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### **Russian Energy Ambitions in the Middle East**

This paper will offer insight into Moscow's behavior in the Middle East, considering its twin desires to project raw power and protect Russian energy corporation interests. The fall in the price of oil forced Russia to pay closer attention to opportunities in Middle Eastern oil and gas. If Russian companies can obtain access to the region's resources, it will strengthen their presence in the global energy market. These 'normal' interests are one of the primary determinants of Russian activity in the region; and they must be considered alongside (not instead of) the more common explanations of Russian assertiveness on the international stage.

In 2016, joint Russian-Saudi efforts led to the signing of the Vienna Agreement ( OPEC+), a document signed between the OPEC and non-OPEC members aiming to decrease their oil production in order to encourage an increase in the oil price on the international market. The Russia-backed format of cooperation between the OPEC and non-OPEC members proved to be effective.

Despite seeing Middle Eastern countries as potential energy rivals, Russia still prefers cooperation to confrontation. Moscow is supporting projects that allow the Kremlin to take control of or divert exports of Middle Eastern gas away from the EU. For example, Russia has offered Iran and Pakistan help in the construction of so-called 'Peace Pipeline' linking those two countries. Implementation of this project would guarantee a large share of Iran's natural gas will be sold to South Asia and China instead of Europe.