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The Four Seas Initiative

Syria and Türkiye as the Energy Redistribution Hub of the 21st Century Linking the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Black Sea

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Cover Image: A view of the gas transmission station in Syria's Al-Mazra'a village near the Turkish border, where the first natural gas flow from Türkiye to Syria has started, on Aug. 2, 2025. (Bakr Al Kasem/Anadolu via Getty Images)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The post-Assad stabilization of Syria opens a narrow but historically decisive window to transform the Levant from a theater of energy conflict into a continental energy corridor. This paper calls on the White House and the European Commission to jointly sponsor a Four Seas Initiative – a framework to link the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea through a Syria-Türkiye pipeline and transit corridor. Modelled on the architectural logic of the Three Seas Initiative championed by the United States and Poland in 2017, the Four Seas Initiative would deliver four compounding strategic goods: European energy sovereignty from Russian and Iranian dependence; American commercial primacy in the Middle East's most strategically leveraged infrastructure; Syrian economic reconstruction underwritten by transit revenues; and a durable geopolitical settlement that rewards alignment with the West.

The moment is not theoretical. In March 2026, U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Thomas Barrack formally revived the Four Seas concept at the Atlantic Council.[1] Chevron and ConocoPhillips have signed preliminary agreements.[2] Saudi Arabia has launched a $2 billion Syria investment fund.[3] The infrastructure logic is sound, the political alignments are the best they have been in a generation, and the cost of inaction measured in continued Russian leverage over European energy and the steady drift of Middle East hydrocarbons toward China is unacceptable. This paper sets out the strategic case, the infrastructure architecture, the financing model, and the governance framework required to make the Four Seas Initiative the defining energy project of the 2020s.

I. The Strategic Moment: Why Syria, Why Now

The fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 created the most significant geostrategic realignment in the Middle East since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For the first time in over a decade, the Levant is not organized around an Iranian-Russian axis of denial. The interim government of Ahmed al-Sharaa has shown itself willing to engage with the West, the Gulf states, and Türkiye simultaneously, a combination that was structurally impossible under the former regime and remains fragile but navigable today.

The Trump administration has moved swiftly. Sanctions on Syria have been substantially lifted.[4] The Central Bank of Syria has been reconnected to the international financial system, including the SWIFT payments network.[5] U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Thomas Barrack – simultaneously the U.S. ambassador to Türkiye – visited Damascus in May 2025 and signed a $7 billion energy deal between Syria and a Qatari-U.S.-Turkish consortium.[6] In February 2026, Chevron and Qatar's Power International Holding signed a memorandum of understanding with the Syrian Petroleum Company for the country's first offshore oil and gas development.[7] In March 2026, at an Atlantic Council symposium in Washington convened jointly with the Syrian American Business Council, Barrack explicitly revived the Four Seas concept, framing Syria as an alternative to the now vulnerable Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea maritime corridors.[8] This is not a theoretical proposal.

1 Enab Baladi, "From Syria, Thomas Barrack Revives 'Four Seas' Project as Alternative to Hormuz," *Enab Baladi,* March 26, 2026, https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2026/03/from-syria-thomas-barrack-revives-four-seas-project-as-alternative-to-hormuz/.

2 Asharq Al-Awsat, "Syria Opens Its Energy Sector to Global Oil Majors," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, February 11, 2026, https://english.aawsat.com/business/5239968-syria-opens-its-energy-sector-global-oil-majors.

3 Reuters, "Saudi Deepens Ties with Syria's New Leaders through Major Investments," *Reuters*, February 7, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-announces-major-new-syria-investments-2026-02-07/.

4 U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Syria Sanctions (Inactive and Archived)," *OFAC*, accessed April 7, 2026, https://ofac.treasury.gov/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/syria-sanctions-inactive-and-archived.

5 Timour Azhari, "Syria Expects First Transfer with US Bank within Weeks, Governor Says," *Reuters*, June 19, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/syria-expects-first-transfer-with-us-bank-within-weeks-governor-says-2025-06-19/.

6 Reuters, "Syria Signs $7 Billion Power Deal with Qatar's UCC Holding-Led Consortium," *Reuters*, May 29, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/syria-signs-7-billion-power-deal-with-qatars-ucc-holding-led-consortium-2025-05-29/.

7 Offsnet, "Syria's Step into Offshore Energy with Chevron and Qatari Partnership," *Offsnet*, February 8, 2026, https://offsnet.com/content/middle-east/syrias-step-into-offshore-energy-with-chevron-and-qatari-partnership.

8 Atlantic Council, "The US-Syria Energy Symposium," *Atlantic Council*, March 29, 2026, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/the-us-syria-energy-symposium/.

Overview of Four Seas Plan Area

> "When you look at Syria's land borders and the geographic position they offer, from south to north and from east to west, that is extremely striking."
>
> **Ambassador Thomas Barrack**
> *U.S. Special Envoy for Syria, March 2026*

It is a policy already in motion. What it lacks is a formal multilateral architecture to give it institutional weight, sustained financing, and the kind of transatlantic political endorsement that transformed the Three Seas Initiative from a regional aspiration into a credible investment platform. That is what this paper proposes to build.

The vulnerabilities of existing maritime energy routes make this moment urgent rather than merely opportune. The Strait of Hormuz carries approximately one fifth of the world's crude oil and liquefied natural gas.[9] The Red Sea route through Bab-el-Mandeb has been subject to persistent Houthi interdiction since late 2023.[10] Neither disruption can be resolved quickly, and neither is independent of the broader Iran conflict trajectory. Against this backdrop, overland pipeline corridors through Syria and Türkiye represent not a distant alternative but an immediate risk diversification imperative for every energy-importing nation in Europe.

9 Reuters, "What Is the Strait of Hormuz and Why Is It So Important for Oil?," *Reuters*, February 28, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-is-strait-hormuz-why-is-it-so-important-oil-2026-02-28/.

10 Ahmad Ghaddar, "Houthi Attacks in the Bab al-Mandab Strait Hit Global Trade," *Reuters*, December 19, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/bab-al-mandab-shipping-lane-target-israel-fights-hamas-2023-12-12/.

For the United States, the Four Seas Initiative sits at the intersection of three of the Trump administration's declared priorities: maximizing American energy exports and influence; reducing European dependence on adversarial energy suppliers; and achieving a commercially grounded, deal-oriented stabilization of the Middle East.[11] It also offers a vehicle to anchor Gulf investment – Saudi, Emirati, Qatari – in a Western-aligned architecture rather than allowing it to drift toward Chinese Belt and Road infrastructure frameworks also known as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project.

