

# Oil short-selling jumps in record streak as faith in OPEC wanes



NEW YORK (Bloomberg) – Hedge funds are betting OPEC will struggle to reverse oil's precipitous plunge.

Their combined wagers against West Texas Intermediate and Brent crude soared for a seventh straight week, the longest global short-selling streak in data going back to 2011. The bearish bets jumped 14% in the week ended Nov. 13 and have tripled since the end of September, according to data from the U.S. Commodity Futures Trade Commission and ICE Futures Europe on Friday.

With oil prices slipping into a bear market, OPEC has promised to do what it takes to cut output. Still, it's unclear how far the cartel and its allies will go, and it may take a reduction well beyond the 1 MMbpd that's been publicly discussed to

restore faith, said Daniel Ghali, a commodities strategist at TD Securities in Toronto.

“We’ve been through not just a price shock, but a momentum shock,” he said in a telephone interview. “Given that, we don’t think oil will recover these losses in short order without a significant catalyst, and that may have to be OPEC doing more than expected.’

The jump in bearish bets came amid a 12-day losing streak for WTI crude prices, the longest on record, culminating in a 7.1% tumble on Tuesday. Investors received more bearish news on Wednesday as a weekly government report showed a boom in shale drilling pushed U.S. stockpiles up by 10.27 MMbbl, almost three times the median forecast.

The persistent bearishness, after oil had already given back much of its yearly gain, surprised Bill O’Grady, chief market strategist at Confluence Investment Management in St. Louis. Computer driven trades may be adding to the downward pressure, he said, as crude crashes through one technical-support barrier after another.

Still, he and Ghali saw some embers of optimism in an uptick in long WTI bets. “It tells you the bearish news is kind of in the market already,” O’Grady said by telephone. “Perhaps what we ended up getting was traders that looked at this and said, ‘Ok, you’re down 20%, maybe I should start throwing some longs on there.”

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## **Russia wait-and-see stance on**

# Opec+ cuts shows gap with Saudi



Bloomberg/Moscow

Russia's energy minister insisted the country and its allies in Opec need to watch the oil market in the coming weeks before making any decisions to cut output.

"We need to see how the situation develops in November and early December to better understand both the current conditions and the winter outlook," Alexander Novak said in Moscow yesterday. His refusal to join Saudi counterpart Khalid al-Falih in calling for a broad production cut shows their different positions persist just weeks before a key Opec+ summit in Vienna.

"We need to make a balanced decision, and so far there are no criteria for it," Novak said. While producers did discuss potential output curbs at a meeting in Abu Dhabi earlier this month, they agreed to wait until their December summit before making any decision as more clarity on supply and demand is needed, he said.

A week ago, al-Falih said the Organisation of Petroleum

Exporting Countries and its allies need to cut about 1mn bpd from October production levels, reversing about half the increase in output they made earlier this year. The Saudi pronouncement came as fears of supply shortages just a few months ago were supplanted by concerns about an emerging glut and collapsing prices.

Since Saudi Arabia and Russia are the two de facto leaders of the Opec+ alliance, their differing stance suggests negotiations on December 7 could prove difficult.

The Saudis need an oil price of \$73.30 a barrel next year to balance the fiscal budget, according to the International Monetary Fund. That's \$6 higher than the current price of Brent crude. In Russia, the state budget is much less dependent on oil prices than it was when the country agreed to join Opec-led efforts to rebalance the market back in 2016. President Vladimir Putin said last week that a price around \$70 "suits us completely." Russia's budget will balance next year even if prices for the country's export blend drop as low as \$40 a barrel, according to the Finance Ministry.

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**Erdogan, Putin celebrate key step in Russia-Turkey gas pipeline**



AFP Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Monday marked the completion of the offshore phase of a gas pipeline underneath the Black Sea, the latest sign of burgeoning co-operation between Ankara and Moscow.

Erdogan hailed the TurkStream pipeline, which aims to pump some 31.1bn cu m of gas from Russia to Turkey annually, as a “new step” in Turkish-Russian energy cooperation, which he said showed the “high level” of relations between the two countries.

Yesterday’s ceremony marked the completion of the building of two undersea lines stretching 930km (578 miles) across the Black Sea from Anapa in Russia to Kiyikoy in Turkey at a depth of some 2km (6,500ft).

