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Levantine Captagon Smuggling Following Assad's Downfall

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STRATEGY AND POLICY

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COVER: Some 11 million captagon pills, smuggled from Lebanon, are seized during an operation in the southern countryside of Homs province in Syria in October 2025. (Abobaker Alsaka/Anadolu via Getty Images)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The downfall of the regime of deposed President Bashar al-Assad ended Syrian state sponsorship of the production of the illicit amphetamine-type stimulant captagon and dismantled the centralized industrial model that had enabled large-scale manufacturing and cross-border trafficking. Syrian authorities reported thwarting more than 20 prepared smuggling shipments in southern Syria following the regime's collapse. In 2025, the new Syrian government reportedly seized 25 times the amount than had been seized by the Assad regime in 2024.

However, the captagon trade still persists, with questions about sustained flows through Lebanon, Jordan, and from Syria. Furthermore, the collapse of the Assad regime fragmented a decade-long monopoly over captagon production and trafficking, with both old and new actors now engaging in the trade. New questions have emerged about the identities, structure, and modus operandi of criminal actors that have filled this gap in the captagon trade.



Syrian Interior Ministry officials show some of the 12 million captagon pills seized during an October 2025 operation in Damascus. (Hisam Hac Omer / Anadolu via Getty Images)

Initial Findings

A combined qualitative and quantitative methods analysis drawing upon interdiction data compiled from New Lines Institute Captagon Trade Project's Comprehensive Seizure Database reveals these findings:

The role of Hezbollah and its affiliates in captagon smuggling has diminished. This shift appears to reflect mounting regional and security pressures in Lebanon, tightened controls along the Syrian-Lebanese border, and the arrests of several high-profile figures involved in the drug trade in both countries, narrowing traditional smuggling routes and lowering the volume of interdiction, with authorities thus far in 2026 seizing nearly half of the amount of captagon seized for all of 2024.

However, the captagon trade has not been eradicated in Lebanon, with evidence of continued small-scale production and smuggling of captagon among local criminal networks and prominent families, evidenced by continued laboratory interdictions, with six raids in 2025 and five in 2026 to date.

While the total volume of captagon seized in Jordan in 2025 remained broadly comparable to 2024 levels, the number of seizures along the Syria-Jordan border more than doubled, indicating a shift in the modus operandi of smugglers.

Captagon trafficking from Syria has transitioned from a centralized, security-backed enterprise into a fragmented and decentralized system, with the median seizure size declining by nearly 60% as smugglers increasingly rely on drones and balloons, which carry smaller payloads than can be carried on traditional overland routes.

Southern Syria's fragmented security environment continues to enable large-scale smuggling, but there is no evidence of large-scale local production as hybrid control structures, weak accountability, and economic desperation continue to sustain large-scale trafficking in the area.

While the new Syrian administration has made headway in eroding Syria's status as the primary production hub for the captagon trade, the country remains a major transit hub and intermediary for traditional smuggling routes seeking to supply continued demand markets in the Gulf.

Despite the political upheaval in Syria, and as smugglers improved their ability to evade detection, Jordanian border guards continued cross-border operations, including targeted airstrikes against warehouses and manufacturing sites in Suwayda governorate, though this approach has failed to significantly reduce trafficking flows.

Bilateral cooperation between Damascus and its regional counterparts is emerging but remains fragile. Increased coordination between the Syrian and Jordanian Interior Ministries contrasts with the previous era of regime-sponsored obstruction.

Introduction

The collapse of the regime of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in late 2024 exposed the industrial scale of Syria's captagon production and disrupted centralized trafficking networks that had operated under state protection.¹ Although the interim Syrian government has dismantled several major production facilities, the country's fragmented security landscape continues to complicate enforcement. Authority in southern Syria is divided among local armed factions,² tribal networks, criminal families, and emerging state security institutions, creating uneven enforcement capacity across the border region.

Even in light of major shortages in captagon supply, trafficking dynamics have persisted along Syrian border regions with Lebanon and Jordan. Nearly two years after Assad's fall, it is clear that criminal enterprises are adapting to both new regulations and security realities imposed by the new Syrian administration and exploiting opportunities and governance gaps in contested border regions. As a result, while captagon activity has been largely disrupted in former areas under deep Assad regime control, the trade has persisted on a more fragmented, reduced scale along porous Syrian border regions and local networks.

Dynamics in Southern Syria

Over the past decade, southern Syria has undergone significant geopolitical, security, and economic transformation. Between 2016 and 2018, the former Assad regime isolated southern Syria under de-escalation arrangements brokered by regional and international actors including Russia and Israel. Governance structures remained fragmented, with local opposition factions exercising varying degrees of autonomy. Although Damascus reasserted formal control of the region in 2018 under a fragile reconciliation agreement³ it withheld consistent service provision and exploited divisions among local armed groups and tribal actors.^{4,5} From 2016 to 2019, shifting diplomacy and conflict dynamics, including the reopening of the Jordanian Embassy in Damascus and the resumption of trade through the Jaber-Nasib crossing, reshaped the border environment.^{6,7} These developments established the baseline for later enforcement changes against illicit narcotics trafficking.

Economic decline in southern Syria has been a major structural driver of smuggling activity. The collapse of agriculture and grazing livelihoods combined with limited industrial activity and declining public-sector employment has produced widespread impoverishment across border

- 1 Karam Shaar, Caroline Rose, and Roaa Obaid, "Captagon in 2024: Implications After the Fall of the Syrian Regime," New Lines Institute – Special Project on the Captagon Trade, (January, 2025), https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/20250225-Captagon-in-2024_Intelligence-Briefing-nlisap.pdf
- 2 The Levant Studies Unit, "The Syrian Government's Roadmap to Resolve the Suwayda Crisis: Challenges and Prospects of Reintegration," Emirati Policy Center (EPC), (Oct 22, 2025), <https://url.iinfo/1ujb1>
- 3 Suhail al-Ghazi, "Daraa: Another Example of the Regime's Failure of Reconciliation," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), (15 October, 2021), <https://timep.org/2021/10/15/daraa-another-example-of-the-regimes-failure-of-reconciliation/>
- 4 Tim Al-Hajj, "Russia turns against the settlements in Syria," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (November 16, 2021), <https://carnegieendowment.org/ar/sada/2021/11/is-russia-renege-on-its-reconciliation-agreements-in-syria?lang=en>
- 5 "Reconciliation Agreement in Daraa: Insecurity, Continued Repression and Collective Punishment," Syrian Association for Citizens' Dignity (SACD), (July 10, 2020), <https://syacd.org/reconciliation-agreement-in-daraa-insecurity-continued-repression-and-collective-punishment/>
- 6 "Jordan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Announces the Appointment of a Chargé d'Affaires at the Kingdom's Embassy in Damascus," France 24, 22 January 2019, <https://url.iinfo/1uhd7>
- 7 "It's official... The Nassib border crossing between Jordan and Syria has reopened," Sky News Arabia, 28 May 2018, <https://url.iinfo/1uhdn>

“Jordan adopted a more assertive approach combining military action, stricter border enforcement, and regional diplomacy. The kingdom relaxed its rules of engagement, giving its armed forces greater flexibility to fire on smugglers who demonstrated dangerous behavior.”

communities.⁸ The gap between incomes paid in Syrian pounds and expenses denominated in U.S. dollars has increased economic vulnerability and made participation in illicit economies more attractive. In this environment, smuggling networks increasingly function as alternative employment systems.