II. The Three Seas Precedent: A Model for Transatlantic Infrastructure Leadership

On July 6, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump made a historic stop in Warsaw, Poland, en route to the Hamburg G20 Summit.[12] At the second summit of the Three Seas Initiative, a forum co-founded by Poland and Croatia linking 12 Central and Eastern European nations along the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Sea axes, Trump offered the full weight of U.S. political and commercial sponsorship to a project that had previously been regarded as a regional curiosity.[13]

"The Three Seas Initiative will not only empower your people to prosper, but it will ensure that your nations remain sovereign, secure, and free from foreign coercion."

President Donald J. Trump
Warsaw, July 6, 2017

The speech was a masterclass in infrastructure geopolitics. Trump framed the Three Seas Initiative not merely as an engineering project but as an act of civilizational solidarity. "It's been 28 years since your brave citizens lifted the Iron Curtain and defeated communism," he told assembled heads of state, "yet much of the infrastructure within Central and Eastern Europe has remained a relic of the old Soviet era."[14] He committed the United States to helping break Russian energy dominance over the region: "We are committed to securing your access to alternate sources of energy, so Poland and its neighbors are never again held hostage to a single supplier of energy."[15]

The strategic logic was explicit. The Three Seas Initiative aimed to correct a structural imbalance: While Central and Eastern Europe had politically and economically integrated westward, its infrastructure still ran primarily east-west, leaving it dependent on Russian pipelines, Russian gas, and the geopolitical leverage that dependency conferred.[16] By redirecting infrastructure flows along a north-south axis linking the Baltic LNG terminals in Poland and Lithuania with the Adriatic terminal in Croatia, and connecting the Black Sea's energy resources to Central European markets the initiative sought to permanently alter the energy geography of the continent.

Trump's endorsement was not rhetorical. The Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund, launched formally in 2020, attracted a $300 million financing commitment from the U.S. Development Finance Corporation alongside nearly $1 billion in commitments from nine of the twelve member states.[17] The fund has since deployed over $800 million across nine countries, generating returns approaching 15 percent annually.[18] The Atlantic Council's General James Jones Jr., who organized the April 2017 conference that helped make the initiative a Trump priority, described it as "a truly transatlantic project that has enormous geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo economic ramifications" explicitly designed to "alleviate the Kremlin's strong hand in the European energy sector."[19]

11 White House, "American Energy Dominance Is Back Under President Trump," *White House*, February 2026, https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/02/american-energy-dominance-is-back-under-president-trump/.

12 Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at the Three Seas Initiative Summit," *White House*, July 6, 2017, https://2017-2021-translations.state.gov/2017/07/06/remarks-by-president-trump-at-the-three-seas-initiative-summit-july-6-2017/.

13 Trump, *Three Seas Remarks*.

14 Trump, *Three Seas Remarks*.

15 Trump, *Three Seas Remarks*.

16 Emma Nix, Ian Brzezinski, "The Three Seas Initiative Stands at an Inflection Point," *Atlantic Council*, March 13, 2025, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-three-seas-initiative-stands-at-an-inflection-point/.

17 Nix, Brzezinski, *Three Seas Initiative.*

18 Nix, Brzezinski, *Three Seas Initiative.*

19 Rachel Ansley, "Making the Three Seas Initiative a Priority for Trump," *New Atlanticist*, May 2, 2017, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/making-the-three-seas-initiative-a-priority-for-trump/.

The Four Seas Initiative is the Three Seas Initiative's natural southern extension. Where the Three Seas corrected the north-south energy deficit within Europe, the Four Seas addresses the east-west and south-north energy deficit between the greater Middle East and Europe. Where the Three Seas mobilized LNG infrastructure and regional interconnectors to reduce Russian leverage, the Four Seas would mobilize Syrian and Turkish transit infrastructure to reduce dependence on both the Russian northern axis and the Iranian-controlled southern maritime axis. The architecture is identical; the geography is more ambitious; the strategic prize is proportionally larger.

Dimension	Three Seas Initiative (2016)	Four Seas Initiative (Proposed)
Geography	Baltic, Adriatic, Black Seas (Central-Eastern Europe)[20]	Persian Gulf, Caspian, Mediterranean, Black Sea (Levant-Türkiye)
Founding logic	Break Soviet-era east-west infrastructure dependency[21]	Break maritime chokepoint vulnerability; build overland corridor
Primary sponsor	Poland and Croatia; U.S. endorsement (Trump, 2017)[22]	Türkiye and Syria; U.S. sponsorship (Barrack, 2026)
Energy objective	Reduce Russian gas dominance in Central Europe[23]	Diversify Gulf and Caspian exports away from Hormuz & Red Sea
Investment vehicle	Three Seas Investment Fund (3bn-5bn euro target)[24]	Four Seas Infrastructure Consortium (proposed)
EU dimension	12 EU member states; European Commission partner[25]	Non-EU but EU energy security beneficiary
Commercial precedent	$300m Development Finance Corp. commitment; 15% annual returns[26]	Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Hunt Oil, QatarEnergy active

III. The Infrastructure Architecture: Six Thousand Kilometers of Strategic Geography

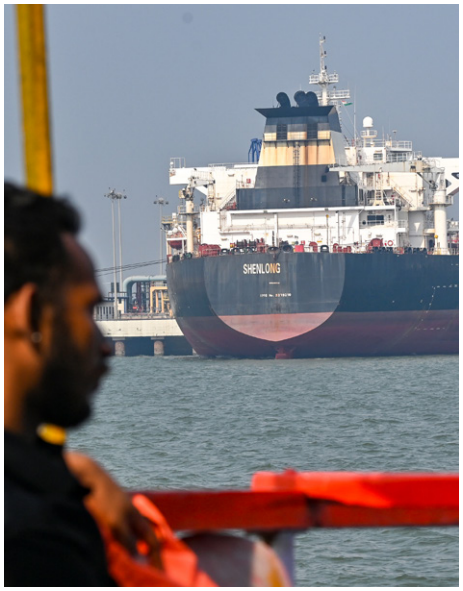
Syria's energy transit potential derives from an accident of geography that no amount of geopolitical engineering can replicate. The country sits at the precise juncture where the land mass of the Arabian Peninsula narrows toward Anatolia, where the Fertile Crescent's river systems have historically sustained both settlement and commerce, and where the overland routes between the Gulf, the Caspian basin, and the European coastline must converge. Before the civil war, Syria operated approximately 6,300 kilometers of gas and oil pipelines, a pre-existing network degraded but not destroyed by conflict, and recoverable at a fraction of the cost of new construction.

