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Trump Applauds UAE's OPEC Exit

By

Gulf State Analytics



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For information about Rosa&Roubini Associates, please send an email to info@rosa-roubini-associates.com or call +44 (0)20 7101 0718.

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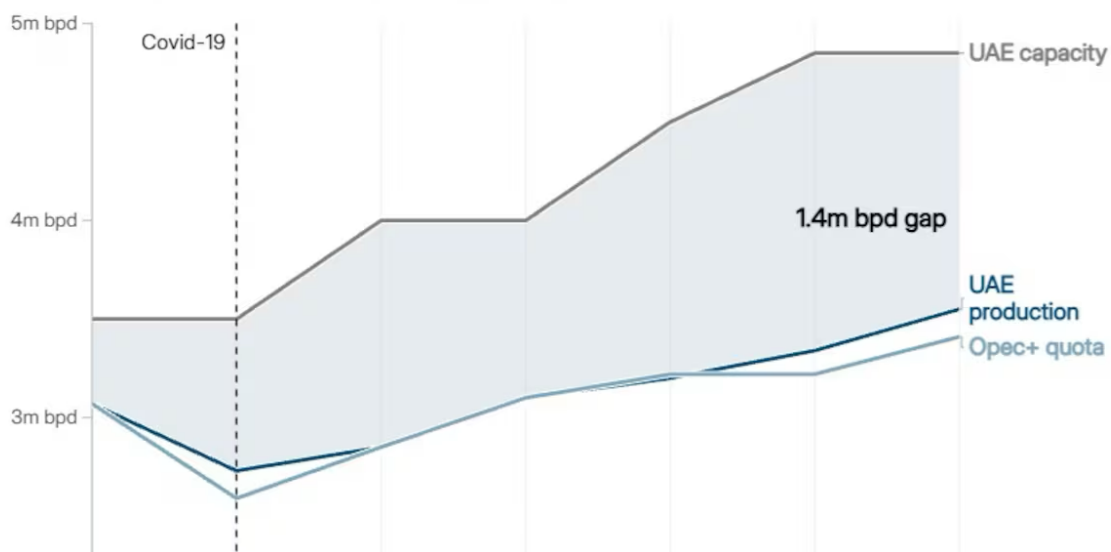
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Executive Summary

- ✦ The UAE-Saudi rivalry remains a defining feature of Gulf geopolitics.
- ✦ Abu Dhabi's exit from OPEC reflects its frustration with the cartel's production limits and Saudi dominance.
- ✦ The move strengthens the UAE's alignment with the United States, particularly under the Trump administration, which favors lower oil prices and reduced OPEC influence.
- ✦ As the world's eighth-largest oil producer, the UAE's departure introduces new uncertainty into global oil markets and may embolden other members like Iraq or Kazakhstan to consider leaving.
- ✦ The UAE's oil output is expected to surpass 4 million barrels per day, giving it leverages independent of OPEC constraints.
- ✦ Beyond energy markets, the exit signals Abu Dhabi's pursuit of a more autonomous foreign policy, including closer ties to the U.S. and Israel.
- ✦ The UAE's decisions challenge traditional Arab multilateral frameworks, including potential shifts in its engagement with the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.
- ✦ Abu Dhabi perceives that past Gulf alliances, particularly the "old Gulf compact," no longer guarantee support, prompting a more transactional and sovereign approach to regional diplomacy.
- ✦ The move could limit Saudi Arabia's influence in both the Gulf and broader Arab-Islamic world, marking a notable shift in regional power dynamics.
- ✦ Understanding the UAE's strategy requires looking beyond energy policy to broader geopolitical, geo-economic, and security ambitions in a rapidly evolving Gulf landscape.

Key Picture: The Growth Gap: UAE's Production Capacity vs. OPEC Constraints

UAE's oil production capacity vs Opec+ quota



Source: [TheNational](https://www.thenationalnews.com)

Introduction

In recent years, the rivalry between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia has become an increasingly important dynamic in the Gulf's geopolitical order. Although the American-Israeli war on Iran briefly drew the two Gulf Arab states together against a shared threat from Iranian missiles and drones, yet the conflict did nothing to resolve their underlying tensions, which seem likely to resurge in the post-Iran conflict period.

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Both Abu Dhabi and Riyadh continue to position themselves as the United States' most indispensable partner within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In this context, the UAE's recent decision to exit the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is poised to enhance Abu Dhabi's standing with Washington at a time when volatility in global energy markets is a growing concern for American policymakers.

Economic Implications and Global Energy Markets

President Donald J. Trump, a fierce critic of OPEC for many years, was quick to welcome the UAE's departure from the organisation. The administration views Abu Dhabi's move favorably, as it diminishes the cartel's pricing influence and could help lower energy costs—an outcome closely aligned with Washington's interests amid the ongoing American-Israeli war on Iran.

