



**Gulf Research Center**  
Knowledge for All

**Even with the Reopening of Hormuz  
More Oil Export Pipelines are Urgently  
Needed in the Gulf**

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The major crisis in the Gulf since late February 2026 and the threat of open-ended Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz clearly shows the need for the Arab oil producers in the region to keep emergency measures ready to be executed if and when their crude exports through the Strait of Hormuz are blocked for any possible reason.

In fact, the Gulf oil producers should keep, build, and expand alternative outlets to Hormuz for their exports, which should be ready to be securely activated as quickly as possible, and have adequate and sustainable capacity to accommodate as much export volumes as possible.

Over the years, some oil exporters in the region, notably Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have built many alternate export outlets aimed at bypassing the vulnerable Strait of Hormuz. Those oil exporters are now increasing shipments from alternative routes, but the total volumes are far from enough to offset the entire drop from the crisis-hit strait. Only Saudi Arabia is currently capable of channelling its entire crude oil exports without passing through the strait.

Other oil producers in the Gulf either have no export outlets outside Hormuz, such as Kuwait and Qatar, where the full crude capacities are stacked without any possibility to go around the vulnerable strait or, as in Oman, oil loading and export terminals are located in strategic locations outside Hormuz, with major facilities on the Gulf of Oman (Ras Markaz) and the Arabian Sea (Mina Al-Fahal and Mina Al-Duqm).

New pipelines may actually be the only way to reduce the enduring vulnerability of Gulf countries to disruption in Hormuz, even though such projects would be expensive, politically complex, and take years to complete. In addition, such pipelines would be vulnerable and subject to closure and pumping disturbances, comparable to the fate of many crude pipelines in the region, especially those crossing more than one border.



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## Reopening and Rehabilitating Existing Oil Pipelines

With the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the current conflict has underscored the strategic value of **Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline, also known as Petroline**. The Kingdom eagerly started channeling almost all its crude exports through Petroline which runs from the Eastern Province across the width of the Arabian Peninsula to the Yanbu terminal on the Red Sea. Petroline is 1,200-km long, 48-inch in diameter, and has a nominal capacity of 5 million barrels per day (b/d) which could well be expanded to 7 million b/d.

Petroline was built during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War to secure outlets other than the Gulf, and to lessen the Kingdom's dependence on the Strait of Hormuz. At one time, the line was converted to carry natural gas to power plants in the Kingdom's Western Province, but was then switched back again to pump crude oil.

In addition to the East-West pipeline, Saudi Arabia could hypothetically use other alternative export outlets, such as the old Iraqi Pipeline through Saudi Arabia (IPSA) and the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline).

The 1.65-million b/d, 1,380-km, 48/56-inch **Iraqi Pipeline through Saudi Arabia (IPSA)** which originally travelled from the Al-Zubair field in southern Iraq through Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port of Mu'ajjiz, just north of Yanbu, was built in 1987 after Iraqi oil tankers were attacked in the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War. However, the line has not carried Iraqi crude since Baghdad invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Riyadh subsequently confiscated IPSA in 2001 as compensation for debts owed by Baghdad.

In the early years of the new century, the Saudi government used IPSA to transport gas to power plants in its western provinces. However, concerns over the potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz led Riyadh in 2012 to pump test volumes of crude through the pipeline. Then, in 2018 Saudi Arabia announced serious plans to use IPSA and the Mu'ajjiz terminal to export its oil through the Red Sea.



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Although the Kingdom seldom used IPSA to pump its crude, the pipeline provides more strategic flexibility and hedge against disruptions around Hormuz by giving Riyadh scope to export more of its crude from Red Sea terminals. In a related context, the Iraqi government declared in March 2026 its intention to begin serious talks with the Saudi authorities on the possibility of using of IPSA for pumping Iraqi crude.