3.1 The Four Seas Corridor Architecture

The Four Seas Initiative proposes four interlocking infrastructure corridors, each serving a distinct energy source and market, but all converging on the Syria-Türkiye border zone as the primary redistribution hub:

- **The Gulf-Mediterranean Corridor:** An overland pipeline from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE through Jordan and southern Syria to the

20 *Nix, Brzezinski, Three* Seas Initiative.
21 N*ix, Brzezinski, Three* Seas I*nitiative.*
22 *Trump, Three* Seas Remarks.
23 Nix, Brzezinsk*i, Three Seas Initiative.*
24 Nix, Brzezinski, *Three Seas Initiative.*
25 Nix, *Brzezinski, Three Seas I*nitiative.
26 Nix, Brzezinski, Three Seas Initiative.



The Liberia-flagged crude oil tanker Shenlong Suezmax docks at Mumbai Port after navigating the Strait of Hormuz on March 11, 2026, in Mumbai, India. (Raju Shinde/Hindustan Times via Getty Images)

Mediterranean port of Banias. This route revives the historic Tapline corridor but with significantly expanded capacity, and provides Gulf producers with a direct route to European markets that bypasses the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal entirely. Estimated capacity: 1.5 million to 2 million barrels per day (bpd).

- **The Iraq-Syria Corridor:** The rehabilitation and expansion of the Kirkuk Banias pipeline, which operated at 200,000 bpd before its closure in 1979.[27] The Syrian Petroleum Company has indicated that a new pipeline with a capacity of 1.4 million bpd is technically feasible.[28] Given Iraq's urgent need to diversify its export routes away from the Basra terminals, themselves vulnerable to Gulf instability, this corridor addresses both Iraqi and Syrian economic reconstruction imperatives simultaneously.

- **The Caspian-Anatolian Corridor:** The linkage of Syrian pipeline infrastructure to the existing Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the planned expansion of Azerbaijani and Turkmen gas exports through Türkiye into Europe.[29] Syria does not need to be physically adjacent to the Caspian to serve as the southern terminus of a redistribution network anchored in Ankara and Istanbul; Turkish infrastructure serves as the connective tissue, and the Four Seas framework creates the commercial and political logic for integrated operation of both systems.
- **The Arab Gas Pipeline Modernization:** The rehabilitation of the Euro Arab Mashreq Gas Pipeline originally designed to carry Egyptian gas through Jordan, Syria, and Türkiye to the Nabucco connection into Europe at a projected cost of $1.2 billion.[30] This corridor adds Egyptian and eastern Mediterranean gas (including Cypriot and Lebanese offshore reserves) to the diversification portfolio, creating a genuinely multisource European supply architecture.

3.2 The Türkiye Hub: From Anatolia to Europe

Türkiye's role in the Four Seas architecture is indispensable and strategically coherent. Ankara already operates as a significant energy transit state: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, TANAP, and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) all use Turkish territory as their primary conduit from the Caspian to Europe.[31] The Four Seas Initiative extends this logic southward, connecting Syrian infrastructure to existing Turkish pipeline capacity at the border zone between Gaziantep and Aleppo, with onward distribution to European markets through the Ceyhan terminal and the TAP-Nabucco connections.

Barrack's dual role as Turkish ambassador and Syrian special envoy is not an administrative convenience; it is a structural signal that Washington understands the Syria-Türkiye corridor as a single strategic unit.[32] Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's interest in positioning Ankara as a gas hub for Europe (a stated national objective since at least 2022) aligns precisely

27 Karam Shaar, "Syria Gas Pipeline Revival Post-Assad-Qatar," *Syria in Figures (blog)*, Karam Shaar Advisory, February 4, 2026, https://karamshaar.com/syria-in

28 Syria Report, "New Syrian-Iraqi Oil Pipeline Will Carry 1.4 Million Barrels a Day," *Syria Report*, accessed April 7, 2026, https://syria-report.com/new-syrian-iraqi-oil-pipeline-will-carry-1-4-million-barrels-a-day/.

29 Daily Sabah, "Supply of Turkmen Gas via Türkiye Now Just 'Matter of Time': Erdoğan," *Daily Sabah*, June 3, 2024, https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/supply-of-turkmen-gas-via-turkiye-now-just-matter-of-time-erdogan.

30 Paul Cochrane, "The War in Syria Has Never Been About Gas," *Middle East Eye*, April 15, 2018, https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/pipelineistan-conspiracy-war-syria-has-never-been-about-gas.

31 U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Background Reference: Azerbaijan," *EIA*, March 23, 2026, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/AZE/background.

32 Jared Szuba, "Trump Appoints Turkey Ambassador Tom Barrack as Envoy to Syria: What to Know," *Al-Monitor*, May 22, 2025, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/05/trump-appoints-turkey-ambassador-tom-barrack-envoy-syria-what-know.

with the Four Seas framework.[33] Türkiye becomes not merely a transit state but the hub operator of a continental redistribution network – a role that generates substantial transit revenues, significant geopolitical leverage with European consumers, and a strategic depth that reduces Ankara's own energy import vulnerability.

3.3 Syrian Domestic Production: The Revenue Foundation

The transit corridor logic is reinforced by Syria's own recoverable energy wealth. Before the civil war, Syria produced approximately 380,000 bpd.[34] By early 2026, output had fallen to around 110,000 bpd, but the Syrian Petroleum Company has set a target of 200,000 bpd before the end of 2026, with longer-term ambitions of 800,000 bpd by 2029.[35] Estimated recoverable reserves stand at approximately 2.5 billion barrels, with potential annual revenues of $4.6 billion to $6.1 billion at current prices.[36] Seventeen unexplored onshore blocks and significant offshore potential in the eastern Mediterranean add a further exploration upside that Chevron's preliminary offshore agreement has begun to price into the market.[37]

These production revenues are not ancillary to the transit corridor argument; they are its financial foundation. The Four Seas Initiative is not asking Syria to become purely a conduit for other nations' energy. It is offering Syria a dual revenue model: transit fees from Gulf, Iraqi, and Caspian energy flows, combined with growing domestic production revenues that fund reconstruction, public services, and the legal and regulatory infrastructure that commercial investment requires. This dual revenue model is what makes the Syrian state a viable and creditworthy partner for long-term infrastructure investment, and it is what distinguishes the Four Seas Initiative from previous attempts to build Middle Eastern energy architecture on the shifting sands of political goodwill alone.