The pipeline was laid by the special pipe-laying vessel Pioneering Spirit, which is the area of some six football pitches.

Putin and Erdogan watched via video link in Istanbul as the last section was welded and laid into the sea by the vessel.

Putin said he believed TurkStream and the Akkuyu nuclear power station would become “clear symbols of the growing development of Russia and Turkey’s multi-faceted partnership.”

“This (TurkStream) will without doubt turn Turkey into a serious European hub and this will without doubt have an effect on the geopolitical position of the Turkish Republic,” he added.

The onshore section of the pipeline in Turkey still needs to be built and TurkStream expects the gas to start being pumped at the end of 2019.

The aim is that half of the gas pumped through the pipeline will go to ensure the energy needs of western Turkish cities like Istanbul, Bursa and Izmir and the other half sent on to other European countries.

Despite in theory being on opposite sides of the Syrian civil war, regime backer Russia and rebel supporter Turkey have worked closely to end the conflict and stave off a government assault to re-take the key region of Idlib.

Meanwhile, Ankara and Moscow have agreed terms on the delivery of S-400 missiles in a deal that had alarmed Nato member Turkey’s Western allies.

“We have never determined our bilateral relations with Russia according to demands or pressure from other countries,” Erdogan said to loud applause.

Putin meanwhile personally praised Erdogan, saying the TurkStream project could not have been released without the Turkish president.

“Such a project needs political will and courage. Because in the circumstances of growing competition such projects cannot be without this,” he said.

Both leaders also reaffirmed their goal to lift annual

bilateral trade volumes to \$100bn, which Putin said was the same as between Russia and China.

“Why should it be less with Turkey? We will achieve this result. I don’t even doubt this,” said Putin.

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## Norway lawmakers call for scrutiny of wealth fund Saudi holdings



Norwegian socialist lawmakers are stepping up pressure to review the country’s \$1tn wealth fund’s investments in Saudi Arabia after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. In a proposal to parliament put forward last week, lawmakers representing the small Socialist Left Party demanded an overhaul



of the country's ties with Saudi Arabia, including the wealth fund's holdings in the kingdom. Legislators, including the party's standing member on the Finance Committee, Kari Elisabeth Kaski, said the government needs to examine whether the investments are in compliance with the fund's ethical and human rights framework. They also asked for a review of all investments in weapon producers and the supply of weapons to the war in Yemen. It's unclear if the motion will receive broader backing from the main opposition party, Labor, or the three-party minority government. Abid Raja, a key lawmaker for the Liberals, a member of the ruling coalition, also last month called on the fund to divest from Saudi Arabia. At the end of last year, the fund held about \$831mns in Saudi Arabian stocks, invested in 42 companies. The holdings have more than doubled since it entered Saudi Arabia in 2015, but records show that it dumped its holding in Saudi Telecom Company. The fund was set to increase its investments in Saudi Arabia due to the country being included in indexes, but that was put on hold by the government earlier this month amid a broader global review. Also earlier this month, Norway's Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide said that the government will halt any new export licences for sales of defence material to Saudi Arabia.

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**Energy firms dive with oil in Asia; major markets fall into negative territory**





AFP/Hong Kong

Asian energy firms took another battering yesterday after oil prices suffered their worst day in three years, while most of the region's major equity markets fell into negative territory.

The pound enjoyed some support after Britain and the European Union said they had reached a draft Brexit deal, though observers were cautious as it faces a number of hurdles before being given the green light.

Both main crude contracts plunged Tuesday – Brent lost 6.6% and WTI 7.1% – on oversupply fears just as demand falters in the face of the China-US trade war and easing economic growth. With prices now down more than a fifth from their four-year highs seen in early October, oil kingpin Saudi Arabia this week said it will cut output.

The announcement fuelled an initial surge in the crude market before a Donald Trump tweet calling for it to keep prices low sent the commodity plunging.

The selling continued on Tuesday and then Wednesday in Asia after Opec trimmed its outlook for demand this year.

And energy firms were caught in the crossfire.

Hong Kong-listed CNOOC dived 4.7% while Sinopec slipped 2.3%

and PetroChina lost 3.6%. In Tokyo, Inpex was 1.9% down and Australia's Woodside Petroleum sank 2.5%.