Smuggling along the Jordanian-Syrian border intensified beginning in 2020, with seizures of captagon rising through 2021 and peaking in 2022. This escalation followed Saudi Arabia's ban on Lebanese agricultural imports in April 2021, a prohibition that by October had expanded to include all imports.⁹ This disrupted the established smuggling routes that relied on Lebanese export channels and increased reliance on the Jordanian-Saudi land corridor as the primary remaining overland smuggling route to Gulf markets.¹⁰ Russia's reduced military presence in southern Syria after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and subsequent downgrade of its military patrols along the border, weakened an enforcement layer Jordan had viewed as stabilizing. The Jordanian Prime Minister Jafar Hassan later acknowledged that the reduced Russian presence increased border security challenges for the kingdom. Jordan, with U.S. support, had installed a relatively new border surveillance system that could detect major military incursions, but it was less suited to intercepting small, mobile trafficking units.¹¹

As a result, Jordan adopted a more assertive approach combining military action, stricter border enforcement, and regional diplomacy. The kingdom relaxed its rules of engagement, giving its armed forces greater flexibility to fire on smugglers who demonstrated dangerous behavior. Furthermore, Jordan's intelligence agencies deepened monitoring and collection activities in southern Syria, coordinating with local groups to gain further insight about the nature and location of smuggling operations, information that would later help the kingdom target these networks directly. This pressure was leveraged alongside regional efforts to normalize relations with Syria under Assad's rule, particularly by Arab states including Saudi Arabia, which in turn prompted Syrian authorities to signal a willingness to curb captagon trafficking as part of reintegration efforts.¹²

Yet while Jordan was pursuing normalization with Syria, it simultaneously adopted punitive measures against Damascus. Earlier security dialogue included the establishment of joint working groups involving law enforcement and intelligence agencies in both countries. However, Jordanian officials publicly acknowledged that smuggling operations increased following these talks¹³ despite Syrian assurances that the issue would be addressed.

Jordanian officials attributed the continuation of trafficking to corruption, collusion, and institutional dysfunction within Syrian structures,¹⁴ arguing that prior coordination efforts had not yielded effective results. These frustrations increased pressure in Amman to adopt more direct and unilateral enforcement measures.¹⁵ In 2023, the Jordanian air force conducted airstrikes against farms, warehouses, and residences linked to drug traffickers in southern Syria.¹⁶

8 Jalal Al-Attar, "Syria's Agricultural Crisis," Sada, (Jan 2, 2024), <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/01/syrias-agricultural-crisis?center=middle-east&lang=en>

9 "Saudi Arabia considers the background to the diplomatic crisis with Lebanon to be Hezbollah's hegemony over it," France24, (October 01, 2021), <https://url.info/1uifg>

10 "Saudi Arabia Closes Its Borders to Lebanese Agricultural Exports," Al Alam, (April 28, 2021), <https://url.info/1oY-Z>

11 Jordanian prime minister affirms continued coordination with the Assad regime in combating drugs, YouTube, Althania, (Jul 13, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leHYoqy27Vs>

12 Hesham Alghannam, "Border Traffic: How Syria Uses Captagon to Gain Leverage Over Saudi Arabia," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (July 9, 2024) <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/08/border-traffic-how-syria-uses-captagon-to-gain-leverage-over-saudi-arabia>

13 "Jordan: Drug Smuggling Instructions Increased After Dialogues with Damascus," Al-Modon, (September 25, 2023) <https://url.info/1uiz3>

14 "Former Jordanian Minister of Media: Jordan suffers from drug trade smuggled from Syrian territories," Al Hadath Syria, Facebook, (May 8, 2023) <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=171047879234197>

15 "Civilian casualties from airstrikes believed to be Jordanian targeted the towns of Arman and Melh in the countryside of Suwayda," Sham Network, (January 17, 2024), <https://shaam.org/news/syria-news/dhhaya-mdnywn-bgharat-jwyh-yurjh-anha-ardnyh-asthdt-bldty-aman-wmlh-bryf-alswydaa>

16 "Jordanian airstrikes against drug smugglers' hideouts inside Syria," France24, (December 19, 2023), <https://url.info/1uiTB>

A Jordanian-Syrian ministerial security committee was established to address drug and weapons smuggling,¹⁷ and rules of engagement were introduced¹⁸ authorizing border forces to neutralize smugglers attempting to cross into Jordan.¹⁹

To this point, Jordan's strategy of successive strikes against captagon smugglers and drug trafficking assets have had limited impact on trafficking flows. Jordan's strategy has not contributed to the supply shortage of captagon emanating from Syria – something that could be credited to the collapse of the Assad regime and limited evidence of captagon production in southern Syria – and trafficking flows continue well into Syria's new chapter of governance. While Jordan has been able to launch a campaign that acts upon accurate intelligence about the movement of key drug kingpins and the locations of warehouses and smugglers, decapitation strikes have not successfully yielded considerably lower trafficking rates from Syria into Lebanon.

The Syria-Jordan Border

The 375-kilometer (233-mile) shared border between Jordan and Syria has long served as a conduit for illicit activity beyond captagon, including hashish, heroin, crystal methamphetamine (*Shabu*), diverted products from licit markets like cigarettes and alcohol, and weapons.²⁰ With these illicit products, smugglers sometimes also carry ammunition and explosives that pose direct threats to Jordan's national security.²¹ The porous nature of the border has intensified concerns about the crime-conflict nexus, where criminal syndicates – and armed militants – create greater risk for violence and instability inside the kingdom.

Jordanian authorities describe their country primarily as a transit corridor for Syrian narcotics bound for Gulf markets, particularly Saudi Arabia, rather than a producer or major consumer of these drugs. Local captagon use emerged as a secondary effect of this status, while nascent attempts to set up production in 2017-2018 were disrupted before they could be developed into sustained operations.²² Captagon production in the Levant, mainly in neighboring Syria, gives consumers access to the drug at a lower price than in destination markets in Saudi Arabia where a pill can sell for up to \$25, for approximately \$4-\$7 per pill, according to field sources in Jordan.