IV. The Geopolitical Case: Energy Security as Western Strategy

4.1 The European Imperative

Europe's energy situation in 2026 remains structurally precarious. The rupture with Russian gas that began with the 2022 Ukraine invasion was managed through emergency LNG procurement – primarily American, Qatari, and Norwegian – but the structural vulnerability it exposed has not been permanently resolved.[38] While expansion of LNG terminals is ongoing, they remain expensive to develop, capacity constrained, and exposed to global spot-market volatility. The European Commission's REPowerEU strategy explicitly identified pipeline diversification from the Caspian, the eastern Mediterranean, and eventually the Gulf as a necessary complement to the LNG buildout.[39]

33 "Erdoğan Says Turkey and Russia to Study Putin's Gas Hub Proposal," *Al Jazeera*, October 14, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/14/erdogan-says-turkey-and-russia-to-study-putins-gas-hub-proposal.

34 EnergyNews.pro, "Syria: Oil and Gas Production Expected to Resume in 2026 According to Wood Mackenzie," *EnergyNews.pro*, January 25, 2026, https://energynews.pro/en/syria-oil-and-gas-production-expected-to-resume-in-2026-according-to-wood-mackenzie.

35 Fareed Rahman, "Syria's Energy Sector Set to Get a Boost after Kurdish Oilfield Takeover," *The National News*, January 21, 2026, https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/energy/2026/01/21/syrias-energy-sector-set-to-get-a-boost-after-kurdish-oilfield-takeover/.
Debra K. Rubin, Gary Lakes, "Analysis: Cost of Mideast Energy Sites War Rebuild Exceeds $25B," *Engineering News-Record*, March 29, 2026, https://www.enr.com/articles/62753-analysis-cost-of-mideast-energy-sites-war-rebuild-exceeds-25b.

36 John Power, "Syria's War-Ravaged Oil Sector Faces Tough Road to Recovery, Analysts Say," Al Jazeera, January 20, 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2026/1/20/syrias-war-ravaged-oil-sector-faces-tough-road-to-recovery-analysts-say.

37 Malcolm Moore, "Syria Taps Energy Majors to Explore for 'Trillions' of Cubic Metres of Gas," *Financial Times*, February 9, 2026, https://www.ft.com/content/16f98de7-5de2-4f53-b403-08c9cfbee5c1.

38 EnergyNow Media, "Russian Gas Era in Europe Ends as Ukraine Stops Transit," *Energy Now*, January 2025, https://energynow.com/2025/01/russian-gas-era-in-europe-ends-as-ukraine-stops-transit/.

39 European Commission, "Diversification of Gas Supply Sources and Routes," *Energy — European Commission*, accessed April 8, 2026, https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-security/diversification-gas-supply-sources-and-routes_en.

The LNG tanker HL SEA EAGLE unloads liquefied natural gas from the Sabine Pass LNG terminal in the United States at the Revithoussa terminal near Athens, Greece, on March 28, 2026. (Nicolas Koutsokostas/ NurPhoto via Getty Images)

The Four Seas Initiative offers European policymakers exactly what REPowerEU identified as missing: a southern pipeline corridor structurally separate from both the Russian northern axis and the LNG maritime supply chain that draws on multiple source nations rather than replicating the single-supplier dependency that made Russian gas so dangerous, and that is governed by a Western-aligned institutional framework rather than bilateral deals with producer states outside the rule of law.

The European Commission's investment case is straightforward. A Syria-Türkiye corridor delivering Gulf, Iraqi, and Caspian gas to European markets would reduce the EU's LNG import bill by an estimated $15 billion to $20 billion annually at projected consumption levels, reduce spot market exposure, and give Brussels genuine leverage in its energy negotiations with Gulf producers – leverage it currently lacks because it has no credible overland alternative to the maritime route.

4.2 The U.S. Interest

The Trump administration's energy philosophy is grounded in a dual proposition: U.S. energy abundance should be mobilized as a geopolitical asset, and U.S. commercial firms should capture the infrastructure rents that flow from global energy redistribution. The Four Seas Initiative serves both propositions, though in ways that require careful articulation. American liquefied natural gas exports to Europe are not threatened by a Syrian pipeline corridor; they serve different market segments and different security logics. LNG is flexible, interruptible, and responsive to price signals; pipeline gas is baseload, cheap, and strategically committed. The two modalities are complementary, not competitive. A Four Seas corridor that reduces Europe's LNG import dependency from the spot market actually stabilizes the long-term LNG price environment by reducing panic procurement premiums, while creating new commercial opportunities for U.S. firms in Syria's upstream and infrastructure sectors. Chevron, ConocoPhillips, and Hunt Oil are already in the market. The Four Seas framework gives their investments a geopolitical guarantee.

More fundamentally, the Four Seas Initiative is an opportunity to demonstrate that U.S.-led stabilization of a post-conflict state can generate tangible commercial returns not only for the host country, but for U.S. investors, energy companies, and economy. This is the Trump doctrine applied to energy infrastructure: deals over doctrine, commerce over ideology, results over process. Syria is the test case.

4.3 Countering Chinese Infrastructure Expansion

The Belt and Road Initiative has been extending its energy infrastructure reach into the Middle East, the Caspian Basin, and Central Asia for over a decade.[40] Chinese state firms have signed agreements with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and several Central Asian republics that, if consolidated, would create a parallel energy infrastructure architecture oriented toward Beijing rather than Brussels or Washington.[41] The Four Seas Initiative is the Western counter architecture: It draws the same geography into a Western commercial and governance framework, makes Western firms the primary investors and operators, and ensures that the transit revenues flowing through Syrian and Turkish territory generate economic and political dividends for Western-aligned states rather than their competitors. The window for this counter architecture is narrow. Chinese firms have been moving rapidly into Syria since sanctions lifted.

