



Can Israel Connect to Syria's New Oil Routes?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Syria is reviving plans for major oil pipelines linking Iraq and other Gulf oil producers to the Mediterranean Sea. At first glance, such projects may appear to compete with Israel's ambitions to become an important link in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). This assumption is misleading. While railway and highway projects may naturally compete directly with one another for freight routes, energy pipelines operate with a different logic. Once established, oil and gas pipelines (and future hydrogen pipelines) tend to move continuously through several parallel routes, with additional pipelines providing resilience rather than displacing one another. Israel should not view Syria's emergence as an oil transit state as a threat in the same way it may view competing regional railway corridors proposed by Turkey. The more useful question is how Israel can ensure future access to, or connection with, the regional oil network that is developing around it. Options may include a physical connection to a proposed Iraqi oil pipeline via Jordan, access to direct maritime deliveries from Baniyas or Tripoli to Ashkelon, or reciprocal energy arrangements in which Israeli gas and electricity

flow to Syria and Lebanon while Israel gains access to their emerging oil supply routes. The goal is not to force oil corridors to go through Israel, but to make sure that the new regional oil network does not bypass it completely.

Limited energy cooperation between Israel and its northern neighbors is already a reality. [Israeli natural gas has reached Syria](#) through indirect trade and swap deals with Jordan since the beginning of 2026, and limited electricity cooperation between Israel, Syria and Lebanon may soon become possible through [carefully controlled connections in the Golan Heights](#). The third missing component in the emerging energy relationship among Israel, Lebanon and Syria is oil transit, but this too may soon change.

In 2026, [Iraq and Syria began advancing plans](#) to restore a large oil connection between Iraqi production areas and Syria's Mediterranean coast. The historical Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline once carried roughly 300,000 barrels per day before falling into disuse and suffering extensive damage. The current project under discussion is much more ambitious, with proposals for a modern pipeline capable of carrying approximately 1.5 to 2 million barrels per day toward Baniyas. Lebanon has also expressed interest in connecting to this developing network through [a branch toward Tripoli](#) and its existing oil infrastructure. If such projects advance, Syria could once again become an important transit state between the Gulf region and the East Mediterranean.

From an Israeli perspective, framing Syria's developing corridors simply as competitors to Israel's own regional infrastructure ambitions is misleading, because it depends on what kind of infrastructure is being discussed. Railway and highway corridors tend to compete with one another. A container leaving Saudi Arabia for Europe may travel north through Jordan and Syria toward Turkey, or west through Jordan toward Israel and its port in Haifa. The two routes seek to move essentially the same cargo between the same markets, making political factors important in deciding which route is best. Trucks and trains must cross borders, clear customs, meet regulatory requirements, obtain insurance, comply with rules of origin, and operate within bilateral or multilateral trade arrangements. Delays at even one border can undermine the economics of an entire corridor, as is the case with the current freight procedures on the Israel-Jordan border, [which are notoriously slow and cumbersome](#). For this reason, a

functioning Saudi-Turkey railway through Jordan and Syria could represent a genuine alternative to the Israeli leg of IMEC. Israel has a clear interest in competing for that trade and ensuring that a regional freight system does not simply bypass it.

However, energy transit operates according to a different logic than other trade corridors. Oil and gas pipelines still require complex transit arrangements and security guarantees, but once a pipeline is operating, the commodity does not stop for customs inspection at every border. Flows are metered rather than physically inspected, and the infrastructure can operate continuously regardless of limitations on ordinary trade between the countries. Unlike other goods that require thousands of individual cross-border transactions, energy flows can be structured through a small number of companies, pipelines, contracts, and metering points. For this reason, energy trade often exists where other forms of trade are absent. One current illustration of this principle is the fact that Israel routinely exports natural gas to Jordan and Egypt through dedicated pipelines, while trade in other goods remains relatively limited among the three countries.

There is also a historical precedent for this type of practical energy cooperation in the region involving Israel. After Israel took over the Golan Heights in 1967, roughly 50 kilometers of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (“Tapline”) carrying Saudi oil to Lebanon’s ports came under Israeli control, [yet oil continued to flow through the pipeline](#) despite the absence of diplomatic relations among the parties. Israel did not disrupt the flow of oil and did not become part of the Saudi oil market, and Syria did not relinquish its territorial claims. The parties simply shared an interest in allowing existing energy infrastructure to continue operating.

This distinction between energy trade and other forms of trade makes potential plans for new energy corridors in the region more complementary than competitive. Iraq does not necessarily have to choose between exporting oil through Turkey, Syria, or a future route toward Aqaba in Jordan. Having several outlets would increase Iraq’s resilience to disruption and strengthen its bargaining position over transit fees. The same logic applies to Saudi Arabia. A direct oil pipeline to the Mediterranean Sea would not replace its large East-West pipeline to Yanbu in the Red Sea. It would provide an alternative option during a crisis,

such as when the [Houthis disrupt passage through the Bab el Mandeb](#) Strait, and reduce dependence on individual maritime or overland routes.