## The Saudi Oil Pipelines

The **Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline)** could, if and when reopened, hypothetically add more, although modest, potential for exporting Saudi crude. Tapline was built in 1950 from the Saudi Eastern Province to the Lebanese Zahrani terminal on the Mediterranean coast. The 500,000-b/d, 1,213-km, 30/36-inch pipeline was an important factor in the global trade of petroleum, as well as in American-Middle Eastern political relations. Tapline, as well as the Iraqi lines through Syria and Lebanon, were priceless during the closure of the Suez Canal between 1967 and 1975. However, with the introduction of supertankers, shipping regained some of its economic advantages.

Tapline was built and operated by the Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company (TAP), now a fully-owned subsidiary of Saudi Aramco. It largely ceased functioning in 1983 as a result of the exorbitant



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fees on the pipeline's oil imposed by the transit countries, and Syria in particular, which undermined the line's economic value, before completely stopping operation in 1990. According to sources at Saudi Aramco, the pipeline is still in excellent condition having been regularly and amply maintained and cathodically protected, whereas the its communication system would require some modernization in order to bring it up to date on the latest technological developments. In addition, the pumping stations need some rehabilitation work if the pipeline is to pump again at its top nominal capacity, especially since they have been idle for over 35 years.

The Tapline corridor remains a potential direct export route for Saudi oil to Europe. Transportation costs of exporting oil via Tapline to markets there would actually cost up to 40 percent less than shipping by tanker through the Suez Canal.

In the UAE, the **Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline (ADCOP)** from the Habshan onshore field in Abu Dhabi to the Emirate of Fujairah on the Gulf of Oman has proven during the current crisis to be of strategic importance. The 370-km, 1.5-million b/d, 48-inch pipeline was built in 2012 in order to increase the security of supply and reduce the transportation of Emirati oil through the Strait of Hormuz. The pipeline's utilization has recently increased by using its spare capacity to reach a total flow of around 1.8 million b/d, allowing Abu Dhabi to channel around 66 percent of its total current crude exports.

In the near term, a viable and strategic option for Abu Dhabi may be to expand ADCOP, by both building a parallel line and doubling its total capacity, and alternatively extend it to the Omani Port of Duqm while increasing its daily capacity by between 1-1.5 million barrels. This would expand the Emirate's export capacity without the complications of new cross-border infrastructure.



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### The Habshan-Fujairah (ADCOP) Pipeline

In Iraq, the Gulf crisis pushed the government to reuse its 1.6-million b/d, 46-inch dual pipeline from the Kirkuk field in the north to the Turkish Ceyhan terminal on the Mediterranean which was built in the 1970s and 1980s. Only minor volumes (between 200,000 and 500,000 b/d) are currently pumped through this pipeline, given its need for massive rehabilitation. In addition, Baghdad needs to reach an agreement with the autonomous Kurdistan authorities to facilitate piped oil exports to Ceyhan which passes through Kurdish regions. Furthermore, Iraq should rehabilitate the Strategic Pipeline which links its prolific southern fields (around 80 percent of the total Iraqi oil production) with the transportation system in the central and northern parts of the country, allowing the full utilization of the pipeline to Ceyhan.



### The Kirkuk-Ceyhan Pipeline



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**The Strategic (or the Rumaila-Haditha) Pipeline** which was built in 1975, consists of a 42-inch, 670-km dual line for pumping oil with a capacity of 980,000 b/d when running south and 900,000 b/d if crude is transported north. Considering its deteriorating condition, the Iraqi government recently decided to massively rehabilitate the pipeline and increase its daily capacity to 2.25 million barrels. It is worth mentioning that the International Energy Agency (IEA) recently proposed to assist Iraq in rebuilding the line, while repeatedly raising the possibility of extending the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline to Basrah.



### Extension of the Ceyhan-Kirkuk Pipeline to Basrah

Overall, the rehabilitation and expansion of the Strategic Pipeline is a critical requirement if Iraq wants to reopen other oil export outlets which remain closed for various reasons.