40 Christoph Nedopil Wang, "China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2025" *Green Finance & Development Center*, (Shanghai: Fudan University, 2026), https://greenfdc.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-investment-report-2025/

41 Nedopil Wang, *China Belt and Road Initiative.*

Without a Western-anchored framework backed by U.S. political sponsorship, European institutional financing, and Gulf commercial investment, the Four Seas corridor will be built, but on Chinese terms. The question is not whether Syria becomes an energy hub. The question is who designs it, who finances it, and who governs it.

V. The Financing Architecture: A Public–Private Coalition

The Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund provides a proven template for mobilizing public development finance alongside private capital in politically sensitive infrastructure environments. The Four Seas Initiative should be structured around an analogous instrument: a Four Seas Infrastructure Consortium (FSIC) capitalized by a combination of U.S. Development Finance Corporation commitments, European Investment Bank lending, Gulf sovereign wealth fund co-investment, and private equity from the energy firms already active in Syria.

Four Seas Infrastructure Consortium — Proposed Capitalization

U.S. DFC	Initial commitment of $500m in project finance guarantees, with authority to scale to $2bn upon milestones. Modeled on the $300m Three Seas DFC commitment but reflecting the larger geographic scope.
European Investment Bank	$1.5bn in concessional lending for pipeline rehabilitation and interconnector construction, structured as EU energy security loans under the REPowerEU mandate.
Gulf Sovereign Funds	Co-investment of $2bn–$3bn from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, and Qatar Investment Authority. Saudi Arabia's $2bn Syria fund (announced Feb. 2026) provides the seed.
Private Equity / IOCs	Project-finance equity from Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Hunt Oil, QatarEnergy, and TotalEnergies, structured as joint ventures with the Syrian Petroleum Company on individual corridor segments.
Turkish State Contribution	BOTAŞ (Türkiye's state pipeline operator) contributes existing Anatolian infrastructure as in-kind equity, valuing the Turkish network at $1bn-$1.5bn for FSIC purposes.
Syrian Transit Revenues	Ring-fenced transit fee revenues deposited into a World Bank-administered escrow account, available for debt service and Syrian reconstruction co-investment after an initial 3-year grace period.
Total Target	$8bn–$10bn initial capitalization, with a capacity to mobilize $25bn–$30bn in total project investment over a ten-year construction horizon.

The Three Seas Investment Fund's track record of nearly 15% annual returns on infrastructure investment in emerging European markets provides a benchmark for investor expectations.[42] Middle East infrastructure returns in politically normalizing environments have historically exceeded this benchmark. The key variable is political risk premium, a factor the FSIC structure is designed to reduce through multilateral guarantees, clear legal frameworks, and the reputational anchor of U.S. and EU co-sponsorship.

Critically, the Four Seas Initiative should incorporate the Syrian government as an equity participant in transit infrastructure, not merely a license-granting sovereign, but an ownership stakeholder with a long-term commercial interest in the network's performance. This is both a governance principle and a political insurance policy: a Syrian government that owns transit assets has a direct financial incentive to maintain the stability and security that protects those

42 Nix, Brzezinski, *Three Seas Initiative.*

assets. It also responds to the legitimate concerns of Syrian civil society about foreign exploitation of national infrastructure concerns that have historically been mobilized against Western engagement and that must be preempted by design rather than managed after the fact.

VI. The Governance Framework: Rules, Institutions, and Legitimacy

Infrastructure projects do not fail primarily because of engineering challenges but from governance failures: disputed ownership, unclear legal frameworks, political interference in commercial operations, and the absence of dispute resolution mechanisms that all parties trust. The Four Seas Initiative must be designed from the outset with a governance architecture robust enough to survive changes of government, shifts in bilateral relations, and the inevitable commercial disputes that arise in multiparty infrastructure ventures.

6.1 Legal and Regulatory Foundation

The immediate priority is the establishment of a clear Syrian energy law that specifies the terms of production-sharing, transit fee calculations, third-party access rights, and environmental standards. This is not a distant aspiration: Syrian Petroleum Company CEO Youssef Qiblawy has indicated that the framework is under active development.[43] The United States and the European Commission should jointly fund a Technical Assistance Program modeled on the EU's existing Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument to accelerate the legal drafting process, drawing on international energy law experts from the U.S. Department of Energy, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy, and the Energy Charter Treaty secretariat.

6.2 The Four Seas Ministerial Forum

The Four Seas Initiative should be governed at the political level by an annual Ministerial Forum convening the energy ministers of Syria, Türkiye, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait alongside the U.S. energy secretary and the European commissioner for energy. This forum mirrors the summit architecture of the Three Seas Initiative and provides the political visibility and accountability that sustains private investor confidence.[44] The inaugural forum should be convened in Istanbul, reflecting Türkiye's hub role, in the fourth quarter of 2026.

6.3 The Four Seas Business Forum

Trump's 2017 Warsaw speech explicitly endorsed the creation of a Three Seas Business Forum as a vehicle for private-sector engagement.[45] The same instrument should anchor the Four Seas Initiative. The Business Forum brings together energy company CEOs, sovereign wealth fund managers, infrastructure finance directors, and technology providers in an annual convening aligned with the Ministerial Forum. The Atlantic Council, which already served as the convening institution for the U.S.-Syria Energy Symposium, would be the natural institutional host for this forum's inaugural edition.[46]

6.4 Transit Security and Force Majeure Architecture

The most persistent objection to Middle Eastern pipeline infrastructure is physical security: Pipelines can be sabotaged, interdicted, or held hostage by non-state actors. This objection is real but manageable. The Four Seas Initia-

43 Moore, *Syria Taps Energy Majors.*

44 Ian Brzezinski, "Prosperity across Three Seas: An Opportunity Awaits in Bucharest," *Atlantic Council*, September 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/prosperity-across-three-seas-an-opportunity-awaits-in-bucharest/.

45 Trump, *Three Seas Remarks.*

46 Atlantic Council, *The US-Syria Energy Symposium.*

A view of the Jandar Gas Power Plant in Homs, Syria, as natural gas from Azerbaijan begins flowing to the facility via the Turkiye-Syria Natural Gas Pipeline on Aug. 9, 2025. (Bakr Al Kasem/Anadolu via Getty Images)

"Syria's geography is its fortune. The Four Seas Initiative is the instrument by which that fortune becomes a shared prosperity for Syria, for the region, and for every European household whose energy bill reflects the cost of fragile maritime supply chains."

tive should incorporate three layers of security architecture. At the technical level, pipeline routing should prioritize urban and semi-urban corridors where community economic dependence on infrastructure generates organic protection incentives. At the political level, the Ministerial Forum should include a security working group that coordinates intelligence-sharing and rapid response protocols among transit states. At the strategic level, the United States should provide an explicit security guarantee – not a military deployment, but a formal diplomatic commitment that interference with Four Seas infrastructure will trigger coordinated sanctions responses from the full coalition of sponsoring states.

