



Energy diplomacy as a repositioning strategy Indonesia's geopolitics in the Arab World

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Arab world is undergoing a fundamental transformation in its geopolitical and energy landscape as global dependence on fossil fuels declines and green energy transitions accelerate, reshaping regional power configurations and opening new opportunities for non-Middle Eastern actors. This study aims to analyze how global energy transformation and shifting Arab geopolitics reconfigure regional power structures and to formulate strategic pathways for Indonesia to reposition its foreign policy through energy diplomacy. Previous scholarship highlights energy as not merely an economic commodity but a strategic instrument of power, emphasizing the rise of energy diplomacy and governance in defining global influence. **Methods:** This research employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical method, combining literature review, policy document analysis, and geopolitical mapping to assess regional dynamics, Indonesia–Arab relations, and multilateral energy frameworks, particularly the role of the OPEC. **Findings:** The findings indicate that the transition towards renewable energy in Gulf countries has transformed energy from a trade-based asset into a model of political leverage, while Indonesia remains constrained by fragmented and largely bilateral energy diplomacy. The analysis shows that Indonesia's suspended participation in OPEC limits its access to strategic energy governance networks and emerging green energy funding mechanisms, reducing its bargaining power in global energy forums. The theoretical framework of energy as a source of geopolitical power is substantiated by empirical evidence demonstrating that countries actively shaping energy governance gain greater diplomatic leverage and strategic depth. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that proactive energy diplomacy and strategic re-engagement with multilateral energy institutions are essential for strengthening Indonesia's geopolitical role. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty of this article lies in conceptualizing Indonesia not merely as an energy consumer or market actor but as a potential "bridge state" in the emerging architecture of Islamic world energy diplomacy and green energy governance, integrating state-led and non-state diplomatic pathways.

KEYWORDS: Arab; diplomacy; energy; Indonesia; OPEC.

1. Introduction

The Arab world is currently facing a major turning point in its geopolitical trajectory, especially in relation to energy transformation and the gradual shift toward post-oil political and economic structures. For more than fifty years, the political economy of many Middle Eastern countries has been built on the petrodollar system, where state power, fiscal capacity, and political stability depend heavily on revenues from crude oil exports to global markets (Miao, 2025). This system has shaped not only domestic governance but also foreign policy orientations, alliance patterns, and regional influence. Oil wealth has allowed

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governments to maintain social contracts based on subsidies, public employment, and welfare distribution, while also financing strategic roles in international politics.

However, this long-standing structure is increasingly under pressure. Global energy demand patterns are changing due to climate commitments, technological innovation, and the rise of renewable energy sources. Even though oil remains important, its role as the sole backbone of national economies is no longer secure. Data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) show that in 2025, upstream oil and gas investment in the Middle East still reached around USD 130 billion, accounting for about 15% of total global investment in the sector (International Energy Agency, 2025). It indicates that the region remains deeply dependent on fossil energy production, even as global discourse and policy move steadily toward decarbonization (Koyama, 2021). In other words, while the world is preparing for a low-carbon future, many Middle Eastern economies are still structurally tied to oil and gas.

The continued dependence is not only a result of large oil reserves but also reflects structural limitations in economic and energy diversification. Many Arab countries still rely on a narrow range of energy products and export commodities, which makes them vulnerable to global price fluctuations (Haytayan et al., 2022). Shadab (2023) highlights that despite decades of policy announcements and national development plans, most Gulf countries have not significantly reduced their dependence on oil revenues. When oil prices fall or when global demand weakens due to economic crises or energy transitions, national budgets and development programs are immediately affected. The situation exposes the fragility of development models that rely almost exclusively on oil income and underscores the urgency of finding alternative economic foundations.

In response to these structural risks, several Arab states have begun to promote green energy transition agendas as part of broader economic reform strategies. One of the most prominent examples is Saudi Vision 2030, which represents Saudi Arabia's attempt to modernize its economy and prepare for a post-oil future (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2024). This initiative is not limited to energy policy but also includes reforms in industry, tourism, education, and governance. Within the energy sector, Vision 2030 places strong emphasis on renewable energy development, energy efficiency, and new technologies such as green hydrogen.