One of those outlets is the **old IPC (Iraq Petroleum Company) oil pipeline from the Kirkuk field to the Mediterranean Syrian terminal of Banias, together with a branch line to the loading facility at the Lebanese port of Tripoli.** The 700,000-b/d, 880-km, 12/16/30-inch Kirkuk-Banias/Tripoli pipeline which was completed in 1952, repeatedly fell (and is still) victim to Iraqi-Syrian antagonism

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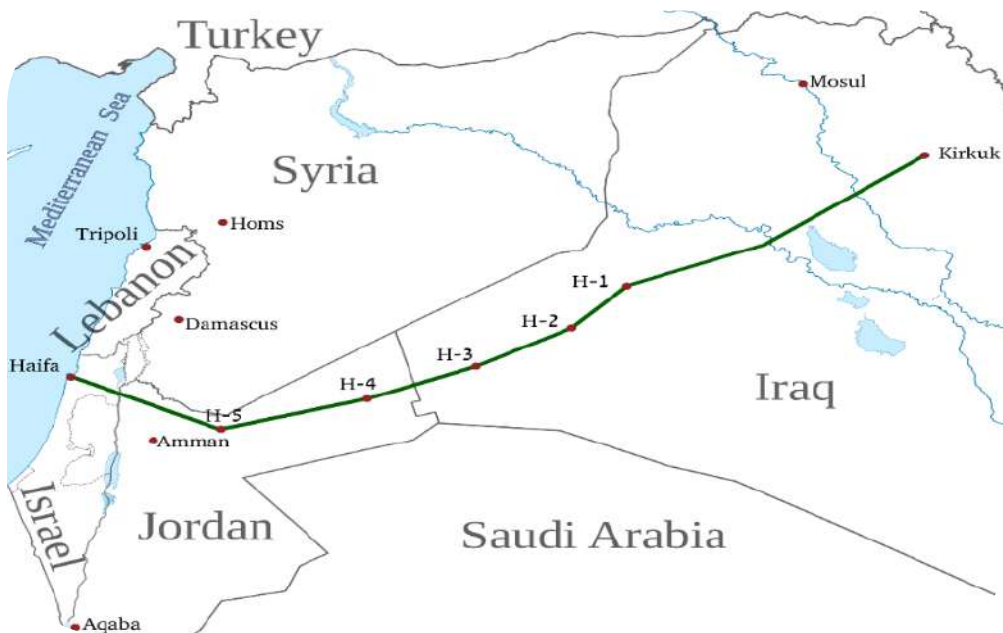


which resulted in its closure since April 1982. Recent rumors were heard of the possible rehabilitation and reopening of the pipeline following the 2024 radical change in the Syrian regime, although no concrete steps have been taken in this direction since then.

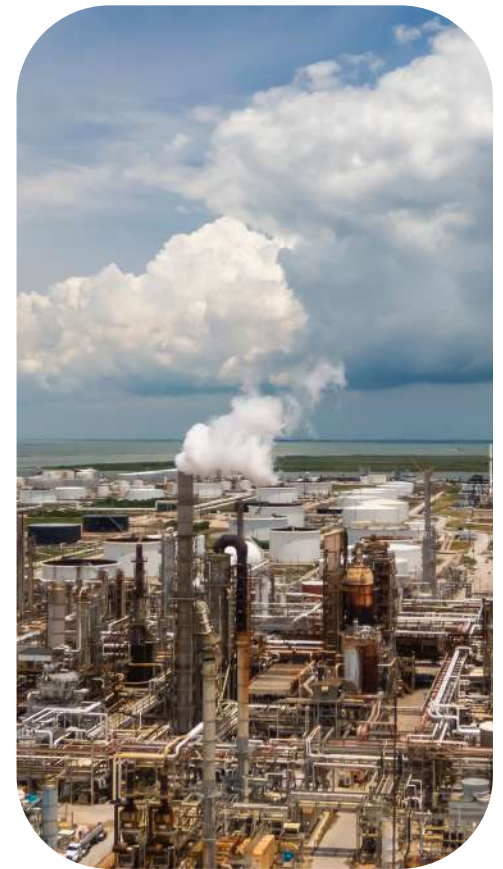


### The Kirkuk-Banias Pipeline

Another pipeline that could well be revived if and when the peace prevails between Israel and its Arab neighbors is the **IPC line** built in 1932 **from Kirkuk to the Mediterranean port of Haifa** (now in Israel/Occupied Palestine). With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the small pipeline (12 inch in diameter, 1,000-km long, and 100,000-b/d of capacity) was permanently closed. Although the pipe itself was completely dismantled, the route of the line could well be used again in the future.



