

As the de facto leader in OPEC+, Saudi Arabia has a huge role to play in determining the direction of energy policy in global markets, including the decision to reduce the amount of crude oil production in 2022. This decision was made by Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to stabilize energy prices during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this ambition has triggered tensions with the United States, which is worried about the impact on inflation and the country's domestic economy.

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO), which represents the world health organization, announced the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Aeni, N., 2021). This event has brought significant changes to the global economy, especially in the energy sector. Restrictions on population mobility (lockdown) and declining economic activity have caused global oil demand to plummet, so OPEC and OPEC+ countries need to adjust their production levels (Volker Roeben, 2024). Supply chain disruptions and market uncertainty have further exacerbated imbalances in the energy sector, making it difficult to stabilize oil prices in the global market.

In its history, OPEC has also used oil as a geopolitical tool, namely during the oil crisis in 1973 where Saudi Arabia and other OPEC member countries embargoed oil against the US. The embargo is a response to the military support carried out by the US to Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur war (Ruriana Alvinda, 2023). This OPEC policy then caused global oil prices to jump up to 300% or equivalent to 11.56 dollars per barrel (Putri, F. D. E., 2014).

Since the 1973 oil crisis to the 2022 production cut policy, it has proven that the relationship between OPEC, Saudi Arabia, and the United States is influenced by economic and geopolitical interests. Changes in the global energy market are adding to the complexity of the relationship between the three, with the emergence of new challenges. One of them is the COVID-19 pandemic

which caused Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ to carry out a policy of cutting crude oil production, which then invited disapproval for the US.

Saudi Arabia's decision as the de facto leader in OPEC+ to cut oil production has triggered threats from the United States, as it is considered potentially disrupting the stability of global energy supplies. The impact is mainly felt by the United States, as an industrialized country that relies on oil imports to maintain its energy stability. The factors that influence this decision come from global dynamics, including international political interests and international political economy.

OPEC+, which consists of countries such as Russia, Mexico, Kazakhstan, Oman, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Bahrain, South Sudan, Sudan, and Brunei, has a strategic role in determining world oil production policy. One of the OPEC+ members, namely Mexico, is a target oil supplier for the United States. In 2022, the US imported more crude oil from Mexico with a total of 536,000 barrels per day and this increased by 9% from the previous year, the increase in global oil prices pushed the value of US imports from Mexico up 47% to \$20.7 billion without any re-exports to Mexico (EIA, 2023).

When Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ cut oil production, then it is likely that Mexico will follow suit. Although Mexico previously rejected the cut agreement, in the end Mexico agreed to reduce its production by 100,000 barrels per day (Anna Suci Perwitasari, 2020). As a result, oil supplies for the United States industrial sector are threatened, which could trigger an increase in energy prices and affect the United States economy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the United States' threat toward Saudi Arabia in response to the 2022 crude oil production cuts is shaped by a combination of internal and external factors, as analyzed through the lens of Richard Snyder's internal-external setting theory. The key finding indicates that while both dimensions play a role, internal factors, particularly public opinion and domestic political pressure, emerge as the more dominant drivers of U.S. foreign policy behavior. This is evidenced by the strong influence of inflation, rising fuel costs, and economic dissatisfaction among American citizens, which placed significant pressure on political leaders to respond assertively to OPEC+ decisions.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings validate the utility of the internal-external setting framework in explaining the dual influence of domestic and international contexts in foreign policy decision-making. Public opinion, in this case, served not only as a backdrop but as an active force that shaped the urgency and direction of the U.S. government's diplomatic stance. The implications of this research are twofold. First, it underscores the increasingly responsive nature of U.S. foreign policy to domestic economic conditions, especially in democratic settings where public approval directly affects political legitimacy. Second, it highlights the fragile balance of power and interdependence in U.S.-Saudi relations, particularly in the realm of energy diplomacy.

Based on these insights, future research should consider conducting comparative analyses with other U.S. allies involved in energy negotiations to assess whether similar patterns of internal dominance are present. Additionally, policymakers are encouraged to adopt more anticipatory strategies that integrate domestic sentiment into international negotiation frameworks, particularly in sectors as sensitive as energy, where public impact is immediate and politically consequential.

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