In 2021, the U.S. imported an average of 199,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil and 473,000 bpd of other petroleum products from Russia. Although Russian crude accounts for only three percent of U.S. crude oil imports and about one percent of total crude oil processed by U.S. refineries—Russian crude oil imports are important to refineries on the West Coast and Gulf Coast. Read more on this topic from AFPM's industry analysts in their recent assessment: "U.S. Imports of Crude Oil and Petroleum Products from Russia."

Why do we import from Russia?

U.S. West Coast (USWC) refineries rely on imports of light sweet crude oil from other countries, including Russia, because access to U.S. produced light sweet crude oil is challenged by geography, transportation and logistics.

Our refineries in the U.S. Gulf Coast (USGC) import heavier crude and unfinished oils from Russia that our complex refineries can transform into other products including gasoline, diesel and jet fuel.

Gasoline and diesel represent only a small part of Russian imports to the United States, largely going to the East Coast. The U.S. East Coast is reliant on foreign sources of refined product due to lack of local refining capacity and infrastructure to economically move products from refining centers along the USGC to markets along the eastern seaboard.

Why have Russian imports increased?

In 2021, increased Russian imports to refineries in California and Washington state have helped offset lower volumes of light sweet crude imports into California from other countries—notably Nigeria—and lower volumes of U.S.-produced crude oil shipped by rail to Washington.

Increased imports of crude oil to the USGC region in 2021 were largely driven by disruptions to U.S. Gulf of Mexico oil production caused by Hurricane Ida and have since declined.

And, since 2019, U.S. refineries have increased imports of unfinished heavy oils from Russia to help replace heavy sour crude from Venezuela that U.S. refineries can no longer import.

If Russian imports are restricted, what other options do U.S. refineries have?

Although not as cost effective as current imports from Russia, particularly heavy fuel oil, additional heavy crude supplies from Canada and countries within Latin America could replace imported Russian crude. Restrictions on the availability of Russian crude to other countries could also have significant impact on crude oil supply patterns and costs.

What can policymakers do to blunt the impact?

While there is no near-term, silver-bullet policy to blunt the impact of geopolitical disruptions of the market, pursuing policies that allow domestic production to return to pre-pandemic levels will help to provide market stability and insulate not only the U.S. but the world from major disruptions. Policymakers can also provide relief from policies that increase the cost of producing refined product and policies that make it uneconomic to transport crude oil and petroleum products domestically.

**This piece was updated in March 2022 to reflect full year 2021 import data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). AFPM's initial post preceded the release of this data and included a projection for 2021 imports extrapolated from EIA's January - November 2021 import data. Actual December imports ended up being lower.*

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We make the products that make life better, safer and more sustainable — we make progress.

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