### The Kirkuk-Haifa Pipeline



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## New Oil Pipeline Projects

It is clear that in the Gulf only Saudi Arabia currently has the capacity to entirely export its crude without passing through the Strait of Hormuz, while the UAE and Iraq are able to channel only part of their oil exports through alternative outlets bypassing Hormuz. On the other hand, Kuwaiti and Qatari crudes are stacked in their fields without any possibility of circumventing the vulnerable strait, as there is no pipeline capable of transporting Kuwaiti or Qatari oil.

With the aim of addressing this gap, a **New Coastal Pipeline project** was recently proposed for connecting Gulf oil production directly to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean by building one of the largest and most ambitious infrastructure projects in the history of the region. The proposed 2,400-km pipeline would run from Kuwait fields to a loading terminal at Salalah in Oman, passing through Ras Tanura in Saudi Arabia, Qatar's Ras Laffan, Abu Dhabi, and Fujairah. The choice of Salalah is a strategic decision: It sits on the Arabian Sea outside Hormuz and well away from any direct threat to Gulf shipping lanes, and offers a shorter shipping route to Asian markets compared to Fujairah.

The New Coastal Pipeline, which would have a capacity of between 3 and 5 million b/d at a total cost of around US\$15-25 billion, shall be sponsored by the main national oil companies in the region, including Kuwait's KPC, Saudi Aramco, QatarEnergy, and Abu Dhabi's ADNOC. The project could be built in 7 to 10 years after the finalisation of all needed commercial agreements and political arrangements.



**The New Coastal Pipeline**



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Actually, the greatest challenge for such projects is not technical but political: The pipeline requires an unprecedented multi-party consensus among five sovereign states on cost-sharing, transit fees, pumping rights, and governance. In addition, this project as well as other pipelines running south would face the difficulty of passing through both desert and hard-rock mountains in Oman to reach ports on its coasts. Those ports have recently proven not to be immune from security threats, especially drone attacks.

In another similar development, the US Baker Institute in Houston suggested in April 2026 another strategic project, the **Gulf Super Express Pipeline**, which is designed to mitigate the risks of bottlenecks in the Strait of Hormuz for crude oil shipments from the region.

The Gulf Super Express Pipeline would consist of two 56-inch lines with a combined daily capacity of 10 million barrels, stretching for around 1,800 kilometers from southern Iraq to Omani oil loading terminals at Duqm and Salalah, after passing through Kuwait and along the Gulf coast to collect oil from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It is estimated to cost about US\$55 billion, including the financial expenditures and those for building oil loading terminals in Oman. The proposed pipeline which would face the same challenges of the suggested New Coastal Pipeline, would need five to seven years to be built.

