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SHORT COMMENTS

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By Irina Tsukerman, National Security Lawyer and Geopolitical Analyst

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UAE's Post-OPEC Future and the Rise of the East Mediterranean

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The UAE's withdrawal from OPEC and OPEC+ is best understood as a structural repositioning within a [wider contest](#) over routes, infrastructure, and regional order. Oil policy, in this context, becomes subordinate to a broader objective: control over the systems through which energy, trade, data, and security arrangements circulate. Abu Dhabi is recalibrating its posture away from collective frameworks, such as the oil cartels, historically shaped by Saudi Arabia and toward a model grounded in strategic autonomy, network integration, and geographic diversification. The significance of this shift lies not only in production volumes, but in the ability to align energy flows with a preexisting lattice of ports, logistics hubs, digital infrastructure, and defense partnerships that extend from the Gulf into the Eastern Mediterranean and onward into Europe and Africa.

This trajectory reflects a [decade-long](#) accumulation of infrastructural and financial assets that now form the backbone of Emirati external policy. Port concessions, shipping networks, free zones, and sovereign investments have been deployed with a degree of coherence that allows Abu Dhabi to influence the movement of goods and capital across multiple theaters. The integration of energy into this system alters its scale and function. Hydrocarbon exports are no longer treated as an independent stream of revenue, but as one component of a coordinated architecture in which extraction, storage, transit, and delivery are linked to infrastructure under Emirati control or influence. The exit from OPEC removes a layer of external constraint, enabling a tighter alignment between [production strategy and this infrastructural geography](#).

Within this framework, the question of institutional alignment becomes unavoidable. OPEC represented one of several arenas through which Saudi Arabia exercised [structural influence](#) over regional policy coordination. The UAE's departure suggests a willingness to reconsider its role in other organizations where Riyadh's leadership carries similar weight. A full withdrawal from institutions such as the Gulf Cooperation Council remains improbable for now due to the costs associated with formal rupture. A more plausible trajectory involves a recalibration of engagement, in which Abu Dhabi maintains formal participation while

redirecting substantive decision-making into narrower, functionally defined coalitions. These alliances may take the form of infrastructure consortia, investment partnerships, or security arrangements that operate outside traditional diplomatic frameworks. But other less influential networks such as the Arab League could be under review.

Such a shift reflects a broader transformation in the mechanics of power. Influence is increasingly determined by control over connective systems in the newly [emerging energy economy](#), rather than by formal institutional hierarchy. Ports shape trade flows, energy terminals structure dependency, digital networks govern information exchange, and security partnerships define operational environments. The UAE has [invested systematically in each of these domains](#), constructing a network that spans the Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea basin, and East Africa. Extending this network into the Eastern Mediterranean allows Abu Dhabi to interface directly with European markets and regulatory systems, reducing reliance on intermediary structures.

The Eastern Mediterranean has acquired [strategic centrality](#) precisely because it offers this interface. Greece, Cyprus, and Israel occupy a position that links European demand with Middle Eastern supply while providing access to Balkan transport corridors. Their combined infrastructure, regulatory alignment with the European Union, and proximity to emerging energy resources create a platform through which external actors can project influence into Europe. The region is not simply an energy basin, however. It is a convergence point for maritime routes, digital connectivity, and [security cooperation](#). What is widely perceived as an alliance to counter Ankara's expansionist objectives in the East Med could serve Abu Dhabi well in its potential stand-off against the Saudi-Turkish axis. Moreover, UAE's membership in the Cairo-led [Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum](#), which excludes Türkiye, could keep Egypt balancing between its Eastern Mediterranean alliances with Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Israel, and Haftar in Libya on the one hand and its growing defense cooperation with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye, on the other, as the latter bloc is looking to lure away Eastern Libya [into their camp](#).

The trilateral competition among the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia is now unfolding across this multidimensional space. Each actor is attempting to embed itself within the infrastructure that will define future economic and strategic flows. The UAE's approach

centers on integration, aligning energy policy with logistics networks and maritime access. Qatar operates through a combination of liquefied natural gas exports, targeted investment, and diplomatic engagement that allows it to insert itself into key nodes without requiring extensive physical infrastructure. Saudi Arabia relies on financial scale and political weight while expanding its external partnerships, particularly through its alignment with Türkiye.

Qatar's engagement with Greece provides a concrete illustration of this strategy. The recent [meeting](#) between Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis produced a framework of cooperation that extends across energy, defense, infrastructure, digital development, agriculture, and education. Qatari investment in Greek energy assets and data centers places Doha within the structural foundations of the Eastern Mediterranean corridor. The emphasis on digital infrastructure is particularly significant, as data centers and connectivity networks are becoming integral to both economic activity and intelligence operations. By securing a presence in these domains, Qatar positions itself within the underlying architecture that connects European and Middle Eastern systems.