Saudi Arabia's commitment to energy transition is also reflected in its increasing engagement with global energy forums. The hosting of the International Association for Energy Economics (IAEE) conference in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2023 signals that the region is no longer seen only as a fossil fuel supplier but also as a potential actor in shaping future energy discussions (IAEE, 2022). Through Vision 2030, Riyadh aims to develop renewable energy capacity of up to 130 GW by 2030, focusing mainly on solar power and green hydrogen. By the end of 2024, Saudi Arabia had achieved renewable energy capacity of 6,551 MW, supported by investments of approximately USD 5.3 billion (General Authority for Statistics, 2024). Although this figure is still small compared to the country's fossil fuel production, it demonstrates concrete steps toward diversifying the national energy mix. Importantly, this transformation is not only a domestic agenda but also part of a wider regional effort to reposition the Arab world within the evolving global energy system.

These changes, however, take place within a complex geopolitical environment. The Middle East remains a strategic arena for major powers, particularly the United States and China, whose competition has intensified in recent years. Both countries seek to expand their influence through energy cooperation, infrastructure investment, and long-term strategic partnerships (Muhaimin et al., 2022). For the United States, energy stability in the Middle East is closely linked to global market stability and its broader security interests. Meanwhile, China views the region as a key node in its Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to secure energy supplies while also expanding technology and infrastructure networks across the Gulf.

As a result, the Arab world has become an important space for strategic competition between these two major powers, each attempting to shape regional energy governance in ways that align with their global interests (Chaziza, 2024). Thus, this situation creates both

opportunities and risks for regional actors. On the one hand, increased investment and cooperation can accelerate development. On the other hand, dependence on external powers may limit policy autonomy and deepen geopolitical tensions.

Amid these global and regional shifts, Indonesia occupies a position that is both unique and underutilized. Historically, Indonesia and the Arab world have shared deep cultural, religious, and diplomatic ties. These connections date back centuries, involving networks of Islamic scholars, pilgrimage routes, and long-standing trade relations, particularly through the spice trade (Syafrizal, 2015). These historical bonds have continued into the modern era, shaping diplomatic relations and people-to-people connections.

This closeness is also evident in contemporary economic relations. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Trade (2023), trade between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia reached USD 7.51 billion in 2022, reflecting growing economic interaction. However, despite these ties, Indonesia's geopolitical bargaining power in the Arab region remains relatively limited. Historical and cultural proximity has not yet been translated into a coherent and integrated energy diplomacy strategy. In the field of global energy transformation, this represents a missed opportunity, especially as energy issues increasingly require cross-sectoral and cross-regional cooperation.

At the domestic level, Indonesia faces its own energy challenges that further highlight the need for strategic engagement. National energy consumption remains heavily dominated by fossil fuels, which account for around 87% of total energy use (Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, 2024). Compared to other ASEAN countries such as Vietnam and Thailand, Indonesia's progress in renewable energy development has been relatively slow (Sudirman et al., 2025). According to the Institute for IESR (2024), renewable energy investment in Indonesia reached only USD 1.8 billion in 2023, far below the estimated annual requirement of USD 25 billion needed to achieve the Net Zero Emissions 2060 target.

The gap reflects deeper structural issues, particularly the weak integration between domestic energy policy and foreign diplomacy. Adrian et al. (2023) note that national energy planning often lacks coherence, while Halimatussadiah et al. (2024) emphasize that foreign policy instruments have not been fully aligned with energy transition goals. Strengthening cross-regional energy diplomacy, especially with energy-producing regions such as the Arab world, could help bridge this gap by facilitating investment, technology transfer, and policy learning.

Within the multilateral scale, Indonesia's relationship with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) deserves renewed attention. Indonesia was a full member of OPEC from 1962 but later suspended its membership after becoming a net oil importer (Rudiany & Kusumawardhana, 2023). The decision to freeze membership was officially taken on 30 November 2016 during the 171st OPEC Meeting in Vienna, mainly because production cut policies conflicted with Indonesia's domestic energy needs.

Nevertheless, re-engaging with OPEC does not necessarily mean returning as a traditional oil producer. If Indonesia can strategically reactivate its role or establish a new form of engagement, it could participate more actively in global energy governance (Rudiany & Kusumawardhana, 2023). This is particularly relevant because OPEC's role has expanded beyond oil market regulation. The organization has begun promoting initiatives such as the OPEC Green Initiative Framework and the Energy Transition Charter, which aim to support research collaboration, funding mechanisms, and knowledge exchange for green energy development (OPEC, 2024a).