"I think it's great. I know him very well. Mohamed. Very smart, and he probably maybe wants to go his own way," said Trump on 29 April, referring to UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ). "That's a good thing. I think ultimately it's a good thing for getting the price of gas down, getting oil down, getting everything down. They have it all. He's a great leader, actually. So no, I'm okay. They're having some problems in OPEC."¹

The UAE, as the world's eighth largest oil producer, was the third largest in OPEC.² The UAE, together with its long-serving energy minister Suhail Al Mazrouei, had consistently been at the forefront of negotiation and dialogue.³ In times of conflict, which frequently involved founding member Iran, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE were often counted on to help ease tensions by acting as effective mediators.⁴

Yet, the UAE has long expressed discomfort with OPEC's restrictions on oil exports. With Abu Dhabi having exited the cartel on 1 May, global oil markets face increased uncertainty, especially as the conflict with Iran shows no signs of abating. OPEC's influence had already waned in recent years, as the United States and other nonmember countries expanded their share of global oil production.⁵

The UAE's oil production is now expected to exceed 4 million barrels per day (mbd), yet OPEC will continue to exert significant influence over the markets.⁶ Still, the potential ripple effects merit attention: other members, such as Iraq and Kazakhstan, both frustrated by production limits, might be encouraged to follow Abu Dhabi's lead. If more members were to leave, the cartel's ability to maintain stable price floors and ceilings could be significantly undermined.

Abu Dhabi's New Foreign Policy Playbook

Beyond its immediate impact on oil prices, the UAE's departure from OPEC signals Abu Dhabi's deepening alignment with the Trump administration, set against the backdrop of its notably hawkish stance on Iran amid the ongoing conflict. By stepping back from Arab multilateral frameworks and investing in its partnerships with the United States and Israel, the UAE is asserting its determination to pursue what it perceives as its national interests, independent of institutions such as OPEC.⁷ Although Abu Dhabi has long been a member of this organisation, it is traditionally Saudi-dominated, and its exit from OPEC underscores a broader effort to act autonomously from Riyadh—a move that could be echoed in potential future withdrawals from other regional institutions such as the Arab League, or the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

In essence, the UAE views itself as a sovereign actor rather than merely a member of a cartel or pan-Arab institution. Whether justified or not, Abu Dhabi has concluded that other Arab states—both within the Gulf and

beyond—did not support the UAE during the war with Iran. Consequently, the so-called “old Gulf compact,” which relied on the notion of shared Arab interests, is widely regarded as having come to an end.⁸

Ultimately, Abu Dhabi’s decision to exit OPE, along with the possibility of the UAE freezing its seat at the Arab League and withdrawing from the OIC, needs to be understood within the context of the Gulf Arab country pursuing its own geopolitical, geo-economic, and security interests with less regard for Saudi concerns and interests. It would be reductionist to simply understand this as being about a single energy policy choice. Instead, it speaks to grander strategic shifts in Abu Dhabi’s foreign policy toward a more fluid approach to international relations in which multilateral frameworks are less important and binding.

Although the UAE’s decision was not necessarily a huge surprise, its ramifications are important for the future of the global order, perhaps better labeled global disorder. With circumstances constantly changing, tactical alliances are forming and dissolving all the time. In the UAE’s case, its understanding of the need for a close relationship with Saudi Arabia is not like what it was in past decades. Although the Trump administration may welcome the UAE’s move because of its impact, even if limited, on OPEC, there are grander questions for policymakers in Washington to consider about the Gulf’s geopolitical order in which the UAE is willing to play spoiler to Saudi-led initiatives with the effect of limit Saudi influence in the wider Arab-Islamic world.

Whether these outcomes prove to be positive or negative from the standpoint of U.S. national interests will probably require more time to assess. But rather than evaluating these moves as simply positive or negative, the challenge is to understand each country’s objectives and the options they pursue to advance them. Traditional lenses are increasingly inadequate for interpreting this evolving regional landscape.

NOTES

¹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/trump-fox-news-praise-uae-decision-leave-opec>

² <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/04/29/shocking-uae-exit-rocks-opec-but-group-will-still-hold-significant-sway-over-the-oil-market.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.cfr.org/articles/the-uae-announces-exit-from-opec>

⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/04/29/shocking-uae-exit-rocks-opec-but-group-will-still-hold-significant-sway-over-the-oil-market.html>

⁷ <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2026/04/30/the-uae-doubles-down-on-israel-and-america>

⁸ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/05/01/uae-opec-exit-meaning-oil-middle-east/>