"Oil prices remain the hottest topic in capital markets if not in the world after extending their slide to 12 days and suffering one of the more precipitous falls in years," said Stephen Innes, head of Asia-Pacific trade at OANDA.

"It's all about the toxic combination of weakening global demand and oversupply that has sent prices tumbling."

And Rakuten Securities commodity analyst Satoru Yoshida tipped Trump's pressure to keep Opec from making deep cuts.

Broader markets were also lower, with Hong Kong slipping 0.5% and Shanghai down 0.9%.

Earlier, figures showed Chinese consumer spending slowed last month, with officials pointing to shoppers saving for the annual Singles Day mega-sale that took place on November 11.

However, there was some upbeat news in an improvement in investment and industrial production.

Sydney lost 1.7%, while there were also losses in Singapore, Seoul, Wellington and Bangkok.

But Tokyo edged up 0.2% despite data showing the Japanese economy shrunk in July-September owing to weakness in China and a series of natural disasters hitting domestic spending.

Manila, Mumbai Taipei and Jakarta also enjoyed gains.

In early European trade, London fell 0.5%, Paris shed 0.8% and Frankfurt was 0.9% lower.

There was little movement after comments from the White House's top economic adviser Larry Kudlow that US and Chinese officials were "having communications at all levels" on trade ahead of a possible meeting between Trump and President Xi Jinping this month.

With both sides digging their heels in, expectations for a breakthrough are low, analysts said.

On currency markets, the pound managed to hold on to small gains that came on the back of news that Prime Minister Theresa May finally had a Brexit agreement to put to her cabinet.

However, she must now get it past a divided cabinet before

putting it to parliament, where both pro- and anti-Brexit MPs are unhappy with the few details that have so far emerged from the pact. "Failure to pass the deal will raise the prospects of a disorderly Brexit, a general election and also a second referendum," said Rodrigo Catril, senior foreign exchange strategist at National Australia Bank.

"By the end of the week with some certainty the pound won't be trading near current levels, it could be significantly higher or massively lower."

And Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com warned: "The cabinet will likely pass it but with assault from all sides of the house and Brexit divide, it seems impossible parliament will vote it through."

The euro was also enjoying some lift from the Brexit developments, though the gains were tempered by news that Italy's populist government had stuck to its wallet-busting budget plan, putting it on course for a standoff with Brussels.

Data showing the first shrinkage of the German economy for three years added to pressure on the unit.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 closed up 0.2% to 21,846.48 points; Hong Kong – Hang Seng ended down 0.5% to 25,654.43 points and Shanghai – Composite closed down 0.9% to 2,632.24 points yesterday.

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**Pakistan govt plans to  
privatise two RLNG-fired  
power plants**



The Privatisation Commission (PC) board has asked National Power Parks Management Company Limited (NPP- MCL) to come up with a detailed working pa- per on proposed privatisation of two regasi- fi ed liquid natural gas – RLNG-based power plants, a statement said yesterday. The 1,233MW Balloki and 1,230MW Haveli Bahadur Shah power plants have already been cleared by Cabinet Committee on Privatisa- tion (CCoP) for their 100% privatisation in the next two years. The meeting, which was presided over by Muhammad Mian Soomro, chairman Priva- tisation Commission, directed the manage- ment of NPPMCL to work on the feasibility paper for the privatisation of the power plants as either a bundle package or separate entities along with timelines, justifi cations, and any issues ancillary to it for the consideration of the board and CCoP. A senior offi cial said before initiating the privatisation process of these plants, their case would be taken to the Council of Com- mon Interests (CCI). “After that the privatisation of these entities would be done under the strategic sale,” the of- fi cial added. The statement said the board also directed the concerned department to launch the process for hiring of fi nancial advisers for other public sector enterprises (PSEs) in the Active Privatisation Programme as approved by the federal cabinet. The Evaluation

Committees for privatisation transactions were also constituted during the meeting, it added. The meeting, the statement said, also constituted a committee for the resolution of the issue of contingent payments in the case of Financial Advisory Services Agreements concerning privatisation transactions initiated during the tenure of previous government.