By carefully understanding the direction of energy geopolitics in the Arab world, Indonesia has the opportunity to position itself as a "bridge of energy and peace in the Islamic world." Through proactive energy diplomacy and strategic repositioning within OPEC, Indonesia can move beyond its role as a passive energy consumer. Instead, it can act as an "architect" of strategic cooperation between the Arab world and Southeast Asia. This study therefore proposes concrete steps in energy diplomacy and OPEC engagement as key strategies to strengthen Indonesia's geopolitical position in the global arena.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design and approach

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the transformation of energy geopolitics in the Arab world and its implications for Indonesia's foreign policy repositioning. Data were collected through systematic literature review and document analysis of academic publications, policy reports, institutional records, and international organization publications related to global energy transition, Middle East geopolitics, and Indonesia–Arab relations. The primary data sources include reports from international energy institutions, governmental policy documents, multilateral organization publications, and strategic analysis from think tanks. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach by collecting scholarly sources from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar.

The literature search was conducted using a combination of keywords such as “energy diplomacy,” “geopolitics of energy,” “Indonesia energy policy,” “Gulf countries energy strategy,” “OPEC and global energy governance,” “renewable energy transition,” “track-two diplomacy,” and “youth diplomacy,” combined through Boolean operators. The study focuses on publications within the period of 2010–2025 to capture recent developments in global energy transition and geopolitical dynamics. Inclusion criteria consist of peer-reviewed journal articles and institutional reports relevant to energy policy, geopolitics, and diplomacy, written in English and accessible in full text. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria include non-academic sources, irrelevant topics, duplicate records, and publications outside the specified time frame.

2.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis and geopolitical mapping. Key themes, narratives, and patterns were identified to explore how energy transformation reshapes regional power structures and diplomatic strategies. The study is guided by the theoretical framework of energy as an instrument of power in international relations, integrating concepts from energy security theory, soft power, and global energy governance. This qualitative framework enables a comprehensive understanding of how shifts in the Arab world's energy landscape create both structural constraints and strategic opportunities for Indonesia in designing proactive and multilateral energy diplomacy.

3. Results and Discussion

Reassessing Indonesia's position within the geopolitical dynamics of the Arab world requires a fundamental shift in diplomatic thinking; moving away from a reactive and transactional approach toward a more progressive and strategic model of engagement. Gulf states have increasingly learned to use their natural resource advantages not only as sources of income but also as tools of political bargaining and strategic leverage (Ali & Abdalla, 2025). Through control over energy production, investment flows, and emerging green technologies, these states are actively redefining their roles in international politics. By contrast, Indonesia has largely positioned itself as an economic partner focused on trade and investment, without embedding these interactions within a clear geopolitical strategy. To clarify these differences, Table 1 presents a comparative overview comparison between Indonesia's energy strategy and gulf countries.

Energy, therefore, can no longer be understood merely as an economic commodity exchanged in global markets. It has become a key instrument of power that shapes alliances, diplomatic influence, and international bargaining positions (Gerani & Komnios, 2025). States that are able to control, manage, or influence energy flows are also able to shape

political outcomes beyond their borders. For Indonesia, this transitional moment in global energy politics creates a strategic opening to redesign its energy diplomacy in a way that aligns with long-term geopolitical interests. This applies not only at the bilateral level with Arab states, but also within multilateral institutions that increasingly focus on energy transition and climate governance.

Table 1. Comparison of Indonesia's energy strategy vs. gulf countries

Aspect	Indonesia	Gulf States (Saudi, UAE, Qatar)
The Role of Energy	Economic commodities	Geopolitical Instruments
Focus	Trade & investment	Global Influence & Bargaining Power
Renewable Energy	< 14% (IEA, 2024)	Aggressive (Hydrogen, Solar, Green Tech)
Global Positioning	Economic partner	Agenda Setter
Energy Diplomacy	Fragmented	Strategic & Integrated

3.1 Energy diplomacy as an instrument of global politics

The global energy transition has significantly altered the structure of power in the Arab world (Haytayan & Keskes, 2023). As fossil fuel dominance is gradually challenged by renewable energy and decarbonization agendas, Gulf countries are adapting their strategies to maintain relevance and influence. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar are no longer acting solely as oil exporters. Instead, they are positioning themselves as leaders in renewable energy development, green hydrogen production, and energy technology investment. This shift has also affected their foreign policy behavior, transforming them into agenda-setters within global energy diplomacy rather than passive suppliers of raw materials (Khan, 2025).