VII. The Reconstruction Dividend: Syria's Path from War to Prosperity

Energy infrastructure is not Syria's only need, but it is the one thing that can generate the revenue to fund everything else. The World Bank estimated Syria's reconstruction cost at $400 billion in 2021.[47] That figure has grown with further destruction and economic deterioration. No combination of international aid, diaspora remittances, or sovereign loans can fill a gap of that magnitude. Only a sustained, commercially grounded revenue stream from energy production and transit can do so, and only the Four Seas Initiative offers a plausible path to that revenue at the scale and speed required.

Transit fee revenues from a fully operational Four Seas corridor conservatively modeled at $3 to $5 per barrel for oil and 30 cents to 50 cents per million British thermal units for gas would generate between $3 billion and $6 billion annually for Syria at projected corridor volumes, beginning within three to five years of initial construction.

Combined with the $4.6 billion to $6.1 billion in domestic production revenues that the Syrian Petroleum Company projects by 2029, Syria would be generating $8 billion to $12 billion in annual energy revenues by the early 2030s. Properly governed, this revenue base is sufficient to fund a Syrian state that provides basic services, maintains security, and services the debt incurred during reconstruction – the economic foundation without which political stability remains permanently contingent.

The social contract argument matters here. Syria's civil war emerged from a combination of drought-induced agricultural collapse, economic stagnation, political repression, and a profound sense of governmental abandonment experienced by large swaths of the Syrian population. A Four Seas Initiative that visibly improves Syrian living standards through employment in pipeline construction and operation, public services funded by transit revenues, and the electricity generated by the power infrastructure that accompanies energy corridor development is more than a reconstruction program. It is a legitimacy program for the interim government and a long-term investment in the social stability that protects the infrastructure itself.

VIII. Recommendations to the White House and the European Commission

This paper concludes with a set of concrete, time-bound recommendations addressed to both the White House and the European Commission, structured around the three-year window in which the foundational decisions must be made.

Immediate Actions (2026)

- The White House should formally designate the Four Seas Initiative as a U.S. strategic infrastructure priority, explicitly linking it to the energy

47 Syrian Observer, "Rebuilding Syria, Deferred: Big Plans, Bigger Obstacles," *Syrian Observer*, September 20, 2025, https://syrianobserver.com/society/rebuilding-syria-deferred-big-plans-bigger-obstacles.html.

security commitments made under the Three Seas framework and directing the U.S. Development Finance Corporation to prepare an initial $500 million facility for Four Seas infrastructure development.

- The European Commission should include the Syria-Türkiye overland corridor in the next revision of the EU's Projects of Common Interest list under the Trans European Energy Networks regulation, making it eligible for EIB project finance and European structural fund co-investment.
- The U.S. special envoy for Syria, in coordination with the European commissioner for energy, should convene a founding Four Seas Ministerial Forum in Istanbul before the end of 2026, bringing together the energy ministers of the corridor states and establishing the Four Seas Infrastructure Consortium as a legal entity under a multilateral framework agreement.
- The U.S. Department of Energy and DG Energy of the European Commission should jointly fund a Syrian Energy Law Technical Assistance Program, with a mandate to produce a draft production sharing and transit fee framework within 12 months.

Near-Term Actions (2027-2028)

- The Four Seas Business Forum should hold its inaugural session, convened by the Atlantic Council in partnership with the European Policy Centre, with a mandate to identify the first tranche of bankable infrastructure projects, prioritizing the Gulf-Mediterranean corridor and the Iraq-Syria pipeline rehabilitation as the highest impact near-term investments.
- The Four Seas Infrastructure Consortium should achieve first financial close, mobilizing the initial $8 billion to $10 billion tranche, with Gulf sovereign wealth fund co-investment confirmed and private equity commitments from at least three international oil companies.
- Pipeline construction should begin on the Gulf-Mediterranean corridor (Jordan-Syria segment) and the Iraq-Syria corridor (Kirkuk-Deir ez Zor segment), with construction timelines of 24-36 months for initial operational capacity.
- The White House and European Commission should issue a joint Four Seas Energy Security Communique, establishing the shared governance principles, security guarantee framework, and benchmarks for Syrian political and legal reform that will unlock successive tranches of FSIC financing.

Long-Term Objectives (2029-2035)

- Full operational capacity across all four corridor segments, delivering an estimated 3 million to 4 million bpd of oil and 40 billion to 50 billion cubic meters per year of gas to Mediterranean and European markets.
- Syria generating $8 billion to $12 billion annually in combined production and transit revenues, providing the fiscal foundation for sustainable reconstruction and public service delivery.
- Integration of the Four Seas corridor with the Three Seas Initiative's Eastern European interconnectors, creating a continuous energy infrastructure network from the Persian Gulf to the Baltic Sea – the first truly continental energy architecture of the post-Cold War era.
- A Four Seas Energy Summit, convened at head-of-state level, ratifying the corridor as a permanent feature of the transatlantic energy security architecture, with the same institutional permanence and political visibility as the G7 Energy Ministerial.

IX. Conclusion: The Hour of Infrastructure

When Trump stood in Warsaw in July 2017 and told the assembled leaders of Central and Eastern Europe that the United States would help ensure they were "never again held hostage to a single supplier of energy," he was articulating a principle that extends beyond the borders of any specific initiative.[48] Energy infrastructure is sovereignty. The ability to choose your supplier, to route your imports through corridors you trust, to diversify your exposure across multiple sources and pathways is not merely a commercial preference. It is the material foundation of political independence.

The Three Seas Initiative proved that the United States and Europe, acting together, can transform the energy geography of an entire continent within a decade.

The infrastructure projects that seemed visionary in 2017 – LNG terminals in Poland and Croatia, the Baltic Adriatic Corridor, the Via Carpathia – are now operational realities that have materially reduced Russian leverage over European energy markets.[49] The political will to build them was not a given; It was created by the combination of strategic clarity, institutional design, and personal presidential endorsement that turned a Polish-Croatian initiative into a transatlantic project.

