

The Syrian Pipeline Game: How Turkey's Plans Affect Israel's Regional Ambitions

By [Dr. Elai Rettig](#) January 13, 2025



BESA Geo-Energy Insights No. 7, January 13, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The fall of the Assad regime in Syria has revived Turkey's plans to construct oil and gas pipelines through the country, turning it into a regional "energy corridor" for neighboring states. Some of these plans would offer the Arab Gulf States a more convenient land route for exporting energy to Europe through Turkey, posing a challenge to Israel's similar aspirations. Israel has other opportunities to export its natural gas to new markets via pipeline, but they pose the risk of undermining Israel's relationship with Greece and Cyprus. Israel should follow the "pipeline game" in Syria closely to ensure that new economic opportunities in the region don't pass it by.

The collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024 revived several Turkish-led energy infrastructure projects that had been abandoned due to the Syrian civil war. While some of these projects undermine Israel's interest in becoming an "energy corridor" between Europe and the Arab Gulf States, others have the potential to open up new markets in the region for Israeli gas and electricity exports. This article will highlight three of these potential projects and examine their implications for Israeli regional interests: 1) a joint Turkey-Qatar gas pipeline through Syria; 2) an extension of the Arab Gas Pipeline to Turkey; and 3) new oil pipelines from the Arab Gulf States to Syria to replace Iranian oil supplies.

1. The Turkey-Qatar gas pipeline project through Syria

Soon after the fall of the Assad regime, [Turkish media outlets began reporting](#) on their government's desire to revive an old plan to construct a gas pipeline between Qatar and Turkey through Syria. The pipeline was first announced in 2009 and was primarily promoted by Turkey. Qatar ultimately abandoned it due to technical and political difficulties, including the eruption of the civil war in Syria, high-profile disputes between Qatar and Saudi Arabia

and between Turkey and Assad's regime, and the crash in oil prices in 2014 that put many regional energy infrastructure plans on hold. Now that the Assad regime has fallen and relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia have warmed, Turkey is again interested in advancing the Turkey-Qatar gas pipeline project.

Proposed Turkey-Qatar gas pipeline



A joint gas pipeline with Qatar would serve several important Turkish interests. It would allow Turkey to strengthen its position as the main transit country for non-Russian gas to Europe; provide Turkey with an additional source of cheap gas to serve southeastern Turkey, which suffers from winter power outages due to unreliable supply from Iran and Iraq; and strengthen Turkish and Qatari ties with the new regime in Syria.

At this stage, there is no clear timeline for the pipeline's construction and no estimate regarding the expected capacity or cost of such a project. Qatar likely wants to wait and see that the new regime in Syria is able to gain control over the center of the country before it makes any investment decisions. As a rule, energy companies do not invest in multibillion-dollar cross-border gas pipelines if they're not certain that the transit country will remain stable and reliable for the next 10-15 years, which is the necessary period to recover a pipeline's cost. This is especially important in areas of central Syria where the proposed pipeline will need to pass – areas that are still seeing activity by ISIS and similar groups and will therefore require strong security guarantees.

In the meantime, Qatar prefers to focus on securing its maritime transport routes to Europe, as it has become a major LNG supplier to Europe following the war in Ukraine. [Qatar is also investing heavily in potential gas production projects in the Eastern Mediterranean](#), which will

give it closer access to Europe and provide it with some leverage in the ongoing Turkey-Cyprus maritime dispute. These investments include the recent acquisition of a 23% stake in an Egyptian gas field and a partnership in two new drilling operations in Cypriot waters.