Before trafficking became a central security concern, Jordan's border policy focused primarily on counterterrorism and preventing infiltration by militant groups. Syria's civil war led to the suspension of operations at the Jaber-Nasib crossing in 2015,²³ which remained closed until 2018. This drove investment in surveillance infrastructure, including a border security program supported by the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency, which was completed in 2019.²⁴ Since the regime's collapse, trafficking from Syria into Jordan has persisted along the border, despite organizational disruption. Smuggling attempts

17 "The Jordanian-Syrian Committee for Combating Drugs Holds its First Meeting in Amman," Syria TV, (July 7, 2023), <https://url.info/1uiTR>

18 "Jordanian authorities released the bodies of seven people killed in clashes with Jordanian border guards during a drug smuggling operation," Sham Network, (January 25, 2024), <https://shaam.org/news/syria-news/mhrbwn-qutlwa-fy-albadyh-tqyr-ykshf-hwyh-aljthh-ala-alhdwd-alswryh-ma-alardn>

19 "Following the exchange of statements with the Assad regime, Jordan publishes a list of drug smuggling suspects," Syria TV, (Jan 25, 2024), <https://url.info/1uiX5>

20 Global Organized Crime Index, "Jordan," (2023), https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_profile_jordan_2023.pdf

21 Saud Al-Sharafat, "The Captagon War: Smuggling on the Jordanian-Syrian Border," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, (September 30, 2022), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/captagon-war-smuggling-jordanian-syrian-border>

22 "Jordanian Security Forces Raid a Lab Manufacturing Captagon," Alghad, (January 18, 2018), <https://2u.pw/MJuGwS>

23 "The Nasib Border Crossing: The Impact of Its Closure and Reopening on Syria and the Region," Jusoer for Studies, (July 26, 2018), <https://2u.pw/APg5d9>

24 "Audit of Jordan Border Security Program Oversight DODIG-2020-043," Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, (December 20, 2019), <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2046324/audit-of-jordan-border-security-program-oversight-dodig-2020-043/>

through the Jaber-Nasib crossing increased, with over 163 seizures recorded between December 2024 and August 2026. Of this count, 79 captagon-related interdictions in Jordan came in 2026, indicating that interdiction rates will almost certainly surpass the 2025 total of 80 interdictions by the end of the year, as reflected in New Lines' captagon database. During this time period, the new Syrian government reported thwarting more than 20 prepared smuggling shipments in southern Syria, including consignments intended for Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other neighboring countries, compared with no such interceptions publicly reported under the previous regime. This signals the emergence of limited cooperation that includes intelligence sharing and tip-offs for seizures between Syrian and Jordanian authorities.

Fragmentation in Smuggling Operations

Data from the Captagon Interactive Trade Map maintained by New Lines Institute provides the basis for analysis of both volume and frequency of captagon trafficking patterns.²⁵ The map and its underlying database include more than 2,120 counter-captagon operations – including seizures, raids, arrests, and clashes – across the Middle East and beyond from 2016 to the present. It is updated daily, drawing from Arabic- and English-language reporting, social media, and official sources, including the Syrian Ministry of Interior.

Official figures from the Jordanian Anti-Narcotics Department indicate that authorities seized more captagon in 2025 than in the previous year, reporting approximately 27.5 million pills confiscated in 2024 and roughly 31 million in 2025.^{26,27} The apparent discrepancy reflects changes in public disclosure practices rather than a verified decline in trafficking. In 2025, Jordanian authorities began reporting interdictions without specifying seizure quantities, particularly along the Jordanian-Syrian border. Because the database relies on publicly disclosed pill counts, this change has resulted in an underestimation of total volumes seized. At the same time, Jordanian officials have pointed to intensified enforcement efforts along the border, which may also have contributed to the rise in recorded interdictions. Pill quantities were disclosed for about 86% of reported Syrian-origin captagon seizures in 2024 but for only roughly 42% in 2025, significantly constraining quantitative trend analysis. It is uncertain why transparency about seized volumes changed in 2025.

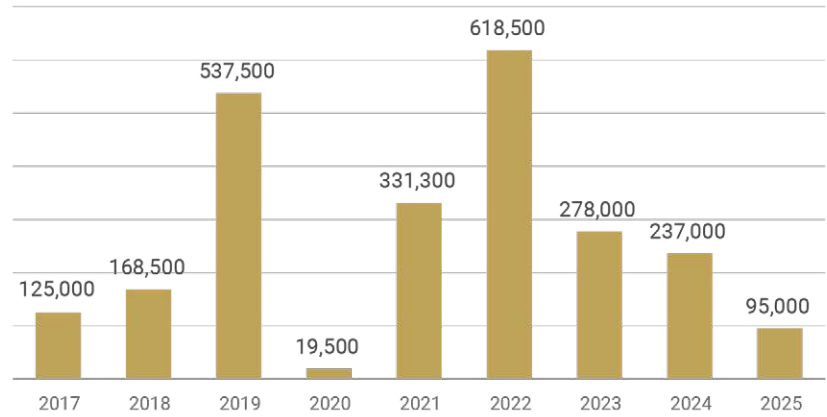
While total official seizure volumes remained broadly stable, the number of reported smuggling incidents along the Jordanian-Syrian border increased by nearly 250%, resulting in a decline in median seizure size. After peaking at more than 600,000 pills per reported seizure in 2022, the median fell to roughly 280,000 in 2023, about 240,000 in 2024, and under 100,000 in 2025. This sustained decline reflects the fragmentation of trafficking operations and the shift from large, consolidated shipments to smaller deliveries, including increased use of drones and balloons along the Jordanian-Syrian border.

25 Special Project on the Captagon Trade, New Lines Institute, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/project/special-project-on-the-captagon-trade/>

26 "Jordanian security forces intercepted 27 million Captagon pills in 2024 before they reached their final destinations," Sraya News, (January 6, 2025), <https://www.sarayanews.com/article/982647>

27 "The total amount of drugs seized by the Anti Narcotics Administration throughout 2025," Al Jazeera – Jordan, (January 1, 2026), <https://url.iinfo/1oZ:2>

