

Russia Eyes Mid-July Start for Commercial Logistics Hub at Syrian Port, Officials Say

By [Reuters](#)

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A general view of the Russian Navy facility in Syria's coastal Tartus, Syria, Dec. 14, 2024. **REUTERS/Umit Bektas/File Photo**

Russia hopes by mid-July to have a commercial logistics hub up and running in one of two berths at the naval base it leases in the Syrian port of Tartus, while keeping a military presence at the other, Syrian officials told Reuters.

The hub will handle a wide range of Russian goods including wheat and grains, and target initial cargo volumes of around 250,000 metric tons per month, one of the officials said.

The project, the officials said, is central to Russian efforts to maintain and expand its influence in Syria through economic channels, after the overthrow of former President Bashar al-Assad in 2024 deprived Moscow of its staunchest ally in the Middle East.

But much more than business is at stake, with a battle for influence under way as Washington seeks ways to ensure not only that Syria awards contracts to U.S. companies but also curbs Moscow's military presence.

Syria's General Authority for Ports and Customs did not respond to a request for comment before publication of this article. After publication, Mazen Alloush, the authority's spokesman, denied Russia would operate a commercial logistics hub at the port, describing such reports as “entirely false.” Any projects or agreements concerning Syria's ports and border crossings would be announced only through official government channels, he said.

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Moscow has backed Syria for decades and intervened militarily in 2015 to support Assad in a 14-year civil war. His fall raised questions about the future of the lease agreement under which Russia has its naval base at Tartous on the Mediterranean coast and the fate of its military base at Hmeimim, southeast of the city of Latakia.

Since Assad was overthrown, Damascus has sought closer ties with Western and Gulf countries, while cooperating with Moscow in areas including energy and food imports and military ties.

Moscow and Syria are now negotiating over the future of Russia's bases at Tartus and Hmeimim.

In 2025, Syria's new government canceled a 49-year contract granting Russian company Stroytransgaz the right to develop commercial facilities at Tartous. The United Arab Emirates' DP World secured an \$800 million, 30-year concession agreement to redevelop and operate the port.

But on June 6, the Russian-Syrian Business Council, a body operating under Russia's Ministry of Industry and Trade, announced plans to establish an “assembly and distribution center for Russian goods” at Tartus.

Officials interviewed by Reuters, and company statements and documents reviewed by Reuters, provided more details of the plans, including when it is intended to become operational, its precise location and how much cargo it will handle.

The project is being developed by Syrian logistics company Rus Line in cooperation with Russian companies grouped under the Russian-Syrian Business Council.

Project organizers say they have agreed with Syria's Sovereign Fund on joint management of the logistics center, providing a direct link to the state's main investment vehicle.

Ossama Ajaj, general manager of Rus Line and adviser to the Russian-Syrian Business Council, said the hub will initially handle Russian wheat, grains, animal feed, vegetable oils, timber, steel, clinker, coal, rice, sugar and mineral oils.

Jinan Mubadda, Rus Line's chief executive, said the hub will operate from Pier No. 4 at Tartus port. The other berth remains dedicated to Russian naval operations.

Ajaj said the main operations for the hub would be in the Tartus port, with Russia-origin cargos expected to berth at Pier No. 4, which Ajaj called a “restricted zone” of the naval base.

He said the Syrian authorities would control the hub operations, with all activity requiring Syria’s General Authority for Ports and Customs approval.

Russia's government also did not comment for this article. But Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in June that Moscow and Damascus were discussing a possible “reformatting” of Russia's military facilities in Syria and that cooperation between the two countries was developing actively.

Ajaj told Reuters cargo volumes of about 250,000 tons per month were being targeted initially and operations were expected to begin in mid-July with a 30,000-ton grain shipment.

He suggested Russia would maintain a “reduced military presence.”

Two officials from Syria's foreign ministry said the project was outlined at a Jan. 28 meeting in Moscow between Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The officials called the meeting a turning point in efforts to revive economic cooperation.

Ajaj said the two leaders agreed to reactivate trade between the two countries. He also said a framework agreement would establish a regular shipping line between Russian and Syrian ports for raw materials and other Russian goods bound for Syria and other countries.

The project aims to establish a regular maritime route between Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk and Tartus, from where goods will be distributed across Syria and neighboring countries.

Ajaj identified Iraq and Jordan as the primary target markets, followed by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.

A May concept document prepared by the Russian-Syrian Business Council said the project envisages the use of Syrian private security companies to protect cargoes where necessary. It ruled out the involvement of Russian security firms.

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The commercial logistics hub is set to increase Moscow's already significant economic role in Syria. Some 85% of Syria's imported wheat — 2.9 million tons for the 2025-26 season — comes from Russia and Russian-occupied Crimea, a Syrian customs document showed.

Reuters has also reported that Syria's reliance on Russian crude oil imports has increased since Assad's fall. It received about 16.8 million barrels of Russian oil in 2025 and an estimated 60,000 barrels per day in the first months of 2026.

Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, recommended increasing support and investment for economic actors capable of strengthening Russian leverage in Syria, said an intelligence source briefed on a confidential GRU report to the Russian presidential

administration in December 2025.

The report identified Louay Youssef, head of the Russian–Syrian Business Council, as a figure Moscow could rely on in pursuing that strategy, the source said.

Youssef has held various senior positions in Russian–Syrian organizations and was an adviser on Syrian affairs to Yunus–Bek Yevkurov, a deputy defense minister, according to two associates of Youssef.

Youssef, who has announced that he is now an adviser to the defense and security committee of Russia's Federation Council, or upper house, did not respond to requests for comment.

The project could help Russia maintain influence regardless of the eventual shape of its military presence, said Nanar Hawach, a senior Syria adviser at International Crisis Group.

“Russia's hold on Syria rests on what it supplies and maintains, and on its [United Nations] Security Council vote, which gives it influence that outlasts any drawdown of troops,” he said.

“A logistics role reinforces that by keeping Russia physically present at the port, strengthening its hand while the future of the base is being decided.”

The U.S. is meanwhile watching closely.

Congressman Joe Wilson last month secured an amendment to the Pentagon budget directing it to assess options for reducing Russia's influence in Syria and securing the departure of its forces from Tartus and Hmeimim.

“We closely monitor Russian–backed commercial and logistics projects in Syria and are concerned that such initiatives may not contribute to stability in the country,” a U.S. State Department official said in response to Reuters questions.

The official said the U.S. was encouraging Syria to engage “trusted corporate partners – especially U.S. firms” during the country's recovery and reconstruction after its civil war, while urging Damascus to respect U.S. sanctions on Russia.

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