"The Four Seas Initiative is not an act of charity toward Syria. It is an act of strategic intelligence by the West: the decision to build, at the moment when building is possible, the infrastructure architecture that will define the energy security of the next half century."

The Four Seas Initiative offers the same opportunity on a larger canvas. The geography is more complex, the political environment more volatile, and the reconstruction challenge more daunting. But the strategic logic is cleaner, the commercial case is stronger, and the cost of inaction is higher. Every year that Syria does not become a functioning transit hub is a year in which Chinese infrastructure investment deepens its position in the region, in which Gulf hydrocarbons flow through maritime chokepoints of growing fragility, and in which Europe pays an unnecessary premium for energy security it could obtain at lower cost through an overland corridor backed by the full weight of transatlantic commitment.

The window is open. Barrack has identified it from Damascus. Chevron and QatarEnergy have entered the market.[50] Al-Sharaa's interim government has demonstrated a willingness to engage with the West on terms that were unimaginable 12 months ago. The sanctions have been lifted. The Central Bank is reconnected. The first deals are signed.

What remains is architecture, the formal institutional framework, the multilateral financing vehicle, the governance standards, and the presidential-level political endorsement that transforms a collection of bilateral deals into a durable, Western-anchored, strategically coherent infrastructure initiative. That is what the Four Seas Initiative proposes to build. And that is what this paper asks the White House and the European Commission to make possible.

48 Trump, *Three Seas Remarks.*

49 Maximilian Hess, "How Eastern Europe Overhauled Its Natural Gas Market," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 21, 2025, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/04/how-eastern-europe-overhauled-its-natural-gas-market.

50 Offsnet, *Syria's Energy with Chevron and Qatari Partnership.*

An aerial view of the gas transmission station in Al-Mazra'a village, near the Turkish border, where the first natural gas flow from Turkiye to Syria has started, in Homs Governorate, Syria, on Aug. 2, 2025. (Bakr Al Kasem/Anadolu via Getty Images)

Annex I: Key Pipeline Infrastructure Referenced

Pipeline / Project	Route / Capacity	Status (2026)
Iraq-Syria (Kirkuk-Banias)[51]	Kirkuk to Mediterranean; historic 200k bpd; proposed 1.4m bpd	Closed 1979; rehabilitation proposed
Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP)[52]	Egypt-Jordan-Syria-Türkiye; connect to Nabucco; 1,200km	Syrian segment disrupted 2011; rehabilitation planned
Gulf-Mediterranean Corridor[53]	KSA/UAE/Kuwait-Jordan-Syria-Banias; proposed 1.5m-2m bpd	Proposed; joint venture negotiations active
TANAP (Trans-Anatolian)[54]	Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Greece; 16 bcm/yr. gas capacity	Operational; expansion planned
Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)[55]	Greece-Albania-Italy; 10 bcm/yr.; expandable to 20 bcm	Operational; expansion underway
Chevron Offshore Syria MOU[56]	Eastern Mediterranean offshore; first offshore block Syria	MOU signed February 2026
Qatar-U.S.-Türkiye Power Deal[57]	$7bn energy deal; 5,000 MW generation capacity for Syria	Signed May 2025, Damascus

51 Karam Shaar, *Syria Gas Pipeline Revival Post-Assad-Qatar.*

52 Paul Cochrane, The War in Syria Has Never Been About Gas.

53 "Syria's $95 Billion Vision: Connecting the Gulf to the Mediterranean via 4 Land Corridors," An-Nahar, April 2, 2026, https://www.annahar.com/fr/295714/syria-connects-the-gulf-to-the-mediterranean-via-4-land-corridors.

54 "Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline," Global Energy Monitor, last modified August 11, 2025, https://www.gem.wiki/Trans-Anatolian_Gas_Pipeline.

55 "Trans-Adriatic Gas Pipeline," Global Energy Monitor, last modified October 9, 2025, https://www.gem.wiki/Trans-Adriatic_Gas_Pipeline.

56 Reuters "Chevron Signs Initial Exploration Deal for Syrian Waters with Qatari Firm," Reuters, February 4, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/chevron-signs-initial-exploration-deal-syrian-waters-with-qatari-firm-2026-02-04.

57 Riham Alkousaa "Syria Signs $7 Billion Power Deal with Qatar's UCC Holding-Led Consortium," Reuters, May 29, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/syria-signs-7-billion-power-deal-with-qatars-ucc-holding-led-consortium-2025-05-29/.

Annex II: The Five Seas Initiative Policy Paper

From Energy Corridor to Regional Civilization - Adding the Red Sea
Persian Gulf · Caspian Sea · Mediterranean Sea · Black Sea

The Four Seas framework is the essential first act: build the energy corridor, prove the governance model, generate the revenues. Once that foundation is secure, the Five Seas Project is not an ambition but an inevitability – the natural extension of the same connectivity logic southward, drawing the Red Sea littoral into a shared framework of economic integration that goes far beyond pipelines.

I. The Fifth Sea: Why the Red Sea Changes Everything

The Red Sea stretches 2,250 kilometers from Suez to Bab el-Mandeb, borders the most populous region of Africa and the western flank of the Arabian Peninsula, and carries roughly 12 to 15% of global trade.[58] It is one of the world's most consequential waterways – and one of its most underbuilt. Houthi interdiction since 2023 has exposed the catastrophic cost of a global trade architecture with no Red Sea resilience.[59] Rerouting cargo around the Cape of Good Hope has added two weeks to transit times and billions in insurance costs, and the disruption is not temporary.[60]

The Five Seas Project answers this fragility not by hardening the maritime corridor – a military task already failing – but by integrating the nations along its shores into a shared economic community with a structural interest in keeping it open. This is a development architecture, not a naval deployment. And it connects naturally to the Four Seas corridor: the same Syria-Türkiye infrastructure spine that carries Gulf and Caspian energy northward to Europe can, with southward extension, draw the Red Sea littoral into the same network – linking Aqaba, Jeddah, Aden, Djibouti, Port Sudan, and the Suez zone into a single integrated economic geography.

II. A Region of Unrealized Potential

The Red Sea littoral – Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia – holds over 265 million people.[61] Added to the broader Five Seas zone, the integrated region approaches 700 million people and a combined GDP exceeding $5 trillion.[62] It is the most solar-irradiated landmass on Earth, sits on the world's largest hydrocarbon reserves, and contains some of the fastest-growing working-age populations in the world.