As a result, energy has taken on a symbolic role that goes beyond market value. It has become closely linked to political legitimacy, international reputation, and leadership claims in global governance (Rachmat, 2018). By promoting renewable energy initiatives and climate commitments, Gulf states seek to present themselves as responsible global actors that are prepared for a post-oil future. This strategy allows them to maintain political influence even as global demand for fossil fuels faces long-term uncertainty.

In contrast, Indonesia's energy profile shows limited progress in this direction. According to the International Energy Agency (2025), renewable energy contributes less than 14% to Indonesia's national energy mix, far below the official target of 23% set for 2025. This gap reflects not only domestic policy challenges but also the absence of a strong energy diplomacy strategy that links national energy goals with foreign policy priorities. Indonesia's engagement in energy cooperation has so far remained largely focused on commodity trade and short-term economic benefits, rather than on using energy as a strategic geopolitical tool. On a global scale marked by oil price volatility and accelerating green energy transition, Indonesia could instead frame energy issues as instruments of political and economic negotiation with the Arab world (Azzahra, 2025). Rather than acting solely as an importer or investment destination, Indonesia could position itself as a strategic partner that offers market access, regional connectivity, and diplomatic legitimacy in Southeast Asia.

Goldthau & Witte (2010), in *Global Energy Governance: The New Rules of the Game*, emphasize that energy today functions as an "instrument of cross-regional power and influence." States that are capable of regulating energy production, distribution, and technological development gain stronger bargaining positions in the international system (Gerani & Komnios, 2025). In this sense, energy diplomacy represents a form of soft power that combines economic interests, technological capacity, and foreign policy objectives. It allows states to shape international norms, build alliances, and influence global agendas without relying on military means.

Indonesia has taken initial steps toward energy diplomacy, although these efforts remain fragmented and insufficiently coordinated. In 2025, Indonesia signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates covering economic

cooperation, investment, and energy development (Ministry of State Secretariat, 2025). Indonesia also played a role in global energy discussions by hosting the G20 Energy Transition Working Group (ETWG) in 2022, where sustainable energy transition was promoted as a shared international responsibility (Portal Informasi Indonesia, 2022).

In addition, Indonesian state-owned enterprises such as Pertamina NRE and PLN Nusantara Power have entered into cooperation agreements on carbon technology and renewable energy projects with Masdar Clean Energy from the UAE and ACWA Power from Saudi Arabia (Purwanti, 2025). These partnerships demonstrate Indonesia's growing engagement with Gulf-based energy actors and indicate the potential for deeper collaboration in green energy development. These collaborations can be summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Indonesia–gulf states energy cooperation

Indonesian actor	Partners	Areas of Cooperation	Years
Government of the Republic of Indonesia	Saudi Arabia	MoU on Energy & Investment	2025
Government of the Republic of Indonesia	UAE	MoU on Energy & Economics	2025
Pertamina New & Renewable Energy	Masdar	Renewable Energy	2025
Indonesian State Electricity Company Nusantara Power	ACWA Power	Carbon Technology	2025

However, these initiatives remain largely bilateral, technical, and project-based. They have not yet been consolidated into a broader geopolitical framework that defines clear national interests, long-term objectives, and regional priorities (Loy & Rachmawati, 2024). As Moran & Russell (2009) argue in *Energy Security and Global Politics*, effective energy diplomacy requires consistency across sectors and sustained strategic vision that goes beyond isolated projects or short-term agreements.

At the same time, Gulf countries are intensifying competition to lead in green energy investment (Majid et al., 2025). Saudi Arabia, for example, has allocated more than USD 8.4 billion to the Neom Green Hydrogen project, signaling its ambition to become a global hub for clean energy innovation (Arab News, 2023). The United Arab Emirates, through Masdar, has expanded its renewable energy investments to more than 20 countries, strengthening its global presence and diplomatic reach (Szalai et al., 2025). Indonesia itself has committed to achieving a renewable energy share of 23% by 2025 (Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, 2021), creating a shared policy space for cooperation.