“The board also approved to initiate the process for Hiring of Human Resource and further directed the concerned officials to review Human Resource Regulations in order to streamline the same for the betterment of organisation and to remove anomalies, if any,” the statement said. Almost two weeks back, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government unveiled its five-year privatisation agenda, and decided to privatise some profit-making entities in oil and gas, power, aviation as well as in banking and insurance sectors; however, it refused to give some loss-making entities in private hands. The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP), in a meeting on October 31, 2018, with Finance Minister Asad Umar in chair, decided to privatise nine-entities in the next two years, while two would be given in private possession later. The committee allowed giving the government’s shareholding of 75% in Oil and Gas Development Corp Ltd (OGDCL), 67.5% in Pakistan Petroleum Ltd (PPL) and its 18.39% shares in Mari Petroleum Company Ltd (MPCL) to private sector in short-term through capital market, official sources in the Cabinet Division. The official further said in short-term, sale of 93.38% shares of SME Bank, 44.8% shares in Pakistan Reinsurance Company Limited (PRCL) and 100% shares of State Life Insurance Corp (SLIC) has been approved. Besides, in medium-term, 82.6% shares of the First Woman Bank would also be given to a private strategic partner, the official added. Although, the government has not put the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines on the list, yet the national flag carrier’s assets, including Roosevelt Hotel in New York and Hotel Scribe in Paris have made the list of the



assets to be sold out in medium-term. The CCoP has also decided not to privatise Utility Stores Corp (USC), Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and have struck them off its privatisation plan.

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## 40-Year-Old Renewable Energy Law's Due for a Revamp



A 40-year-old law that's been key to the growth of renewable energy in the U.S. may be due for an overhaul.

Much has changed since the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act, called Purpa, was established in response to the Arab oil embargo of the early 1970s. Concerned about energy shortages, Congress wrote the law in part to encourage alternative energy. But that era of scarcity has since been replaced by

one of abundance. And utilities say that Purpa should change with the times.

They say power markets have outgrown the 1978 statute, and that it's burdening customers with billions in extra costs.

"Changes to the market need to be reflected in the law," said Adam L. Benshoff, executive director for regulatory affairs at the Edison Electric Institute, an industry association. "We're certainly missing an opportunity to reduce costs for customers."

They may get their wish. Neil Chatterjee, the new chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which oversees U.S. power markets, has indicated that his agency should take a look at the law. But he hasn't outlined a timeline or scope of that effort.

## **Market Abuses**

As it's written, Purpa requires utilities to purchase power from renewable energy projects under certain circumstances. If a developer can build a project for less than a utility can build a new power plant, then they can request a contract to sell power to the utility.

## **Purpa Power**

But utilities argue that developers have figured how to take advantage of the system. They're asking for immediate fixes to prevent market abuses, and curb instances in which developers break up their projects into smaller ones to qualify for higher rates, according to the Edison Electric Institute. Reducing the threshold for mandatory purchases could also be looked at.

"We're asking for Purpa to be modified in a way that more truly reflects avoided cost and stops some of the gaming,"



said Benschhoff.

## Still Relevant

Purpa proponents, including solar and wind developers, reject the notion that it's outdated, saying it's essential to giving renewables a leg up in states that aren't traditionally green leaning.

"Purpa has been a backdoor option to get some renewable projects to states that have few other policy levers that are incentivizing renewable energy," said Timothy Fox, vice president at ClearView Energy Partners LLC. "If the implementation of Purpa is reformed, we could see a slowdown in some of the states with more conventional resources," he said.

About 15 percent of U.S. solar capacity and 3 percent of wind planned to come online in the next few years may rely on Purpa, according to Bloomberg Intelligence.

The solar industry argues that any changes should be focused on making sure the law is enforced.

"It's been a highly successful policy tool and continues to be a highly successful policy in markets where there is not otherwise access," said Abigail Ross Hopper, who heads the Solar Energy Industries Association. Pushback from utilities is unsurprising, she said, since "we're threatening their market, we're threatening their monopoly."

It's all a far cry from when Charles Copeland was working as an engineer on an abandoned building in New York City's Lower East Side back in the 1970s. He designed a solar collector system for a group of residents that generated power for the building and sent the excess to Con Edison.

The utility sued the residents, but the Public Service Commissioner ruled in favor of the building, and the ruling became a crucial forerunner of Purpa. Forty years later,

Copeland says the law is as essential as ever.

“It’s even more urgent now, in terms of global warming,” he said.