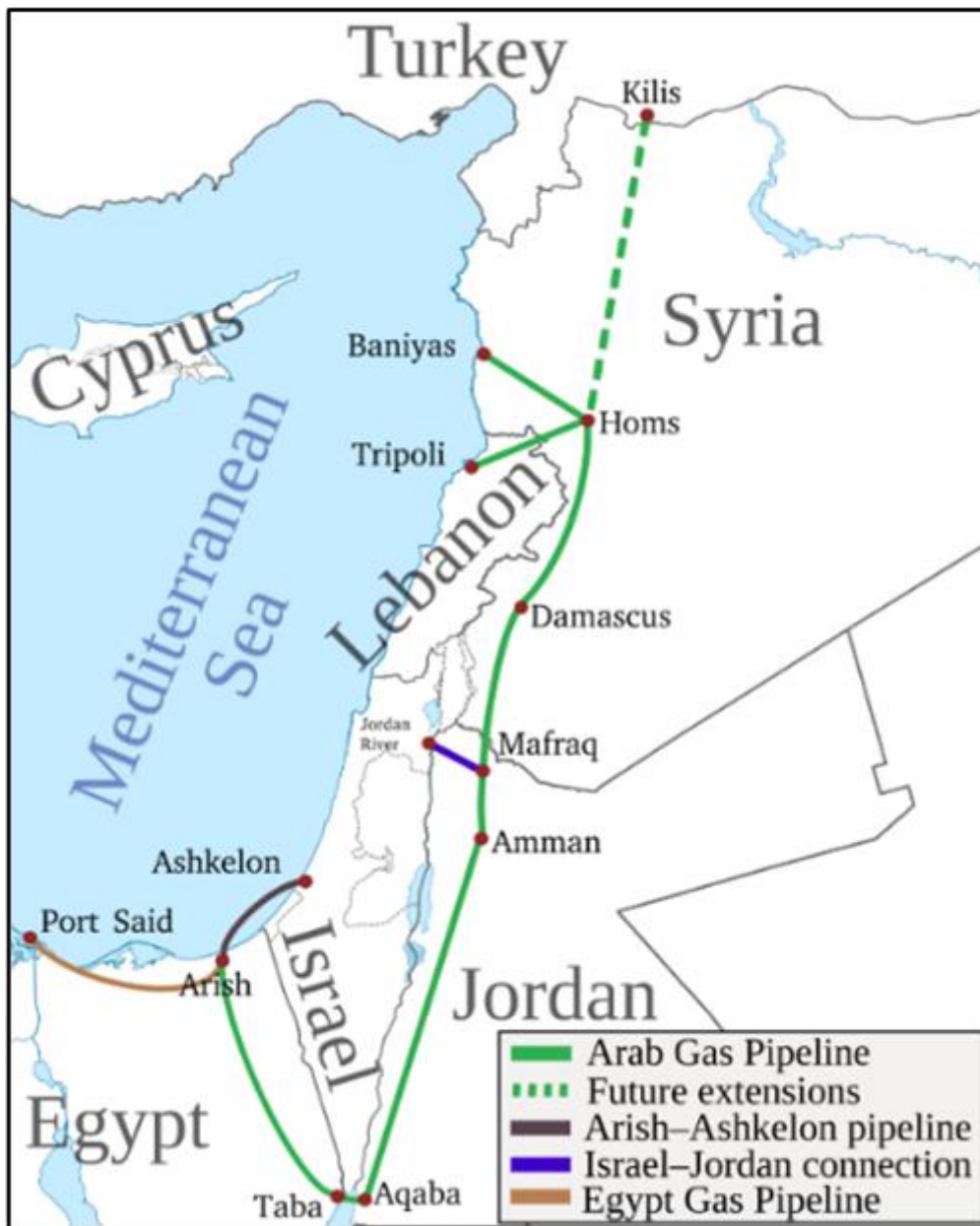
For Israel, the energy connection created between Turkey and Qatar through Syria could undermine some of its own ambitions to become part of an economic corridor between Europe and the Arab Gulf States, also known as the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC). If a new gas pipeline between Qatar and Turkey is successfully established, it will be much easier to supplement that route with additional infrastructure, such as roads, rails, and electricity cables. It would thus be easier for the UAE and other Arab Gulf States to connect to it and export dry gas and other products to Europe through Turkey than to construct a brand-new corridor through Jordan and Israel to reach the Eastern Mediterranean.