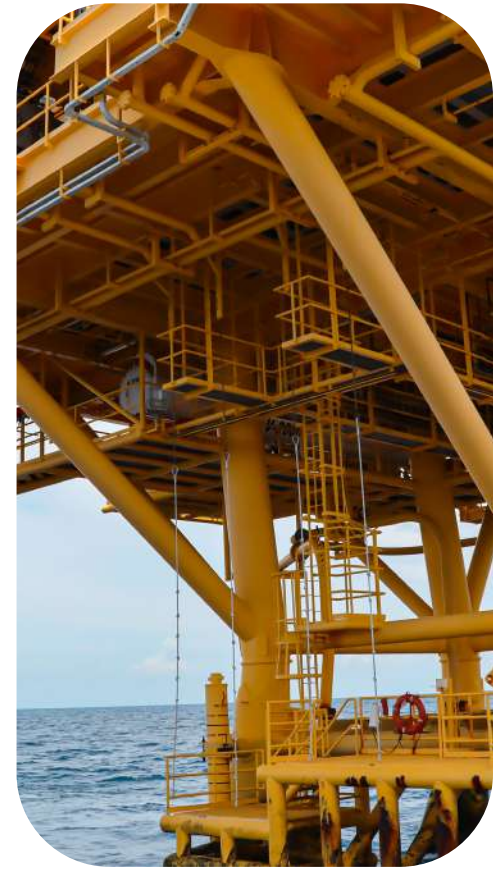


**The Gulf Super Express Pipeline**



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Another new pipeline project that could well be reconsidered is the **Iraq-Jordan Crude Oil Pipeline**, also known as the **Basrah-Aqaba Pipeline**. The 1,665-km pipeline is designed to transport up to one million b/d of crude oil to Jordan, with one section running from Basrah to Haditha in Iraq and another one extending from Haditha to an oil loading terminal at Aqaba on the Red Sea, including a tie-in connection to the Jordanian oil refinery at Zarqa.



## The Basrah-Aqaba Pipeline

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The major crisis in the Gulf since late February 2026 and the threat of open-ended Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz clearly shows the need for the Arab oil producers in the region to keep emergency measures ready to be executed if and when their exports through Hormuz are blocked for any possible reason.

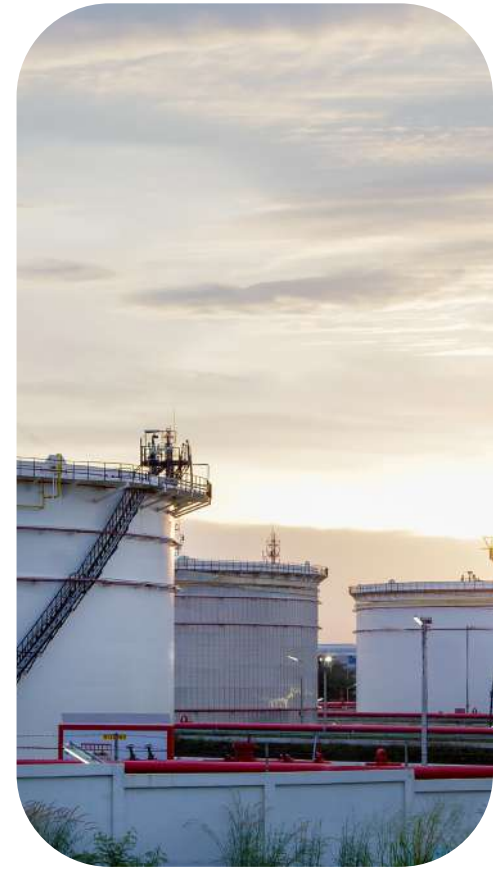
Few oil exporters in the region, notably Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE which have over the years built many alternates export outlets aimed at bypassing the vulnerable Hormuz, are now increasing shipments from alternative routes, but the total exported volumes are far from enough to offset the entire drop from the crisis-hit strait. Only Saudi Arabia is currently capable of channelling its entire crude

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oil exports without passing through the Strait. Other oil producers in the Gulf, such as Kuwait and Qatar, have no export outlets outside Hormuz.

In addition to rehabilitating and reopening existing pipelines, serious efforts must be made to establish new pipelines that meet the export requirements of all Gulf Arab states, which may be the only way to reduce the enduring vulnerability of these countries to disruption in Hormuz, even though such projects would be vulnerable and subject to closure and pumping disturbance, in addition to being costly, politically complex, and requiring years to complete. Nevertheless, even if the current Hormuz crisis is resolved, the Arab Gulf oil exporters have an urgent need to implement such measures, use them fully, and keep them ready for any emergency situation that may arise.

Such proactive efforts should be made at both national and regional levels, with an important coordination role that could well be played by the Gulf Cooperation Council for the sake of all its member states, or by other regional bodies that involve most, if not all, the countries of the Middle East, with the aim of ensuring and guaranteeing the necessary commercial agreements and political arrangements on all related issues, such as cost-sharing, pumping and transmission rights, transit fees, and governance.



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