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## **GE seeks to raise \$4bn with sale of Baker Hughes stake**



General Electric Co yesterday unveiled a plan to raise about \$4bn by accelerating a proposed sale of a stake in oilfield services provider Baker Hughes, its latest move to simplify its businesses and reduce debt. Under the deal, the Boston-based industrial conglomerate will sell up to 101.2mn shares on the market and Baker Hughes will repurchase another 65mn shares from its parent. Based on yesterday’s share price of \$23.76, the sale would raise around \$3.97bn. Once a symbol of

American business power, GE faltered during the 2008 financial crisis and since then has replaced two CEOs. Its stock price has shed more than 80% of its value from highs in early 2000.

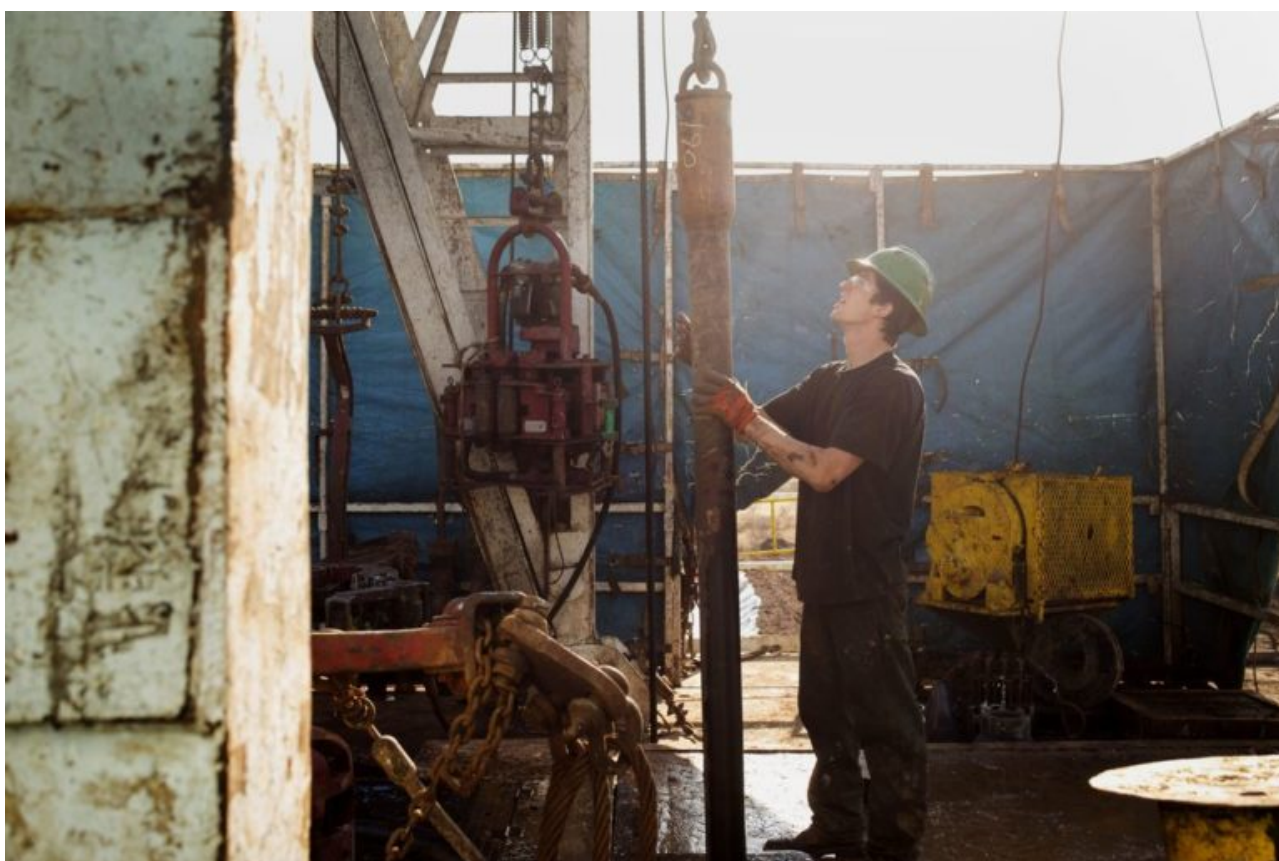
After the announcement, shares of GE rose 4.5% to \$8.35, while Baker Hughes was up about half a per cent. The two companies also struck a series of agreements covering digital technology, products and debt to pave way for the share sale. GE, which bought Houston-based Baker Hughes in July 2017 and agreed to maintain a 62.5% stake until the middle of next year, has made a series of changes to lower its debt and focus on its core businesses of jet engines, power plants and renewable energy. The two will continue to share certain oil and gas technologies, and has a six month lock up of GE's remaining stake in the oilfield company. On Monday, recently appointed GE chief executive officer Larry Culp said the company will sell assets with "urgency" to reduce debt, as GE shares tumbled as much as 10% and the cost of insuring its debt hit a six-year high. "The agreements announced today accelerate that plan in a manner that mutually benefits both companies and their shareholders," Culp said in a statement. Baker Hughes CEO Lorenzo Simonelli on Tuesday said the deal provides "clarity for our customers, employees and shareholders." In June, GE said it would sell its stake in Baker Hughes over the next two to three years. As part of the new deal, the companies will dissolve a two-year lock-up that would have prevented GE from selling shares of Baker Hughes until July 2019.

