Syria’s ports surge back to life as sanctions ease and regional trade shifts

- *Syrian port calls hit post-war highs as sanctions ease and trade returns*
- *Iraqi fuel oil exports via Syria boost tanker volumes amid Hormuz disruption*
- *Russian oil and grain shipments rise as major port investments gather pace*

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Sanctions relief, infrastructure investment and Iraq’s efforts to bypass Strait of Hormuz disruption have combined to drive a sharp rebound in Syrian seaborne trade, with port calls reaching their highest levels since the end of the country’s civil war

CMA CGM HAS CONTINUED ITS WORK ON A €200M MODERNISATION OF LATAKIA PORT’S CONTAINER TERMINAL. *Source: Getty Images/ OMAR HAJ KADOUR*

SYRIAN ports are experiencing an unprecedented recovery as the country emerges from more than a decade of conflict, drawing increasing volumes of oil, grain and container traffic, while attracting investment from some of the shipping industry’s biggest operators.

Lloyd’s List Intelligence data shows 376 vessel calls at Syrian ports in the second quarter of 2026, up 101% year on year. Deadweight tonnage surged 172%, while first-quarter calls rose 221% compared with the same period in 2025. July alone recorded 146 port calls and more than 3.8m dwt, the highest monthly figure since the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

The rebound reflects a convergence of factors: the gradual lifting of Western sanctions, major port infrastructure upgrades, the reopening of regional trade links and shifting energy flows triggered by the conflict in the Middle East Gulf.

Iraqi oil alternative route

One of the most striking developments has been Syria’s emergence as an alternative export route for Iraqi fuel oil. Following severe disruption in the Strait of Hormuz earlier this year, Iraq began trucking thousands of loads of high-sulphur fuel oil across the reopened Syrian border for export through Banias.

According to Vortexa senior market analyst Xavier Tang, fuel oil dominated Syrian oil exports during the second quarter, with cargoes re-exported from Banias and Tartous to destinations across the Mediterranean and beyond.

The surge in ballast tanker arrivals at Syrian ports is at least partly related to the disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.

For Baghdad, trucking fuel oil across Syria provides a workaround for volumes that cannot easily reach global markets via the MEG. Several tankers loaded at Banias have subsequently sailed to destinations including the US and Asia, highlighting Syria’s growing role as a Mediterranean outlet for Iraqi energy exports.

“For Iraq, trucking oil to Syria is one of its workarounds to get some volumes it’s unable to export via the Strait of Hormuz to global markets via alternative routes. Trucked oil, however, is logistically challenging,” Noam Raydan, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy told Lloyd’s List.

Syria’s seaborne trade between July 2024 - Ju 2026

Source: Lloyd’s List Intelligence / Seasearcher
Note: Only cargo carrying vessels included in this analysis

Lloyd’s List

While exports are booming, import trends have become more nuanced. Braemar data shows Syrian oil imports averaged 88,000 barrels per day in the second quarter, down 28% from the previous quarter. However, imports remain well above 2025 levels, largely due to increased deliveries of Russian crude and refined products.

Russia accounted for roughly half of Syria's oil and gas imports during the first quarter, according to Braemar senior tanker analyst Mary Melton.

According to Lloyd's List Intelligence data, the number of crude tanker arrivals rose from a single vessel in the second quarter of 2025 to 14 during the same period this year, while gas carrier calls quintupled year on year.

Russian crude shipments have become a critical source of supply for Syria's recovering energy sector. Several sanctioned tankers linked to Russia's shadow fleet* have delivered cargoes to Banias and Tartous in recent months, underlining Moscow's continuing influence despite Assad's departure.

That influence extends beyond energy.

Grain shipments from Russia have also rebounded sharply, approaching levels last seen during the civil war.

Syria was a depot for the grain coming from the silos or farms of the occupied Ukrainian territories that Russia was exporting during the civil war as Russia was the strongest ally and supporter of the former president Bashar al-Assad.

After he was toppled in December 2024, the volume of grain coming from Russia dropped first, but it has since recovered.

Syrian cargoship allowed to depart Lebanon after detention

By Nidaa Bakhsh and Bridget Diakun

05 Aug 2022

The cargoship, accused of carrying stolen food from Ukraine, has been cleared to sail and was heading to its final destination in Tartus, Syria

Read the full article here ›

Bulk carrier calls jumped from four in the first quarter of 2025 to 61 during the same period this year, supported by renewed trade links between Moscow and Damascus.

Analysts say Russia has been keen to preserve its strategic footprint in Syria by supplying agricultural commodities alongside oil products. The trade is increasingly connected to plans for a Russian-backed logistics hub at Tartous capable of handling up to 250,000 tonnes of cargo per month.

Syria port calls based on sectors between Q1 2024 - Q2 2026

Source: Lloyd’s List Intelligence / Seasearcher
Note: Traceable port calls of cargo-carrying vessels over 10,000 dwt.

The recovery is also becoming visible in the container sector. Containership calls almost doubled year on year in the second quarter, rising to 73 vessels from 40 in the same period of 2025. Significantly, the growth is no longer being driven solely by regional operators.

CMA CGM accounted for 16 of those calls as it continues work on a €200m ($231.6m) modernisation and expansion of Latakia’s container terminal. Meanwhile, DP World has begun implementing an $800m investment programme at Tartous under a 30-year concession agreement, with new cargo-handling equipment already arriving at the port.

The infrastructure upgrades are arriving just as sanctions risk perceptions begin to ease.

The US is expected to complete the formal removal of Syria’s State Sponsor of Terrorism designation after August 22, removing another obstacle for banks, insurers and shipping companies considering a return to the market.

Industry lawyers say the process is as much psychological as legal. After years of sanctions volatility, shipowners, financiers and traders are gradually becoming more confident that Syria’s reopening will endure.

“With every month that passes since the removal of the comprehensive sanctions programmes it becomes easier to expect that this unwinding may remain in place and not ‘snap back’”, explained DJ Wolff, co-chair of Crowell & Moring’s International Trade Group.

Expansion of Syria’s Lattakia port to accelerate with new agreement

By Ece Göksedef

21 Aug 2025

The agreement with French CMA CGM Group will accelerate the second phase of Lattakia port project to extend and update the port’s capacity

Read the full article here ›

Given how often sanctioned jurisdictions relapse after a sanctions relaxation and have at least some number of sanctions reimposed on them (for example, Myanmar, Sudan and Iran), the market is often skittish in re-entering a newly opening market.

“The longer relaxations remain in place, the more participants become willing to trust the legal changes and dip their toes into the commercial opportunity,” said Wolff.

That confidence is increasingly visible in the traffic figures. For the first time since the civil war, Syrian ports are not merely recovering lost volumes. They are becoming part of new regional supply chains, linking Iraqi fuel exports, Russian commodities and Mediterranean trade flows through a country once largely isolated from international shipping.

* Lloyd’s List Intelligence defines a tanker as being part of the Shadow Fleet if it engages in one c deceptive shipping practices indicating that it is involved in the facilitation of sanctioned oil cargo Iran, Russia or Venezuela. Or it is sanctioned for participation in sanctioned oil trades or is sancti links to a company that is sanctioned for facilitating the export of sanctioned oil. Or it participates cargo delivery where at some point over the course of the delivery one party in the chain engage or more deceptive shipping practices.
Lloyd’s List Intelligence defines an LPG carrier as being part of the LPG Shadow Fleet if it engag or more deceptive shipping practices, or if it is sanctioned by the US, UK or EU.
Seasearcher subscribers can activate the Shadow Fleet list by clicking the link above.