Collaboration between Indonesia and Gulf states holds strong potential to create strategic interdependence. Such partnerships could connect Southeast Asia's growing energy demand and technological adaptation capacity with Arab financial capital and experience in large-scale energy projects. For Middle Eastern countries, cooperation with Indonesia offers a gateway to expand influence in Southeast Asia. For Indonesia, these partnerships can enhance strategic depth amid the growing rivalry between the United States and China over energy routes, markets, and political influence in the Islamic world (Yang et al., 2023).

Since suspending its OPEC membership in 2016, Indonesia has also lost access to key global energy diplomacy networks. This absence limits Indonesia's ability to influence global energy discussions and reduces its visibility in strategic forums. Meanwhile, OPEC itself has begun to transform its orientation. Since 2023, the organization has promoted the OPEC Green Initiative Framework, which emphasizes joint investment in green hydrogen, carbon technologies, and energy efficiency (OPEC, 2024a). This shift indicates that OPEC is no longer focused solely on oil market regulation but is increasingly engaged in energy transition governance.

As O'Sullivan (2017) notes in *Windfall: How the New Energy Abundance Upends Global Politics*, energy politics today is not only about resource availability, but also about the ability to build political networks around energy systems. By re-engaging with OPEC, Indonesia could regain access to research collaboration and funding mechanisms for energy transition, position itself as a bridge between Middle Eastern energy producers and

Southeast Asian consumers, and strengthen its bargaining power in global forums such as the G20, COP, and ASEAN energy platforms.

Ultimately, energy diplomacy should be understood not merely as an exchange of commodities or investments, but as a mechanism for constructing global political influence. By strengthening energy-based diplomatic networks, Indonesia has the opportunity to redefine its role as a bridge state connecting the Arab world and Southeast Asia. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country with long-standing ties to Middle Eastern energy producers and rapidly growing energy demand at home, Indonesia occupies a unique intermediary position within global energy flows. If managed strategically, this position can become a source of lasting geopolitical influence in an era of global energy transformation.

3.2 Repositioning Indonesia's role in OPEC

Indonesia's relationship with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has been marked by significant shifts over time, reflecting changes in its domestic energy structure and global energy conditions. These shifts are summarized in Table 3. Indonesia first joined OPEC in 1962, withdrew in 2009, rejoined in 2015, and then suspended its membership again in 2016 due to its status as a net oil importer and disagreements over production cut policies that were seen as conflicting with national interests (Badaruddin, 2015). These repeated changes indicate that Indonesia's engagement with OPEC has often been reactive, shaped more by short-term economic considerations than by a long-term geopolitical strategy.

Table 3. Timeline of Indonesia's OPEC membership

Years	Status	Description
1962	Joined	Initial membership
2009	Leave	Net importer
2015	Rejoined	Re-entry
2016	Suspended	Production policy conflict

Since suspending its membership, Indonesia's role in global energy governance has become relatively passive. This is particularly significant given that OPEC remains one of the most influential institutions in the global energy system, especially in determining oil prices, regulating supply, and shaping collective policy directions among major oil-producing countries (OPEC, 2024b). Although Indonesia is no longer a major oil exporter, its absence from OPEC limits its access to key decision-making forums where global energy trends and market expectations are actively negotiated.

As global energy geopolitics becomes more complex, the possibility of unsuspending Indonesia's OPEC membership deserves serious strategic consideration. A return to OPEC would not be merely symbolic, but could generate tangible geopolitical and economic benefits. OPEC continues to play a central role in shaping global oil markets through coordinated production policies and collective decision-making among its members (Roeben, 2024). According to the U.S. EIA (2025), OPEC member states control approximately 80% of global proven oil reserves and account for around 50% of international crude oil exports. This level of influence means that OPEC remains a key actor in managing global energy stability, even amid the ongoing energy transition.