Annual Median Seizure Size

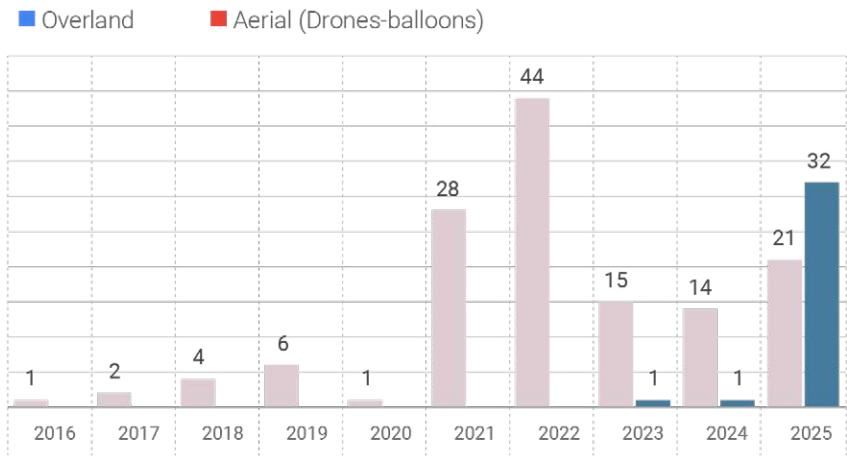


Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

Changing Modus Operandi

The decline in the median shipment size is primarily attributable to shifts in smuggling methods. While land routes historically dominated,²⁸ reported incidents – especially in 2025 – indicate a strategic shift toward aerial methods, reflecting adaptation to increased military and security pressure from Jordan. The transition toward aerial methods may also reflect reduced capacity among fragmented smuggling networks to coordinate large, armed cross-border movements, although available evidence does not suggest a centrally directed strategic shift.

Syria-to-Jordan Smuggling Transit Method



Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

From 2016 to 2019, smuggling was conducted almost exclusively by land, with no recorded aerial seizures. Networks relied on rugged terrain and Jordan’s counterterrorism-focused border posture to facilitate overland movement. Limited aerial smuggling first appeared in 2020, likely attributable to experiments to test security responses. Land-based operations continued to expand, peaking in 2022, after which Jordan adopted a more forceful

28 Ahmad Qweidar and Jacob Wirtschafter, “Desert Smugglers Drive Syria’s Captagon Surge,” The Medialine, (April 12,2025), <https://url.info/1uigJ>

The Syrian Anti-Narcotics Department foiled a large shipment of drugs, including captagon, in rural Damascus in January 2025. (Rami Alsayed/NurPhoto via Getty Images)



security posture and revised its rules of engagement, making overland routes significantly more dangerous for smugglers.

By 2025, aerial methods had become a core component of smuggling operations, driven by heightened risk on land due to tighter border security, lethal responses, and cross-border airstrikes, as well as the operational advantages of aerial delivery systems.

Smugglers increasingly rely on drones and GPS-tracked balloons to avoid direct border crossings. These systems reduce reliance on human couriers and limit exposure to ground patrols and ambush points.²⁹ Small drones operating at low altitude are difficult to detect with conventional radar.³⁰ This shift reflects a broader transition from large, infrequent land shipments to smaller, more frequent consignments, in which individual losses are less costly.

In recent years, networks have turned to balloon-based platforms, or aerostats, in place of drones. This trend transcends the Jordanian-Syrian border. Transnational criminal organizations, including the Mexico-based Jalisco New Generation and Sinaloa cartels, have similarly adopted aerial platforms to move narcotics across heavily monitored borders.³¹ In 2025, balloons accounted for approximately 87.5% of aerial captagon interceptions along the Syria-Jordan border, while drones accounted for approximately 12.5%. Unlike drones – which are audible and typically limited to payloads of around 4,000 captagon pills³² – aerostats offer a lower-cost, silent alternative capable of transporting quantities exceeding 200,000 pills.³³ These systems are typically equipped with GPS tracking devices for post-border recovery and present limited radar signatures, complicating detection by standard patrol systems.

29 Hannah Haight, Southern Methodist University-Dedman School of Law, "High Crimes in Low Airspace: The Rise of Drones in Cross-Border Drug Trafficking," (2025), Pg. 2, <https://scholar.smu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4279&context=jalc>

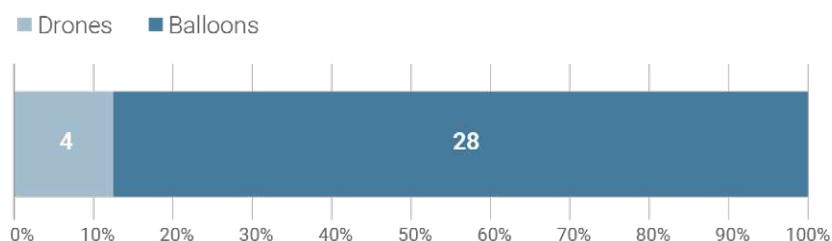
30 "Why Drone Detection with Radar Is More Complex Than You Think," Airsight, <https://www.airsight.com/blog/drone-detection-radar-complex>

31 María Verza, "How Mexican Cartels Employ Drones as Tools to Smuggle Drugs and Fight Enemies," ABC News, February 11, 2026, <https://abcnews.com/International/wireStory/mexican-cartels-employ-drones-tools-smuggle-drugs-fight-130082081>

32 "Jordan foils an attempt to smuggle drugs from areas under Assad's control," Horrya Press, (July 19, 2024), <https://horrya.net/archives/151838>

33 "Jordan foils an attempt to smuggle narcotics using guided balloons," Draa 24, (July 7, 2025), <https://urli.info/1o-d2>

Aerial-Transit Captagon Seizures on the Jordan-Syria Border in 2025

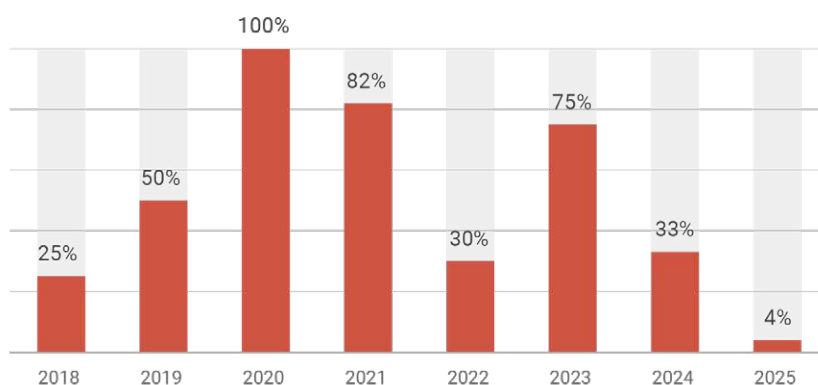


Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

Integration between criminal syndicates also appears to have weakened. Historically, many seizures included narcotics besides captagon, including hashish, Lyrica (pregabalin), and methamphetamine. Following Assad's downfall, this pattern of multidrug shipments appears to have declined, coinciding with heightened security pressure and stricter border controls. These changes likely have dissuaded smugglers from attempting drug trafficking operations in larger quantities, given the increased risk of interdiction and policy attention on cross-border smuggling. However, changes in reporting and disclosure practices may also influence the observed trend, potentially leading to different consignments being grouped into a singular seizure to process information quickly.