While it is clear that the UAE won't want to depend on Qatar or Turkey as transit partners, their appeal as an alternative will grow for the UAE so long as the war in Gaza continues and Israel's status as an island of regional stability continues to erode. Israel should be mindful that the continuation of the war and subsequent delays to Saudi-Israeli normalization could eventually lead to a point where a lucrative regional economic plan completely bypasses Israel on its way to Europe. Israel should [continue to promote the idea of an East-Mediterranean corridor with Cyprus and Greece](#), especially to potential investors in Europe and the US, as an essential component of regional economic plans.

2. Turkish connection to the Arab Gas Pipeline in Syria

While Turkey's pipeline plans with Qatar may undermine Israeli interests, another Turkish plan might help Israel open up new markets for its natural gas exports. Over the past month, Turkey has been reexamining the possibility of [connecting to the Arab Gas Pipeline](#) through its mostly neglected section in Syria. [The Arab Gas Pipeline](#), inaugurated in 2003, was initially designed to allow Egypt to export natural gas northward to Jordan and Syria. Plans to extend the pipeline further to Turkey were signed in 2006 and 2008 but abandoned in 2009, primarily due to financial disputes and the fact that Egypt was running out of gas to export. Today, the pipeline mainly serves Israel, as it transits Israeli gas to Jordan and southward to Egypt while the Syrian section remains unused. The pipeline can transfer about 10 BCM of natural gas annually, but this amount can be increased to 15 BCM, given pipeline upgrades with additional compression stations.

The Arab Gas Pipeline



Source: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Gas_Pipeline)

If Turkey does in fact connect to the Arab Gas Pipeline in its Syrian section, Israel could theoretically transit gas northward through Jordan to Turkey and from there to Europe (either directly or through swap deals). Such a plan is not likely to occur without a significant improvement in Israel-Turkey diplomatic relations, as well as normalization between Israel and the new regime in Syria. But even if none of those things occurs, Israeli gas can still reach Turkey if Jordan or Egypt serves as an “end user” for Israeli gas that they then sell onward to Turkey. A similar arrangement [has existed over the past two years](#): Israeli gas is exported to Egypt, which then liquefies it and exports it to Turkey and other destinations.

There is a snag, however. Any arrangement Israel creates to sell dry gas by pipeline to Turkey, even indirectly, could be perceived by Cyprus and Greece as undermining their interests with Israel. Additionally, the new pipeline connection might undermine some of the goals of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). The Turkish plan to connect to the Arab Gas Pipeline in Syria is only one of several plans for major infrastructure connections between the two

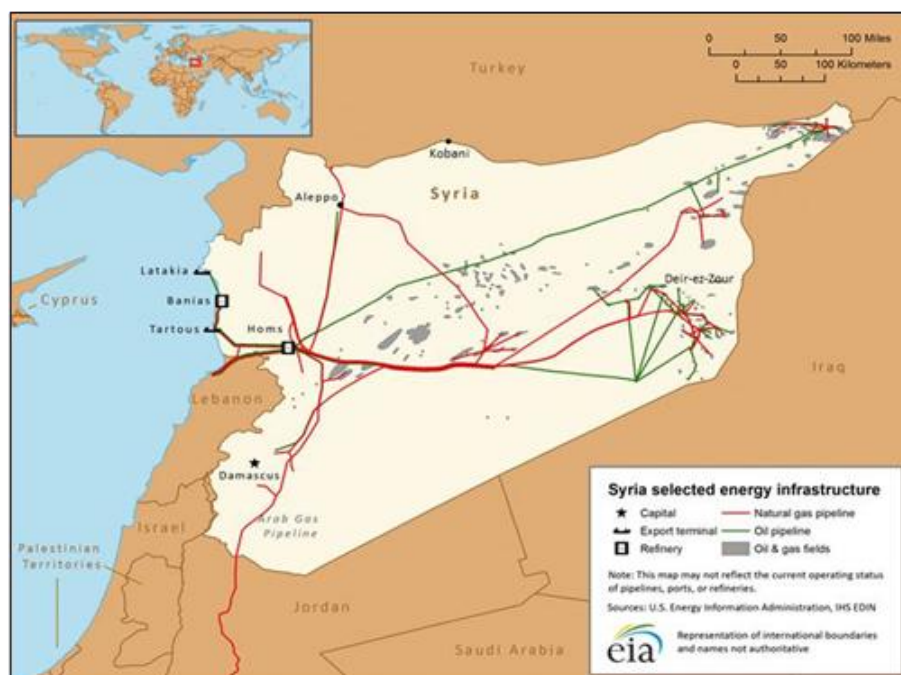
countries. Turkish officials have already discussed projects that advance cross-border road, rail, and communication infrastructure with the new Syrian regime. Such projects would further cement Turkey's influence in Syria and could provide Ankara with several benefits. One would be the drafting of [a new maritime border agreement](#) between Turkey and Syria that would challenge Cyprus's maritime claims and undermine cooperation in the EMGF.