The sale comes as improving oil markets have helped Baker Hughes post a third-quarter adjusted net profit. The oil services firm also said it was optimistic about the near future with oil production in North America climbing to record levels. As part of the deal, GE will sell an undisclosed portion of its shares in the market and others will be acquired by Baker Hughes. GE will reduce its ownership to no more than 50.1% as part of the deal, the companies said. The

companies also will create a joint venture focused on rotating equipment technology, primarily used in Baker Hughes' liquefied natural gas, oil and gas production, and pipeline and industrial segments. Baker Hughes said it had entered into long-term supply and distribution agreements with GE for heavy-duty gas turbine technology.

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## **Chevron, Exxon Mobil Weigh Bids for Endeavor Energy**



Chevron Corp. and Exxon Mobil Corp. are among the companies considering first-round bids this month for closely held oil producer Endeavor Energy Resources LP, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The two oil majors may be joined by ConocoPhillips in

competing for the business, which could be valued at about \$15 billion including debt, said the people, asking not to be identified because the information is confidential. Royal Dutch Shell Plc has also been contacted and may participate, they said.

The value reflects Endeavor's size, with drilling rights on 329,000 net acres, of which only 2 percent have been developed, the people said. A \$15 billion sale would rank among the top 10 deals ever for a private energy company, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Representatives for Endeavor, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips and Shell declined to comment.

Endeavor, based in Midland, Texas, and owned by the family of founder Autry C. Stephens, agreed to explore a sale after its advisers got inquiries from prospective bidders, the people said. Despite that interest, the family's preference remains an initial public offering in 2019 so it can retain control, and the management team is continuing to organize its accounts for that goal, they said.

"We think Endeavor's asset base is likely to be attractive given the positioning in the core of the basin and the overall acreage continuity," Biraj Borkhataria, an analyst at RBC Capital Markets, said in a note to clients. "However, given the size of the transaction buyers would likely be limited to large independents or majors."

Exxon Mobil is the most logical buyer, according to Borkhataria, because it has the financial capacity and is keen to grow its position in the Permian Basin in Texas and New Mexico. The oil major had already signed a seven-year joint venture agreement with Endeavor in 2014 to bolster its work in the basin. The analyst said he doesn't expect Shell to bid for such a large bundle of assets.

Exxon Mobil has plenty of drilling inventory in the Permian,

following its purchase last year of \$6.6 billion of assets in the region, Senior Vice President Jack Williams said in the company's earnings call this month.

It's open to more acquisitions, particularly those with "a large undeveloped aspect," he said, according to a transcript compiled by Bloomberg.

"We continue to scan the market for all opportunities that play to our strength," Williams said.

After a relatively slow start in the first half of the year, deal activity has increased in the North American oil and gas market, driven by companies looking to increase their interests in the Permian Basin. The deals have included Diamondback Energy Inc.'s agreement in August to buy peer Energen Corp. for \$8.4 billion and BP Plc's pending \$10.5 billion acquisition of BHP Billiton Ltd.'s onshore U.S. operations.