In southern Syria, only one publicly announced seizure was reported in 2025.³⁴ Local factions seized a warehouse in the Al-Mashourab neighborhood the Suwayda governate containing captagon and hashish and attributed ownership to Bedouin groups. This contrasts with the significant rise in official seizures reported by state authorities in both Syria and Jordan, suggesting limited local enforcement capacity and persistent security gaps.

Share of Syrian-Originated Captagon Seizures in Jordan that Include Other Drugs



Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

34 "Large quantities of drugs left behind by smugglers from Bedouin tribes in the Mashroub neighborhood of the city of Sweida," Suwayda 24, (July 23, 2025), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2313770309026005>

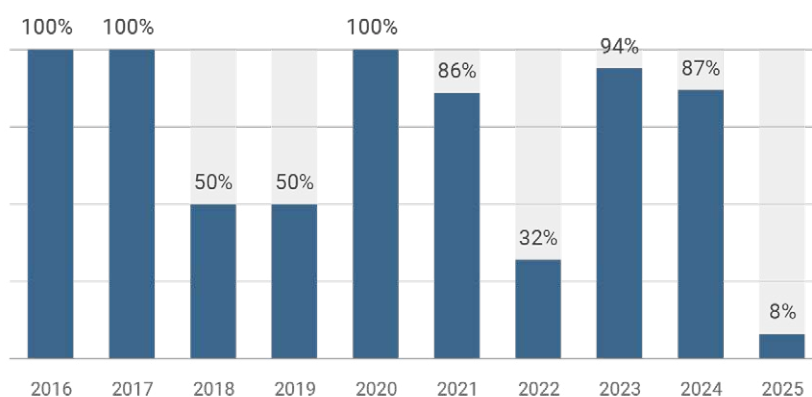
Changing Smuggling Operations Trigger Changes in the Rules of Engagement

Jordan's border enforcement posture evolved significantly after the escalation of violence along the Jordanian-Syrian border in 2022. Following the Jan. 16, 2022, death of a Jordanian border guard captain and the injury of several personnel,³⁵ Jordan revised its rules of engagement for individuals approaching the border from "shoot to halt" to "shoot to kill."³⁶ About a week later, the Jordanian armed forces announced it had killed 27 suspected smugglers during a mass infiltration attempt³⁷ while wounding others. The remainder fled back into Syrian territory. This marked the most severe early application of the revised policy.

Violence along the border continued in 2023. After the death of a Jordanian border guard officer following several hours of clashes on Dec. 12, 2023,³⁸ Jordanian forces killed and injured multiple smugglers, arrested nine people, and seized weapons including rocket-propelled grenade launchers.³⁹ During this period, smuggling networks increasingly deployed heavy weaponry, including rocket launchers and mines, indicating a shift from covert crossings to confrontation.

The revised rules enabled Jordan to deter large land incursions, with lethal engagement at the border declining as smuggling networks adapted their methods. The growing use of drones and balloon-based delivery systems reduced the need for traffickers to physically cross the border, lowering the frequency of armed confrontations with Jordanian forces.

Share of Captagon Seizures on the Syria-Jordan Border Where Rules of Engagement were Applied



Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

As smugglers increasingly avoided direct border contact, Jordan expanded enforcement beyond its territory. In May 2023, the Royal Jordanian Air Force struck the village of Al-Shaab in Suwayda, killing Marai al-Ramthan,⁴⁰ one of the most prominent traffickers in southern Syria, along with members of his

35 Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Jordan Army Officer Killed, Three Injured in Shooting Along Border with Syria - Army Statement," *Reuters*, January 16, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jordan-army-officer-killed-three-injured-shooting-along-border-with-syria-army-2022-01-16/>

36 "The Jordanian Army Discusses Changes to the Rules of Engagement," Jordan News Agency, <https://nabaajordan.com/articles/130221>

37 "Jordanian military kills 27 in shoot-out with Syrian smugglers," *Al Jazeera*, (Jan 27, 2022), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/27/jordanian-military-kills-27-in-shootout-with-syria-smugglers>

38 "The funeral procession of the martyred Warrant Officer, who was killed during an armed clash between Border Guard forces and dozens of smugglers in the Eastern Military Zone," *Al Mamlaka TV*, (December 12, 2023), <https://url.info/1o-mm>

39 "Jordan: Dozens of infiltrators from Syria crossed the border with rocket launchers," *Al Arabiya*, (December 18, 2023), <https://url.info/1o-nA>

40 "Jordan behind attack that killed drug trafficker in Syria: SOHR," *Al Jazeera*, (May 8, 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/8/sohr-attack-that-killed-drug-trafficker-in-syria-was-by-jordan>

family. Additional airstrikes on Orman, Malah, and Al-Shaab followed in 2024, targeting warehouses suspected of containing illicit drugs.⁴¹

During the final two years of Assad's rule, Amman and Damascus established a joint committee to combat drug smuggling by confronting the narcotics threat and dismantling cross-border trafficking networks.⁴² However, the regime's response to Jordanian intelligence was often weak or superficial,⁴³ and it failed to hold accountable traffickers affiliated with regime officers, Hezbollah, or Iran-linked networks. Consequently, Jordan was compelled to conduct several airstrikes in Syria. While statements by Jordanian officials suggested that certain strikes had been carried out in coordination with the Assad regime,⁴⁴ others were carried out despite its opposition to Jordanian intervention on Syrian soil. These unilateral operations demonstrated Jordan's capacity to act independently of Damascus, relying on its own covert intelligence sources, of which the Syrian regime was unaware.

The sequence surrounding Ramthan's death illustrates the selective nature of this coordination. Approximately two months prior to the strike, Ramthan attempted to establish an independent trafficking route to Jordan without coordinating with the Syrian Fourth Division or Hezbollah.⁴⁵ He was subsequently arrested by the Fourth Division's security bureau before being released through the mediation of Maj. Gen. Kifah Mulhem. Several reports hinted that regime sources had provided the intelligence that enabled the Jordanian strike, which framed the targeting as evidence of cooperation with Amman.^{46,47,48,49} In this context, Ramthan was perceived to have become expendable within evolving regime dynamics.

The uneven nature of intelligence coordination became particularly visible in January 2024, when Jordanian airstrikes again targeted sites in the town of Orman. One hit an area near the residence of Faris Semou'a,⁵⁰ a prominent trafficker described by local sources as a close associate Ramthan. Reports indicate that Semou'a had left the residence with his family shortly before the strike, and no casualties were recorded at that location.

Just days after that strike, additional strikes targeted residential areas in Orman and Malah. According to local reporting, the operation resulted in the deaths of 10 civilians,⁵¹ many of them women and children. The incident drew local condemnation and renewed scrutiny of the intelligence and targeting processes underpinning cross-border operations.

