

Following the Syrian oil trail

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As first observed by the researcher known as [@obretix in October 2019](#), one of the two pontoon bridges at the Semelka river crossing between Syrian and KRG territory features a makeshift pipeline. This pipeline runs across the southern bridge where it connects to an oil depot on the KRG/Iraqi side, consisting of 22 storage tanks.



The pontoon bridge, pipeline, and oil depot, as seen from the Syrian side. [ASO Network, 26 Oct, 2019](#)

Using publicly available footage we've determined that this oil depot was assembled sometime between [31 July](#) and [17 September](#) 2015. This second bridge and the oil pipeline appear to have been taken down in the spring of 2019, likely due to heavy rain and high water levels which intermittently closed the crossing. However, this coincided with [heavy construction occurring at landings](#), resulting in the cement walls leading to the bridge as can be seen in recent related media.

In examining publicly available footage of the Semelka crossing we've observed numerous tank trucks being filled from this riverside oil depot, confirming the role the makeshift pipeline plays in the exporting of Syrian oil into the KRG/Iraq.



Numerous tank trucks within the vicinity of the oil depot. [ArtaFMRadio, 11 August, 2018](#)



Numerous tank trucks within the vicinity of the oil depot. [SyriaTV, 20 August, 2018](#)



Multiple tank trucks being filled at the oil depot (photo likely taken at earlier date) [HalabToday, 21 April 2019](#).

Through analysis of satellite imagery, we've traced the Syrian end of this pipeline to a facility approximately 3km to the southwest outside the village of Turamish. Images from the last three years show tank trucks repeatedly using this location, presumably emptying their oil into the pipeline..

The pipeline is not the only way oil passes through the Semalka crossing however, as we have also observed tank trucks driving over the pontoon bridge into Syria. SDF sources say these are carrying fuel from the KRG to coalition forces in Syria.



Tank truck driving over the southern pontoon bridge at Semalka crossing. [AlghadTV, 12 August 2019](#)



Tank truck driving west through the Semalka parking lot, further into Syria. [AlghadTV, 12 August 2019](#)

While it is not possible to track these trucks using available satellite imagery, there are several facilities within 30km of the Semalka crossing that are likely sources for this oil. This includes at the well known Suwaydiyah and Rmeilan oil fields, as well as a smaller one near the village of Hemze Bêg, all of which can be observed receiving constant truck traffic via satellite.