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## **Trump presses Saudi over oil as ties fray further**



President Donald Trump took aim at Saudi Arabia's plan to cut oil production on Monday, injecting new tension into an already fraught alliance that has been clouded by US concerns over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Trump's efforts to influence oil production threatens to further strain relations between the two historic allies, even as his administration continues to describe the Saudis as a crucial partner in a shared bid to counter Iranian influence in the Middle East. But the US president – facing pressure after Republican losses in the midterm elections – is eager to tamp down threats to the economy, including higher gas prices. In a series of tweets, Trump blamed a stock market sell-off on the Democratic victory while pressing the Saudis and Opec to keep oil production at current levels. "Hopefully, Saudi Arabia and Opec will not be cutting oil production. Oil prices should be much lower based on supply!" Trump said on Twitter. Trump posted the message hours after Saudi Arabia's energy minister said that Opec and its allies should reverse about half the increase in oil output they made earlier this year. Oil futures had gained as much as 2.4% in London and 1.8% in New York after the Saudi announcement.

Oil futures in New York fell 0.4% on Monday, extending a



record 11th day of declines, to end the session at \$59.93 a barrel. Trump risks testing Saudi patience – or even provoking the kingdom’s ire – at a particularly vulnerable moment, with the US decision to reimpose sanctions on Iran threatening to increase prices. The administration had been counting on Saudi Arabia to ensure oil supply to prevent a run-up in prices. The two countries have also clashed over the October killing of US-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, with the Trump administration reportedly considering sanctions on some Saudi officials in response. Over the weekend, the US stopped its refuelling support for the Saudi-led coalition fighting against Houthi rebels in Yemen. The Saudis said in a statement the decision to end refuelling flights was a mutual one, and that the kingdom “increased its capability to independently conduct in-flight refuelling in Yemen.” And Trump isn’t expected to impose drastic penalties over the Khashoggi killing, saying earlier this month that he did not feel “betrayed” by the plot and reiterating his desire to avoid consequences that could harm the US economy. Still, the president is likely aware that his statement could irritate Saudi leadership. His tweet posted just minutes after a Fox Business Network segment in which energy analyst Phil Flynn said Opec leaders were angry Trump had “duped” them into raising production ahead of the Iranian sanctions. And the changes in posture by a Trump administration that had previously given Riyadh a pass on a range of international issues could prove an irritant in a relationship that has been carefully cultivated by the president and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner. The interference in oil matters risks overreach in a relationship Trump has leveraged to his advantage in the past.

In June, Saudi Arabia persuaded fellow oil producers to end 18 months of production cuts and pump more crude in response to falling output in Venezuela and Iran. Opec leaders made clear Trump’s social media posts were the impetus for the production changes, which kept oil prices low ahead of both the

midterm elections and Trump's expected move to reimpose sanctions on Iran. "We were in the meeting in Jeddah, when we read the tweet," Opec Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo said earlier this year. "I think I was prodded by his excellency Khalid al-Falih that probably there was a need for us to respond," he said. "We in Opec always pride ourselves as friends of the US." Producers need to cut about 1mn barrels a day from October production levels, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said Monday in Abu Dhabi. The kingdom will reduce shipments by about half that amount next month, he said. This time, Saudi Arabia is urging allies to focus on the risk of rising oil inventories and forecasts for massive growth in rival supplies next year including US shale. It's a concern shared by Barkindo, who said Monday that the market balance is under threat from surplus supply and dwindling demand. "It is beginning to look alarming in the sense that the resurgence of non-Opec supply – in particular shale oil from the US – is putting a lot of pressure on this fragile equation," Barkindo said in Abu Dhabi. A cut in oil exports by Saudi Arabia – or a rise in oil prices – does threaten to provide political ammunition to newly empowered Democrats who have long signalled scepticism of Opec. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, had previously supported legislation that would remove an existing immunity shield that prevents the oil group and its members' national oil companies from being sued under US antitrust law. It's possible a more serious split between the Trump Administration and the Saudis could give new momentum for such an effort, which failed after former President George W Bush threatened to veto it. Trump may also find a familiar ally in his effort to pressure the Saudis: Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia has argued that the oil supply excess is short term and has opposed production cuts, pitting it against the Saudis in an industry that dominates the economies of both countries. The Russian and US presidents met briefly at a lunch Sunday in Paris, where Saudi Arabian issues were discussed, according to White House press secretary Sarah

Sanders.