Taken together, this pattern of uneven intelligence coordination raises questions about whether regime-linked actors cooperated in ways that aligned with their own internal interests, including the sidelining of rival trafficking networks. Following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, Jordan initially emphasized coordination with Syrian authorities and

41 "Jordan strikes Iran-linked drug dealers in Syria—intelligence sources," Reuters, (January 5, 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/8/sohr-attack-that-killed-drug-trafficker-in-syria-was-by-jordan>

42 "Jordan and Syria Agree to Form a Joint Committee to Combat Drug Trafficking," (July 3, 2023), <https://urli.info/1o-u9>

43 Ayman Abu Nokta, "Jordan's Role in Southern Syria: Between Reality and the Future," Jusoor for Studies, (Feb 13, 2024), <https://urli.info/1o-uG>

44 "Jordanian Forces and the Syrian Regime are Responsible for the Killing of Seven Syrian Civilians, including Five Children and One Woman," Syrian Network for Human Rights, (May 12, 2023), <https://snhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/R230508F-1.pdf>

45 Ayman Abu Nokta, "Jordan's Role in Southern Syria: Between Reality and the Future," Jusoor for Studies, (Feb 13, 2024), <https://urli.info/1o-uG>

46 Reuters, "Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say," *Voice of America*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/jordan-strikes-iran-linked-drugs-factory-in-southern-syria-sources-say/7084246.html>

47 Reuters, "Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say," *Voice of America*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/jordan-strikes-iran-linked-drugs-factory-in-southern-syria-sources-say/7084246.html>

48 Mroue, Bassem and Chehayeb, Kareem, "Airstrikes Kill Well-Known Syrian Drug Kingpin," *Associated Press*, May 8, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/syria-jordan-airstrikes-captagon-sweida-daraa-399356200591161f7cfa24b0fe03639b>

49 Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Drug Lord Killed in Mysterious Air Raid in Syria Was Wanted by Jordan," *The National*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2023/05/08/drug-lord-killed-in-mysterious-air-raid-in-syria-was-wanted-by-jordan/>

50 "Civilian casualties in suspected Jordanian airstrikes targeting the towns of Arman and Malah in the Suwayda countryside," Sham Network, (January 17, 2024) <https://urli.info/1o-EE>

51 "Massacre in Suwayda and 10 victims, mostly women and children," Suwayda24, (Jan 18, 2024), <https://x.com/suwayda24/status/1747832869001564358>

“As smuggling attempts increased and traffickers progressively relied more heavily on aerial delivery methods that limited direct border engagement, Jordanian forces intensified enforcement measures.”

regional partners, including Iraq and Gulf states. Late December 2024 and the early months of 2025 featured limited meetings between authorities from Amman and Damascus in which the subject of counternarcotics frequently was featured in the agenda alongside border security and counterterrorism priorities. Jordanian Foreign Minister Aymen Safadi traveled to Damascus shortly after the regime’s collapse to meet with Syria’s interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, where he remarked “We share a 375-kilometer (230-mile) border with Syria. We want that border to be stable, free from terrorist organizations, free from drugs and weapon smuggling.”⁵²

This approach led Syria and Jordan to reduce lethal engagements along the border and increase their emphasis on interdiction and intelligence cooperation, including joint interceptions at the Jaber-Nasib crossing, joint security coordination mechanisms, and efforts to secure Syria’s borders with neighboring states.⁵³

As smuggling attempts increased and traffickers progressively relied more heavily on aerial delivery methods that limited direct border engagement, Jordanian forces intensified enforcement measures. The Royal Jordanian Air Force resumed targeted airstrikes against traffickers in Syria.⁵⁴ In Suwayda governorate,⁵⁵ warehouses, suspected storage facilities, and other sites linked to smuggling networks have been targeted, primarily in areas outside effective central government control.

Jordanian authorities generally do not disclose the specific types of narcotics seized or the nationalities of individuals detained or killed. Amid escalating smuggling activity in southern Syria, Damascus deployed Ministry of Interior and anti-narcotics units to Al-Shaab in Suwayda and established additional security checkpoints as part of efforts to curb trafficking and stabilize the area.⁵⁶

The new Syrian administration, however, has refrained from publicly condemning Jordanian strikes inside Syrian territory. Instead, continued reports of joint operations and interdictions along key border points indicate continued security coordination with Amman,⁵⁷ even as Jordan maintains the option of unilateral action in areas where the Syrian state has yet to fully consolidate control, particularly following violent clashes in July 2025 that constrained government access and influence in parts of the south.

Jordanian-Syrian Interior Ministry Coordination and the Security Landscape in Southern Syria

Security coordination between the Syrian and Jordanian interior ministries improved considerably following the collapse of the Assad regime. This change is reflected in intelligence sharing, joint operations, and the fulfillment of commitments by the new authorities in Damascus. The partnership was formalized in a joint statement reporting the thwarting of seven smuggling attempts and the seizure of approximately 1 million narcotic pills.⁵⁸

This cooperation contrasts with coordination attempts with the Assad

52 “Stand by Our Syrian Brothers, Says Jordan FM after Meeting al-Sharaa,” Al Jazeera, December 23, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/23/stand-by-our-syrian-brothers-says-jordan-fm-after-meeting-al-sharaa>

53 “Syria, Jordan Foil One Ton of Captagon in Joint Anti-Drug Operation,” *Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)*, April 9, 2026, <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2309351/>

54 “Jordan launches airstrikes against drug smugglers in Druze-majority Syrian province of Suweida,” *The New Arab*, (December 25, 2025), <https://www.newarab.com/news/jordan-launches-airstrikes-against-smugglers-syrias-suweida>

55 “Targeting smuggling networks | Jordanian airstrikes hit positions near Syria-Jordanian border,” *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, (Dec 24, 2025), <https://www.syriahr.com/en/375428/>

56 “Additional security reinforcements from Syrian forces into the village of Al-Shu’ab,” *Suwayda24*, (Jan 2, 2024), <https://x.com/suwayda24/status/2007086170253963424?s=20>

57 “Syrian Foils Balloon Drug Smuggling Attempt toward Jordan,” *Daily Sabah*, August 12, 2026, <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/syria-foils-balloon-drug-smuggling-attempt-toward-jordan>

58 “A joint statement between the Anti-Narcotics Administration of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Anti-Narcotics Administration of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,” *Syrian Ministry of Interior*, (October 5, 2025), <https://urdi.info/1ukEZ>

government,⁵⁹ including its defense and interior ministries, which Jordanian officials frequently characterized as ineffective or unproductive. Shared intelligence during that period rarely translated into sustained enforcement, whereas post-collapse coordination has produced measurable interdiction outcomes despite uneven enforcement capacity inside Syria.