Rejoining OPEC would allow Indonesia to engage more directly with global energy transition agendas, particularly through initiatives such as the OPEC Green Initiative Framework that has been developed since COP28 (Conference of the Parties) Dubai in 2023. This framework reflects OPEC's growing awareness of the need to balance fossil fuel interests with climate and sustainability concerns. Through renewed membership, Indonesia could strengthen cross-bloc energy diplomacy, engaging not only with Middle Eastern producers but also with major energy consumers such as China and India. At the same time, OPEC membership could help Indonesia secure national interests related to oil

supply reliability and price stability amid global uncertainty, while also enabling it to contribute more actively to global supply coordination (Stevandić, 2025).

From a diplomatic perspective, Indonesia's re-engagement with OPEC aligns with a broader understanding of proactive diplomacy. Kissinger (1994) emphasizes that effective diplomacy is not merely a response to crises, but a deliberate effort to shape international order before crises emerge. Thus, Indonesia should view OPEC not simply as a club of oil producers, but as a strategic arena where the future direction of global energy policy is negotiated. Participation in energy organizations such as OPEC provides opportunities for countries to promote balanced approaches that consider both energy security and energy transition needs. This is particularly important because understanding price-setting mechanisms and market coordination in global oil markets remains essential for long-term energy planning (Stevandić, 2025).

Through OPEC membership, Indonesia could also strengthen its role as a bridge between Middle Eastern energy producers and major Asian energy consumers. Given its geographic position and growing energy demand, Indonesia is well placed to act as an intermediary that connects supply-side and demand-side interests. This role would not only enhance Indonesia's strategic relevance but also reinforce its leadership position among Global South countries, many of which face similar challenges in balancing development needs with energy transition commitments.

Beyond participation, Indonesia could take a more proactive stance by initiating the establishment of an "OPEC Green Task Force." This proposed working group could focus on strengthening cooperation in green energy research, technology exchange, and cross-member financing mechanisms. By advancing such an initiative, Indonesia would move beyond the role of a passive participant and begin to shape policy agendas within OPEC. This approach would be consistent with the Energy Transition Charter adopted by OPEC in 2023, which emphasizes the need to balance economic sustainability with gradual and inclusive energy transition pathways.

Reactivating OPEC membership would also open access to practical financial mechanisms, particularly through initiatives such as the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID). This institution channels funding to support development and increasingly supports green energy projects in developing countries. Participation in OFID-related programs would strengthen South-South economic diplomacy, which aligns with Indonesia's long-standing foreign policy principles of mutual benefit and non-alignment (Ministry of Finance, 2025). Such engagement would also enhance Indonesia's credibility as a constructive actor in global development cooperation.

Table 4. Energy & investment data

Indicators	Scores
Indonesia's Renewable Energy	<14%
2025 Target	23%
Indonesia's RE Investment (2023)	USD 1.8 billion
Annual Needs	USD 25 billion
NEOM Hydrogen Investment	USD 8.4 billion

Importantly, this strategy would address Indonesia's domestic energy challenges. Data from the Institute for IESR (2024) show that Indonesia's renewable energy investment in 2023 reached only USD 1.8 billion, far below the estimated annual requirement of USD 25 billion needed to meet national energy transition targets. A summary of key energy and investment indicators is presented in Table 4. Through strengthened green energy diplomacy with Gulf countries, Indonesia could gain greater access to investment, technology, and expertise. At the same time, active participation in OPEC's evolving energy transition agenda would enhance Indonesia's international standing as a serious and credible actor in global energy governance. In sum, repositioning Indonesia's role in OPEC should be understood as part of a broader strategic effort to strengthen its geopolitical position in an era of energy transformation. Rather than viewing OPEC membership as

incompatible with its status as a net oil importer, Indonesia can leverage the organization as a platform for diplomacy, negotiation, and leadership in shaping a more balanced global energy future.

3.3 *Track-two diplomacy and the role of youth*

The repositioning of energy diplomacy in the contemporary global scale cannot rely solely on state-level or track-one diplomacy conducted through formal governmental channels (Bovan et al., 2020). Global challenges such as energy transition, climate change, and sustainable development are complex, technical, and long-term in nature. These issues often extend beyond the capacity of formal diplomacy, which is frequently constrained by political interests, bureaucratic procedures, and short-term national priorities. As Montville (1991) argues, such conditions require alternative diplomatic pathways that allow dialogue and cooperation to continue even when official negotiations face limitations.