The inclusion of agricultural cooperation reflects an additional layer of strategic calculation. Food security considerations have driven Qatar to [diversify](#) its supply chains, and partnerships with Greece provide access to production within a stable European environment. Educational and cultural initiatives reinforce this relationship, creating [channels of influence](#) that will ultimately extend beyond immediate economic interests, particularly in light of the intra-GCC rivalry. The cumulative effect is to embed Qatar within Greece's long-term development trajectory, ensuring that its presence is sustained across multiple sectors.

For the UAE, Qatar's expanding footprint in Greece underscores the need to consolidate its own position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Abu Dhabi's strengths in [port management and logistics](#) provide a foundation for deeper engagement. The integration of independent energy policy into this framework can enhance the UAE's ability to influence entire corridors, from production to delivery. This posture will extend into financing, insurance, and digital monitoring, enabling a comprehensive approach to energy distribution that operates across multiple layers of the value chain.

Saudi Arabia's strategic alignment with Türkiye introduces a further dimension to this landscape. The partnership combines Saudi financial resources with Turkish industrial capacity and defense capabilities. Türkiye's position in the Eastern Mediterranean, shaped by its maritime claims and regional posture, affects how Saudi Arabia navigates its engagement with Greece and Cyprus. Riyadh is managing a dual set of priorities: expanding its presence in European-facing markets while maintaining a productive relationship with Ankara. This will result in a calibrated approach in which Saudi investments may focus on sectors such as tourism, logistics, and energy services, allowing it to establish a presence without becoming directly entangled in regional disputes. Digital corridors in Greece are [just as valuable](#) to KSA as energy, and for the same reasons as why Abu Dhabi is linking the two.

The concept of an Eastern Mediterranean energy corridor continues to shape strategic thinking despite shifting political conditions. The proposed Israel-Greece-Cyprus [pipeline project](#) represents one expression of this concept, linking regional gas resources to European markets through a dedicated route. The United States [backed away](#) from the EastMed pipeline in January 2022 for three interlocking reasons: cost, climate policy, and regional friction. The project was always technically ambitious, involving roughly 1,900 kilometers of pipeline, deep-sea segments, and an estimated multibillion-dollar price tag. Washington judged that the pipeline was too expensive, too slow to build, and unlikely to deliver gas quickly enough to address Europe's immediate energy needs.

The Biden administration also wanted to shift emphasis from long-lived fossil-fuel infrastructure toward electricity interconnectors and projects that could carry or support renewable power. That is why Washington began favoring the Greece-Cyprus-Israel electricity link, now commonly discussed through the Great Sea Interconnector framework, over a dedicated gas pipeline. In American policy language, the issue was not simply whether Eastern Mediterranean gas mattered, but whether a new fixed pipeline would lock the region into a carbon-heavy infrastructure model at the very moment when Europe was trying to accelerate its energy transition.

The third reason was Türkiye. The EastMed pipeline was designed to connect Israeli and Cypriot gas to Greece and Europe while bypassing Türkiye. Ankara viewed the project as exclusionary and hostile to its maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. Washington

appears to have concluded that the pipeline could intensify Greek - Turkish and Cypriot - Turkish tensions without guaranteeing enough commercial return to justify the diplomatic cost. The American reversal therefore served several purposes at once: it reduced friction with Türkiye, avoided endorsing a project with uncertain economics, and redirected U.S. support toward electricity interconnection and more flexible energy routes.

For now, the original EastMed pipeline, as envisioned by Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, remains politically significant but commercially unresolved. It has not advanced into construction, and the full-scale subsea pipeline to Greece and Italy still faces questions over financing, engineering difficulty, gas volumes, buyer commitments, environmental scrutiny, and Turkish opposition.

At the same time, the strategic concept behind EastMed has not disappeared. It has fragmented into several parallel tracks: gas exports through Egypt's LNG facilities, possible shorter pipelines linking Israeli and Cypriot fields to regional processing hubs, the Great Sea Interconnector electricity cable, Israeli - Greek energy cooperation, and renewed discussion of Mediterranean gas corridors after Europe's break with Russian energy. The corridor has survived, but the original pipeline is no longer the only vehicle. Still, even the original pipeline project is returning to official conversations now that the energy transition has taken a back bench to the more immediate security concerns.

For the UAE, this distinction matters. Abu Dhabi does not need the original EastMed pipeline to be built exactly as proposed in order to benefit from the corridor. Its opportunity lies in the surrounding architecture: LNG terminals, port modernization, storage, shipping, insurance, digital monitoring, electricity interconnection, and security infrastructure. If the pipeline proceeds, the UAE can help finance, insure, protect, and integrate it. If the pipeline remains stalled, the UAE can still participate in the alternative network that is replacing it.