What it lacks is not resources or people; it is connectivity, shared infrastructure, and the institutional frameworks that allow scale economics to work.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the NEOM project on the Red Sea coast are the most visible expressions of what regional ambition looks like when it is properly capitalized. But NEOM connected only to itself is an island of modernity; NEOM connected to a Five Seas digital network, a regional desalination corridor, and an integrated Gulf-to-Mediterranean transport axis is a continental anchor. The Five Seas Project gives every national ambition in the region the regional context it needs to reach its potential.

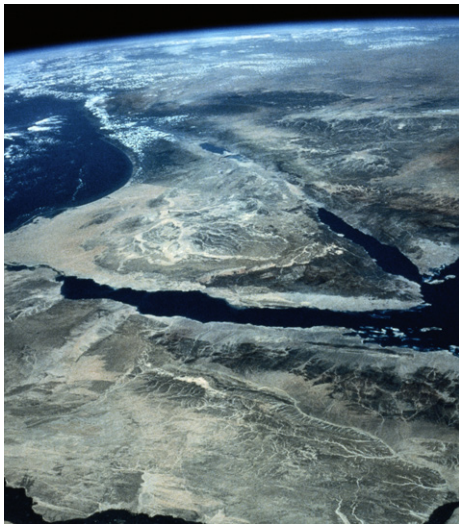
58 Mevlut Ozkan, "Bab al-Mandeb Strait: Iran War Places Another Vital Shipping Route at Risk," *Anadolu Agency*, March 29, 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/explainer-bab-al-mandeb-strait-iran-war-places-another-vital-shipping-route-at-risk/3885293.

59 Josh Eiermann, "Red Sea Attacks Increase Shipping Times and Freight Rates," *U.S. Energy Information Administration* March 11, 2026, https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=61363.

60 Josh Eiermann, *Red Sea Attacks Increase Shipping Times*.

61 World Population Review, "Population by Country (2026)," *World Population Review*, accessed April 8, 2026, https://worldpopulationreview.com/.

62 Worldometer, "GDP by Country (2025)," *Worldometer*, accessed April 8, 2026, https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-by-country/.
World Population Review, *Population by Country (2026)*.



Satellite view of the Red Sea and the Sinai Peninsula (Getty Images)

III. Beyond Pipelines: Seven Pillars of Integration

The critical difference between the Four Seas Initiative and the Five Seas Project is scope. Energy infrastructure is Pillar I – indispensable, and the source of the revenues that fund everything else. But the Five Seas vision extends across six further pillars:

Pillar	Five Seas Ambition
I · Energy Infrastructure	The Four Seas pipeline corridor – the non-negotiable foundation. Transit revenues fund all that follows.
II · Digital & Data	Terrestrial fiber spine from Istanbul to Djibouti; Five Seas Digital Highway; regional data sovereignty and cybersecurity framework; solar-powered data centers.
III · Water Security	Five Seas Water Compact; solar-powered desalination network across the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa; shared aquifer management; agricultural efficiency programs.
IV · Transport & Logistics	Red Sea Rail Corridor (Aqaba to Aden); Suez-to-Syria Land Bridge; port investment at Djibouti, Berbera, and Port Sudan connecting landlocked East Africa to the network.
V · Industrial SEZs	Eight-node Special Economic Zone network - Banias, Mersin, Aqaba, Jeddah, Djibouti, Port Sudan and beyond – with harmonized customs, investor protections, and shared regulatory frameworks.
VI · Education & Human Capital	Five Seas University Consortium across Istanbul, Damascus, Amman, Riyadh, Cairo, and Khartoum; Five Seas Technical Institute; regional youth exchange targeting 50,000 students annually.
VII · Green Energy Transition	Five Seas Green Energy Grid: Saharan and Arabian solar generation → green hydrogen exports to Europe. By 2042, the pipeline corridor evolves into a clean energy corridor. The transit fees on hydrocarbons become capacity charges on electrons.

IV. The Road from Four Seas to Five

The sequencing is everything. The Five Seas Project does not compete with the Four Seas Initiative; it is what the Four Seas Initiative grows into when it succeeds. The key institutional step is a Five Seas Scoping Commission, established by resolution of the Four Seas Ministerial Forum in 2028-29, once the energy corridor is sufficiently advanced to demonstrate commercial viability to prospective Red Sea member states. By 2032-36, Red Sea nations formally accede; by 2042, a renewable energy grid has begun to replace the hydrocarbon corridor as the network's primary revenue driver.

Grand visions have a poor record in the Middle East. The Five Seas Project is not built on political aspiration alone – it is built on the commercial logic of the Four Seas Initiative, which already has signed deals, sovereign wealth fund commitments, and active American energy company investment.

The difference between this vision and its predecessors is that it begins with infrastructure that pays for itself, expands through sectors that multiply those returns, and creates the economic stakeholders – companies, universities, youth exchange alumni – whose continued prosperity depends on integration succeeding.

> "Build the Four Seas. Prove the model. Then build the Five. The Red Sea is not a distant horizon – it is the next chapter of the same story, waiting to be written."

V. The Stakes for Washington and Brussels

For the White House: The Five Seas Project is the Trump dealmaking philosophy at civilizational scale: U.S. technology firms entering a market of 700 million people building digital infrastructure from scratch; U.S. engineering companies executing the largest infrastructure program since the Marshall Plan; and U.S. diplomacy generating visible commercial results that sustain engagement across administrations. It is also the West's most credible answer to China's Belt and Road in the Red Sea region, where Chinese port investment at Djibouti and along the East African coast has been advancing for over a decade without a coherent Western counter architecture.[63]

For the European Commission: The Five Seas Project addresses both of Europe's most pressing external vulnerabilities simultaneously: energy supply fragility and the instability of the southern neighborhood. A Five Seas region that is economically integrated, institutionally stable, and commercially connected to Europe is not merely an energy supplier; it is a partner in the fullest sense: a market, a destination for investment, a source of skilled human capital, and a stabilizing force in the neighborhood that Europe cannot afford to leave to chance.

63 Paul Nantulya, "Mapping China's Strategic Port Development in Africa," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, March 25, 2025, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/china-port-development-africa/.

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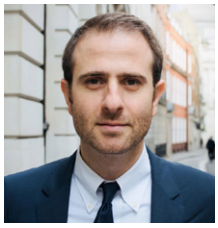

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