Indonesia needs to strengthen track-two diplomacy mechanisms that involve non-state actors, including academics, think tanks, industry actors, and civil society organizations (Zreik, 2025). As energy diplomacy increasingly intersects with technological innovation, social transformation, and public participation, the involvement of these actors becomes essential. Non-state actors often possess specialized knowledge, technical expertise, and social legitimacy that complement formal diplomatic efforts. Their participation can help produce policy outcomes that are more flexible, inclusive, and durable over time.

Track-two diplomacy plays a crucial complementary role alongside official state diplomacy. It refers to informal and non-governmental interactions that involve academics, policy experts, industry representatives, civil society organizations, and community actors who engage in dialogue, joint research, and cooperative problem-solving across national boundaries (Zreik, 2025). Unlike track-one diplomacy, which is bound by official mandates and political sensitivities, track-two diplomacy allows participants to explore ideas more openly and creatively. This approach is particularly effective when official negotiations encounter political deadlock or when issues require technical expertise that may not be fully available within traditional diplomatic institutions (Burgess & Burgess, 2010).

For Indonesia, strengthening track-two diplomacy is especially relevant in the field of energy diplomacy and potential re-engagement with OPEC-related frameworks. By mobilizing societal actors, Indonesia can extend the reach of its foreign policy beyond formal government channels. Universities, research institutes, private energy firms, and civil society groups can act as informal ambassadors who support national interests while also contributing substantively to global energy discussions. Through such engagement, Indonesia can shift its role from a passive policy recipient to an active contributor in shaping international energy discourse.

Track-two diplomacy also provides a valuable space for informal discussion, idea exchange, and trust-building. These interactions help reduce misunderstandings and foster cooperation in sensitive geopolitical areas without the pressure of official protocols or political maneuvering (Zreik, 2025). From the energy diplomacy perspective, where interests often overlap and conflict, informal dialogue can create channels of communication that remain open even when formal relations are strained or complex. As such, track-two diplomacy functions as a bridge that connects technical problem-solving with broader diplomatic objectives.

Within the framework of track-two diplomacy, youth engagement has emerged as an increasingly important dimension. Demographic trends in both the Arab world and Indonesia highlight the strategic significance of youth participation. According to the UNDP (2022), approximately 60% of the population in the Arab world is under the age of 30. This demographic reality positions young people as a major force for innovation, economic transformation, and social change in the region (Amrin et al., 2025). Indonesia shows similar characteristics, with more than 70% of its population in the productive age range of 15–64 years (BPS, 2025).

Young people are no longer merely beneficiaries of public policy. They have increasingly become active agents of change in areas such as climate action, technological innovation, and international cooperation. Research shows that youth participation enhances creativity, openness to collaboration, and long-term commitment to sustainability goals, particularly in transnational initiatives related to clean energy and climate solutions (Nisbett & Spaiser, 2023). Because energy transition is inherently a long-term process, involving younger generations is essential to ensure continuity, policy sustainability, and intergenerational ownership of outcomes.

In this regard, Indonesia could initiate a structured track-two platform within OPEC-related frameworks, such as an OPEC Green Youth Fellowship. This program could be designed to bring together young people from OPEC member states and partner countries to collaborate on green energy initiatives, research projects, and policy discussions. Youth diplomacy literature suggests that fellowship and exchange programs are effective tools for building cross-national networks, reducing political mistrust, and developing shared problem-solving capacities (Sevinç, 2023). Such platforms would allow young participants to engage with energy issues in a cooperative and forward-looking environment.

Young people possess at least two strategic assets that are highly relevant to green energy diplomacy. First, they demonstrate strong capacity for technological adaptation and innovation, particularly in fields such as renewable energy, digital platforms, and climate-related entrepreneurship (Rasa & Laherto, 2022). These skills are critical for addressing the technical challenges of energy transition. Second, youth are deeply embedded in transnational social networks that facilitate people-to-people connections, knowledge exchange, and collaborative learning across borders (Saud et al., 2025). These informal networks often endure longer than formal diplomatic agreements and play a significant role in shaping future policy norms and cooperation patterns (Roger & Rowan, 2022).