Israel should take steps to assuage such concerns from Cyprus and Greece. It should make clear that any opportunity Israel may have to export gas through Turkey would not contradict its plans to advance joint infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean. Even if the pipeline plans in Syria materialize, Israeli gas companies won't want to rely on Syria and Turkey as the main transit countries for their gas and would only use it cautiously and in limited amounts. Moreover, Israeli energy companies are not keen to rely on Egypt and Jordan as end users to sell Israeli gas to Turkey, partly over debt payment issues. They would still prefer a more direct route to new markets to diversify their portfolio, such as a joint LNG project with Cyprus.

3. Non-Iranian oil pipelines and electricity connections to Syria

The new regime in Syria has energy interests beyond using the country as a transit area for gas pipelines. Syria is in desperate need of a stable supply of oil now that it is without a regular supply of Iranian crude oil and fuels. During Assad's regime, Syria received about 90% of its oil supply from Iran (60,000-70,000 barrels per day), with another 10% coming from local Syrian oil fields. In addition, Hezbollah smuggled fuel to Syria through Lebanon (despite Lebanon's own problems with severe oil shortages). Syria's new reality is very different. Immediately following the collapse of Assad's regime, Iran cut off all oil shipments to Syria. At the same time, [Israel bombed Hezbollah's smuggling routes to Syria](#), thereby preventing fuel from being smuggled in from Lebanon.

Oil and Gas Pipelines in Syria



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

Under these new circumstances, Syria is now seeking cooperation agreements to receive regular oil supplies from one or more of its neighbors. The most immediate means would be cross-border truck shipments, which are expensive and infrequent. In the long term, Syria will seek new pipeline projects to ensure a consistent flow. The most obvious source would be the existing oil pipeline between Syria and Kirkuk in Iraq, which stopped operations in the 1980s and would require rehabilitation. However, those oil fields are now under the control of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, which might provoke opposition from Turkey.

Additionally, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia are all examining the possibility of becoming Syria's new oil supplier as part of the regional game to gain a political foothold with the new Syrian regime. In the coming months, we should expect to see many movements in this direction. Saudi Arabia is highly motivated to supply oil to Syria instead of Qatar and possibly thwart other Qatari plans to strengthen its presence in Syria together with Turkey.

It seems that at this stage, Israel has not yet made a clear decision regarding the nature of its relationship with the new regime in Syria. This is understandable, considering the numerous political scenarios that could still occur in Syria that would completely change existing calculations. However, in terms of potential, a normalization agreement between Israel and Syria could open new energy routes and economic opportunities for Israel, including natural gas exports, assistance in oil supply, the establishment of joint wind turbines in the Golan Heights, and more. If Israel is slow to react to developments surrounding new energy infrastructure in Syria, especially those led by Turkey, it might lose a valuable economic and political opportunity to become an integral part of a new regional energy corridor.

[view pdf](#)

Dr. Elai Rettig is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Studies and a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. He specializes in energy geopolitics and national security.