

Syria Smarting From Russian Fuel Shutoff

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Assad supporters in Damascus celebrating Putin's inauguration Monday. **Khaled al-Hariri**

LONDON — Syria is facing a halt in imports of diesel needed to power heavy vehicles including army tanks, as a stream of shipments from Russia and other sources has dried up over the past four weeks, industry sources say.

Ordinary Syrians have been grappling with fuel supply shortages for months as Western sanctions prompted most European oil firms to drop trade with Syria. The halt in Russian supplies could exacerbate the pain already felt by many struggling to make a living with limited access to fuel and power.

Thousands of people have been killed in Syria during a yearlong popular revolt against President Bashar Assad's rule, a conflict in which the military's use of heavy vehicles has been prominent.

Shortages of gas oil, which can be marketed as diesel, are already hurting local industries. In the northeast, for instance, agriculture is suffering because farmers have been unable to secure fuel for tractors and other agricultural machinery.

"We can't farm because they've cut off the electricity and they haven't been distributing fuel. So we can't use our farming equipment, for example. We've lost our livelihood," said Melhem, a farmer from Hasakeh.

As many as nine cargoes of gas oil were delivered per month this year according to data from a shipper — mainly from Russian ports — but also from political allies Iran and Venezuela. Average cargoes contain about 30,000 tons of fuel.

However, in the past four weeks, not one shipment of gas oil has reached Syria's oil ports Baniyas and Tartus, according to industry sources.

Industry sources say the last shipment of refined oil seen to reach Syria was delivered from Russia aboard the Cape Benat on April 11.

The transaction was handled by Galaxy, a Monaco-based shipper, which said a tightening of EU sanctions in March had forced the firm to cut ties with Syria's distribution company Mahrukat.

The EU's move also forced Greek company Naftomar, previously a mainstay of Syrian imports, to halt deliveries of the heating fuel liquefied petroleum gas used in Syrian homes and businesses.

LPG imports are seen as peaceful because they play a vital role in regions with limited infrastructure for piping gas, and a Naftomar director said in April that the stoppage would make it difficult for Syrians to cook and keep themselves warm.

Six cargoes of LPG were delivered to Syria in March, but no further imports of the fuel have been seen since and trade sources say shortages are getting worse.

An Iranian tanker in late March reached Syria with a cargo of gas oil, and left in April with a cargo of Syrian gasoline, in what appeared to be an exchange of refined oil products between allies.

It is not clear why Iranian shipments have also dried up, although Iran is also grappling with Western sanctions and many of its oil tankers are being used to store unsold crude oil.

Venezuela's government confirmed that it had sent at least two shipments of fuel to Syria in February, but has not sent any since.

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