Similarly, new oil pipelines through Syria should not be viewed by Israel as competitors to the IMEC initiative, since the original IMEC concept did not include an oil pipeline. Its proposed energy infrastructure instead included electricity connectivity and, in the longer term, a pipeline for green hydrogen. An Iraqi oil pipeline to Baniyas, or a future Gulf oil connection through Syria, would therefore be more likely to operate in parallel with IMEC than to compete directly with it.

Rather than seek to compete with Syria over oil pipelines, Israel should focus on the potential for future connectivity with Syrian routes. Israel does not need to insist that Iraqi or Gulf pipelines physically cross Israeli territory from either Syria or Jordan, but it can eventually obtain access to them through either a physical connection, a maritime route, or commercial swaps.

One physical option is a connection through Jordan. Iraq and Jordan [have long discussed an oil pipeline toward Aqaba](#), generally at a capacity of around one million barrels per day. Aqaba sits next to Israel's Eilat oil terminal, [which is connected by EAPC's pipeline](#) to Ashkelon on the Mediterranean coast. A direct connection between an Iraqi-Jordanian pipeline and Israeli infrastructure is politically unrealistic today, particularly given Iraq's position toward Israel, but the close geographic proximity demonstrates why Israel should think about future interoperability rather than exclusive ownership of corridors.

A second option would be for Israel to gain access to oil export terminals in Lebanon and Syria for direct maritime trade and deliveries to Israeli terminals. This would provide Israel with another oil route from the East that does not depend on Turkey as the main transit state, as is currently the case with Azerbaijani and Kazakhstani oil supplies to Israel and past oil supplies from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. In addition, Israeli EAPC infrastructure in Ashkelon and Eilat could provide oil storage and transit services for Gulf clients, as it already does for several international customers moving crude between the Mediterranean and Asia markets.

One possibility to facilitate such trade would involve commercial swaps rather than a physical connection. Reciprocal arrangements could develop in which Israeli gas and electricity support Syrian and Lebanese energy security while Israel enjoys access to oil imports via sea originating in Syrian and Lebanese terminals. If Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon establish a large Mediterranean oil network, Israel would not need to become a formal partner in the trade but can leave open the possibility of swaps, terminal arrangements, or branch connections if regional politics improve in the future.

This approach also fits Israel's broader interests. [Repeated disruptions to Israeli gas production](#) and to maritime chokepoints for oil deliveries during the past three years have demonstrated the danger of relying too heavily on a small number of energy supply routes. Israel's neighbors are responding by diversifying their own supply options, and Israel should do the same. Most of Israel's oil imports currently [depend on transit through Turkey](#), either through the Ceyhan terminal or the Turkish Straits, and arrive entirely by sea. A more diverse oil import network could provide Israel with additional redundancy and lower import costs.

There are, of course, many limits to this vision. Iraq does not want to publicly promote any oil infrastructure projects that may reach Israel, although Iraqi oil from the Kurdish regional government has already [reached Israel in large amounts](#) in the past. In addition, the prospect of actually constructing an oil pipeline from Iraq to Jordan is still distant due to budget constraints and bureaucratic hurdles. While the Iraqi-Syrian pipeline is considerably more advanced and enjoys international and US backing, it still needs to overcome several obstacles, such as guarantees for physical protection over hundreds of kilometers, credible payment mechanisms, and confidence that governments will honor agreements for decades. Syria does not yet meet all these conditions, Iraq faces political and security constraints, and Lebanon remains deeply unstable. A pipeline of this scale would require substantial commercial commitments, financing, and long-term security guarantees before it could be justified, and adding the possibility of an Israeli connection to the pipeline at this early stage would likely make the process more difficult.

Israel should therefore monitor the oil pipeline infrastructure now being planned in Syria and avoid policies or statements that unnecessarily turn new Syrian oil

routes into a geopolitical contest. Israel should continue to compete strongly for railways, ports, and logistics because those elements can genuinely bypass it, but should approach pipelines differently. The strategic objective should be to create as many reliable energy routes as possible and ensure that Israel can eventually connect to them.

The Eastern Mediterranean region does not need a single winning energy corridor. It needs a network of multiple routes that provide alternatives when war, political disputes, technical failures, or maritime disruptions affect one of them. The new pipelines now being considered through Syria should be seen as an opportunity for Israel. The goal should not be to force an oil pipeline to go through Israeli territory but to ensure that the regional energy network that emerges does not permanently bypass Israel as a whole.

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