Attribution for captagon production and smuggling in southern Syria remains constrained by fragmented authority and uneven evidence. Despite recurring claims in public discourse, there is no verified evidence confirming the institutional involvement of Druze-based factions, such as the Rijal al-Karama (the Men of Dignity), in captagon production or organized smuggling. Available reporting instead points to ambiguity in local security roles,⁶⁰ with multiple local actors participating in counter-smuggling efforts while coordination remains limited and uneven across factions operating in the south.

Post-collapse reporting suggests limited but growing coordination between local actors and Syrian Interior Ministry units in southern Syria, including the deployment of antinarcotics forces to Al-Shaab in Suwayda. These efforts reflect attempts by the interim authorities to assert control over trafficking networks near the Jordanian border, though enforcement remains inconsistent due to local resistance to centralized intervention, widespread weaponization, and competing power centers.

Despite these constraints, the post-Assad security landscape differs from the previous period in one important respect: Smuggling networks now operate without centralized state sponsorship. Instead, trafficking activity appears to be shaped by overlapping local power structures, criminal networks, and opportunistic intermediaries rather than by coordinated institutional protection.

Coordination between Damascus and Amman, therefore, reflects both opportunity and limitation. While bilateral cooperation has improved interdiction capacity and intelligence exchange, the fragmented security environment in southern Syria continues to constrain Syrian authorities' ability to sustain enforcement across border regions.⁶¹

Lebanon

Captagon in Lebanon and State Countermeasures

While the Syria-Jordan border experiences heavy trafficking rates, there is another trend observed along the Syria-Lebanon border, along with patterns inside Lebanon itself: the continued production of captagon. Almost all captagon laboratory seizures in the Levant have been concentrated in Lebanon's border areas with Syria and in regions experiencing security and political tension, almost entirely in the Baalbek-Hermel governorate and the Bekaa Valley. In 2026 alone, the New Lines captagon database has recorded captagon laboratory seizures in Syrian areas like Rif Dimashq and in Lebanon in Hermel, Bekaa, Qasr, and Al-Shawana.

The Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel region is considered Hezbollah's most prominent popular, political, and military stronghold.⁶² The party possesses the largest and strongest influence in these areas, controlling political decision-making, the strategic trajectories therein, and the smuggling routes, which are considered the most important artery for survival, particularly weapons

59 "Why Damascus and Amman do not comment on Jordan's strikes in Syria," Enab Baladi English, (January 23, 2024), <https://uri.info/1ukEt>

60 "Coordination between the 'Free Syrian Army' faction and Jordan to combat drugs on the border," North Press Agency, (January 23, 2024), <https://npasyria.com/179179/>

61 "All-out war! Jordan bombs drug dens in southern Syria and launches airstrikes," Roya News, Youtube, (Dec 27, 2025), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAoSVyy8CNE&t=32s>

62 Al Jazeera, "What Is Lebanon's Ancient City of Baalbek and Why Is Israel Targeting It?" Nov. 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/11/1/what-is-lebanons-ancient-city-of-baalbek-and-why-is-israel-targeting-it>

Syrian Interior Ministry forces seized some 12 million captagon pills during an operation in October 2025 that dismantled a drug trafficking network in Damascus. (Hisam Hac Omer/Anadolu via Getty Images)



smuggling, especially in the border areas with Syria (such as the town of Qasr).⁶³ Furthermore, the region's armed clans and large families, provide cover for illicit activities and serve as a popular incubator for Hezbollah; this support has recently diminished due to displacement caused by systematic Israeli bombing.⁶⁴

Still, just as in southern Syria, it is challenging to assess the exact nature of relations between Hezbollah and recently seized captagon production sites. During the Assad regime, Hezbollah served as a strong partner to the Syrian Fourth Division in managing small-scale, mobile production operations along the Syrian-Lebanese border as well as industrial-scale trafficking from Lebanese ports.⁶⁵

However, three factors may have shifted the Hezbollah-captagon connection. First, Hezbollah's primary partner and supply source, the Assad regime, collapsed in December 2024. Second, nearly three years of recurring Israeli strikes in Lebanon have degraded Hezbollah's command and control, and its primary regional sponsor, Iran, has been weakened by U.S. and Israeli campaigns. Third, the Lebanese armed forces and security forces have pursued a series of law enforcement sweeps targeting Hezbollah-aligned criminal syndicates and prominent kingpin families, leading to the arrests and deaths of key drug kingpins such as Noa Zeaiter and Abu Saleh.^{66,67,68}

63 "Clashes on Border with Syria Allow Lebanese Army to Cripple Hezbollah," *The Arab Weekly*, Feb. 16, 2025, <https://theArabweekly.com/clashes-border-syria-allow-lebanese-army-cripple-hezbollah>

64 Council on Foreign Relations, "Political Instability in Lebanon," *Global Conflict Tracker*, accessed Aug. 20, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/political-instability-lebanon>

65 Caroline Rose, "The Captagon Threat: A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities," New Lines Institute, June 23, 2022, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/global-security-mil-priorities/the-captagon-threat-a-profile-of-illicit-trade-consumption-and-regional-realities/>

66 "Lebanese Army Kills Top Drug Traffickers," *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)*, August 7, 2025, <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/lebanese-army-kills-top-drug-traffickers>

67 Associated Press, "Lebanon's Most Wanted Drug Trafficker, Noah Zeaiter, Is Arrested by the Army," Feb. 3, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-drug-trafficker-arrested-noah-zeiter-military-e853c163e279f0755cc21bd9326fc3c3>

68 Nemtala Eddé, "Who Is Abu Saleh, Lebanon's King of Cocaine and Captagon?" *L'Orient Today*, July 22, 2025, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1473014/who-is-abu-salleh-lebanons-king-of-cocaine-and-captagon.html>

In the case of the Assad regime's collapse, degrading or eradicating the primary forces that sponsor illicit trades like captagon do not translate into eradicating criminal behavior. Like the Assad regime, Hezbollah supported and enabled a vast network of local families, criminal syndicates, and fronts across Lebanon that served as an ecosystem for illicit drug cultivation and trafficking, along with other practices like car theft and illicit smuggling of products like fuel, cigarettes, and food.⁶⁹ This ecosystem still thrives – now without a monopolizing force – evidenced by continued smuggling and drug production along the Syrian-Lebanese border.

Production

Seizure data and reports compiled through open-source intelligence collected in the New Lines captagon database enable the identification of several production sites. In 2025, six of 45 (13%) law enforcement interdictions involving the captagon trade in Lebanon featured disruptions of laboratory facilities and warehouses that contained production materials. In 2026, five of 17 (30%) included raids on production sites, a notable increase in the ratio of laboratory busts versus interdictions of consignments from the previous year, even with a reduction in overall seizure count. This could be the result of several factors: either the proliferation of localized production or waning local influence and control of Hezbollah that allow for greater intelligence collection and a systematic interdiction strategy carried out by Lebanese security forces.