By participating in the surrounding infrastructure, including LNG facilities, storage systems, port integration, and logistics networks that connect maritime routes with inland distribution, UAE would be positioned to shape the broader ecosystem in which energy flows are managed.

This is where the Saudi – Qatar - UAE competition is likely to become more pronounced. Qatar has an advantage in flexible LNG supply and can use Greek terminals, European regasification infrastructure, and energy diplomacy to deepen its role without depending on a fixed pipeline. The UAE has an advantage in infrastructure integration and can turn ports, logistics, financing, and security partnerships into durable influence. Saudi Arabia has the capital to enter the corridor, but its alignment with Türkiye complicates any direct embrace of a Greece – Cyprus - Israel energy architecture that Ankara views with suspicion.

The current status of EastMed therefore strengthens the broader argument. The competition is no longer only over the one pipeline, as it was a few years ago. It is now much more so over who shapes the replacement system: fixed gas routes, LNG flexibility, electricity cables, data centers, ports, Balkan interconnectors, and security arrangements. The United States backed away from the pipeline because the original design looked commercially risky, diplomatically costly, and misaligned with its climate priorities. The corridor itself remains alive because the strategic need it addressed has only grown.

The UAE's [rapidly growing](#) relationships with Azerbaijan and Bahrain are adding further depth to its increasingly holistic strategy. Azerbaijan's role in supplying gas to Southern Europe, combined with its connections to Türkiye and the Balkans, creates a pathway that links the Caspian region to European markets. Collaboration between Abu Dhabi and Baku enables participation in these flows while extending the reach of Emirati infrastructure networks. Bahrain contributes to this framework through its alignment with the UAE and its role within the broader security architecture that includes Israel under normalization agreements. Together, these relationships form a network that connects the Gulf, the Caspian, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The development of such networks could introduce alternative corridors that would reduce the concentration of energy flows through traditional chokepoints. Routes that link the Caspian, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Southern Europe could provide additional pathways for energy and trade. The diversification of routes would enhance resilience and alter the strategic environment in which regional actors operate. Control over infrastructure can become a central determinant of influence, as the ability to direct flows across multiple channels will shape both economic and security outcomes.

One possible corridor would run from the Gulf through the UAE's port and logistics network into the Red Sea, East Africa, Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and then northward into the Balkans. In practice, it would combine maritime shipping, LNG terminals, port modernization, electricity interconnectors, digital cables, and rail or road links from Greek ports into Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Central Europe. Its logic would be geographic diversification: energy, goods, data, and security cooperation would move through a Mediterranean - European route that reduces dependence on Hormuz, Bab el Mandeb, and the Red Sea chokepoint system.

A second corridor could link the Caspian basin to Southern Europe through Azerbaijan, Türkiye or Georgia, the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece, and the Balkans, with UAE capital and logistics expertise helping finance storage, terminals, port infrastructure, and distribution networks. This corridor would connect Azerbaijani gas and potentially future electricity or hydrogen flows with Israeli, Cypriot, and Greek infrastructure, creating a layered route into Europe. Rather than a single pipeline, it would look like an integrated platform: gas flows, LNG hubs, power cables, shipping lanes, data centers, customs zones, and defense-secured maritime nodes tied into one strategic geography.

The implications for Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and the Balkans are significant. These states are positioned to become central nodes within a system that links Gulf energy and capital with European markets. Greece's integration into European institutions and its port infrastructure provide a gateway into the continent. Cyprus's geographic position and regulatory alignment add to its strategic relevance. Israel's technological capabilities and energy resources contribute to the overall structure. The extension of this network into the Balkans through transport corridors and energy interconnectors would further amplify its reach, connecting maritime access points with inland markets.

As this configuration evolves, Greece and Cyprus will gain increased leverage within international institutions. Their roles as entry points for energy and infrastructure investment will enhance their influence in European policy discussions related to energy security, infrastructure funding, and defense cooperation. Their strategic value will be reinforced by the interest of external actors seeking access to the Eastern Mediterranean corridor, elevating their positions within broader diplomatic and regulatory frameworks.

For Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, the emerging landscape requires continuous adjustment. Riyadh may expand its engagement in Greece and Cyprus through targeted investments while maintaining its alignment with Ankara. Türkiye will continue to pursue its own objectives in the region, shaping the environment in which Gulf actors operate. The interaction between these strategies will influence the balance of power across the Eastern Mediterranean and its adjacent regions.

The UAE's post-OPEC trajectory reflects an effort to construct a strategic system that integrates energy, infrastructure, and security across multiple regions. The Eastern Mediterranean serves as a focal point where these elements converge, providing a platform for the projection of influence into Europe. The competition among Gulf actors within this space will shape the development of new corridors, the distribution of economic and strategic power, and the evolving configuration of regional alliances.



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