Indonesia could therefore promote the establishment of a Green Youth Fellowship within the OPEC framework as a platform for joint research, green business incubation, and policy-oriented dialogue. The International Energy Agency (IEA) emphasizes that youth-led innovation plays an active role in promoting clean energy, and that clean energy access policies should include a strong focus on youth participation (International Energy Agency, 2025). By connecting Indonesian energy startups with research institutions and innovation hubs in the Gulf region, such as the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC) or Masdar-related research networks, Indonesia could help facilitate knowledge transfer, capacity building, and collaborative research.

Empirical findings also support the effectiveness of youth-based cross-regional cooperation. Yu et al. (2025) find that collaboration among young people across regions strengthens mutual understanding and accelerates the diffusion of green technologies. This suggests that Indonesia–Middle East youth cooperation is not merely symbolic, but represents a practical and socially grounded pathway for building green diplomacy at the societal level. Rather than relying solely on elite-driven negotiations, youth-centered initiatives embed cooperation within broader social structures, making it more resilient over time. Youth-centered cooperation strengthens people-to-people ties, facilitates knowledge exchange, and builds informal networks that often outlast formal agreements. These social foundations are critical for sustaining cooperation in a global environment characterized by uncertainty and rapid change. Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that Indonesia stands at a crossroads in global energy geopolitics. The ongoing transformation of the Arab world's energy landscape offers both challenges and opportunities. If Indonesia continues to approach energy diplomacy in a limited and transactional manner, it risks remaining a peripheral actor in a rapidly evolving system. However, if Indonesia adopts a more visionary and strategic approach—one that combines formal energy diplomacy, reactivation of its role within OPEC, and the strengthening of track-two and youth-based engagement—it can significantly enhance its geopolitical relevance.

Through inclusive track-two diplomacy that centers on youth participation, Indonesia's energy diplomacy can become more adaptive to global change. Youth-led initiatives help bridge generational divides by connecting current policy debates with long-term sustainability objectives, ensuring that energy transition strategies remain relevant and forward-looking (Jaradat et al., 2024). This approach also strengthens social ownership of policy outcomes, which is essential for the long-term success of energy transition efforts. In this sense, the role of youth in energy diplomacy should not be viewed as symbolic or supplementary (Alzain, 2023). Instead, youth engagement represents a concrete manifestation of green energy cooperation and peace-building as cross-border and intergenerational projects. Long-term stability is more likely when cooperation is rooted in shared social experiences, collaborative problem-solving, and inclusive participation (Ispiryan et al., 2024). By integrating youth into track-two energy diplomacy, Indonesia can reinforce its regional partnerships, expand its influence within global energy governance, and strengthen its image as a forward-looking and inclusive diplomatic actor (Griffiths, 2019). By doing so, Indonesia would not merely adapt to global energy transformation, but actively contribute to shaping its direction. It could position itself as a connector between regions, a mediator between producers and consumers, and a promoter of inclusive and sustainable energy governance. In an era where energy transition is closely linked to peace, stability, and development, Indonesia has the opportunity to redefine its international role—not as a passive recipient of change, but as an active driver of new pathways for energy cooperation and peace in the Arab world and beyond.

4. Conclusions

The global energy transformation presents a strategic opportunity for Indonesia to elevate its diplomatic role, particularly in relation to the Arab world. With abundant natural resources, a large domestic energy market, and its identity as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia possesses strong legitimacy to engage more actively in global energy governance. However, its current approach to energy diplomacy has remained reactive and fragmented, as illustrated by the suspension of its OPEC membership in 2016. Reactivating Indonesia's role within OPEC should therefore be understood not as a return to outdated oil politics, but as a strategic repositioning within an evolving energy governance structure that increasingly encompasses green transition frameworks.

Beyond formal institutional engagement, Indonesia must broaden its energy diplomacy through track-two channels involving academics, the private sector, civil society, and particularly youth. Young people in both Indonesia and the Arab world represent the majority of the population and are active agents of change who bring creativity and long-term commitment to sustainability goals. By combining formal energy diplomacy, re-engagement with OPEC, and strengthened track-two and youth-based cooperation, Indonesia can transform from a peripheral actor into a regional connector—serving as a mediator between energy producers and consumers, and a promoter of inclusive and sustainable energy governance at both the regional and global levels.

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