Some of the most reported sites of captagon synthesis and/or pill production are the Sharawna neighborhood in Baalbek, Brital, Dar El Wasaah, Haour Taala, and Tel Al Abaid. De facto control within those areas often belongs to armed clans and fugitives wanted for drug crimes affiliated with prominent families or kingpins engaged in other illicit trades. The Lebanese army engages in periodic violent clashes in these areas to impose state authority and raid captagon factories.

In Qasr, a Lebanese town on the border with Syria in the Hermel district, Hezbollah's influence is absolute for strategic and military reasons related to the borders. It is also a highly active area for smuggling via illegal crossings. Similar environments can be found in Yammoune, Hosh Barada, Al Gamaleya, and Semmaquiyeh, where Hezbollah dominates with political influence over tribal structures and agricultural communities. However, the Lebanese state does occasionally conduct raids that penetrate Hezbollah's security umbrella, seeking to at least temporarily disrupt these networks. Official sovereignty and daily security in those areas belong to the Lebanese state, whereas clans and cartels that challenge the state and manufacture drugs maintain on-the-ground control in some of those towns and neighborhoods.

In Lebanon's Rayak, there is a different situation. Although it is in the Bekaa Valley, its proximity to the Rayak air base, the Lebanese army's largest facility, inhibits illicit activity, particularly drug production, because of the greater risk of interdiction.

A Kinetic Component

According to the Lebanese army's X account,⁷⁰ its armed forces conducted several seizures of weapon storage warehouses belonging to Hezbollah in recent months, containing ammunition and arms. Meanwhile, seizures of drug laboratories and manufacturing facilities have been met with minimal resistance consisting of a few individuals possessing limited ammunition or combat capabilities. This indicates a separation between weapons storage and drug manufacturing in the same village or town.

69 Maha Yahya, "Double Dealers: Lebanon and the Risks of Captagon Trafficking," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 27, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/03/double-dealers-lebanon-and-the-risks-of-captagon-trafficking>

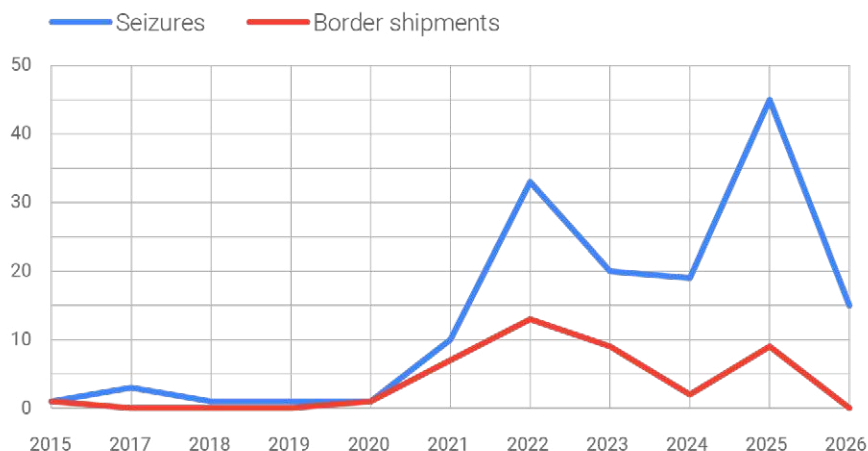
70 Lebanese Army's X account (@LebarmyOfficial), accessed Aug. 19, 2026, <https://x.com/LebarmyOfficial?lang=en>

That does not mean captagon smuggling operations are not accompanied by kinetic activity. Recent raids and interactions between Lebanese smugglers and law enforcement have resulted in violence or even armed clashes. During one May 2026 incident, criminal actors ambushed Lebanese army officers who were preparing to raid a drug laboratory, sparking intense clashes.⁷¹ The next day, Lebanese army personnel came under fire again by criminal actors, this time after seizing a major consignment of unspecified illicit drugs and raw materials for manufacturing.⁷²

These incidents demonstrate criminal syndicates' increasing sophistication in their ability to collect intelligence about Lebanese counternarcotics operations, either through infiltration of the security services or the cultivation of a network of informants. Their own flow of illicit arms gives these actors the capability of conducting sabotage operations against law enforcement, using ambushes to thwart counterdrug operations as they occur with the aim of deterring future interdictions.

This capability is playing out in 2026, with fewer Lebanese interdictions than in 2025 despite mounting media and intelligence reports of localized production and trafficking.^{73,74,75} The Lebanese army recently escalated production facilities seizures, but similar actions had greater reach in 2025. The army's X account consistently posts about its work related to ammunition seizures, obituaries for soldiers killed in Israeli attacks, work to repair crossings and bridges destroyed by Israeli shelling, removal of unexploded ordinance from buildings and commercial centers, and seizures of weapons and ammunition from clans.^{76,77}

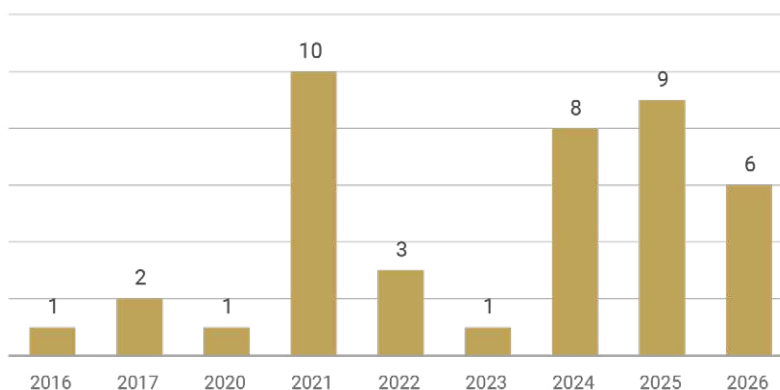
Captagon Seizures in Lebanon



Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

- 71 Lebanese Army's X account (@LebarmyOfficial), May 8, 2026. [Post with photographs], <https://x.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/2052794030501552419>
- 72 Lebanese Army's X account (@LebarmyOfficial), May 9, 2026. [Post with photographs], <https://x.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/2052992960380248403>
- 73 Kristian Alexander, "Assad's Fall and Syria's Fragmented Captagon Industry," Stimson Center, August 19, 2025, <https://www.stimson.org/2025/assads-fall-and-syrias-fragmented-captagon-industry/>
- 74 Natalie Ecanow and Ahmed Shawari, "Assad's Narco-Trade Lives on in Lebanon," FDD, July 17, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/07/17/assads-narco-trade-lives-on-in-lebanon/>
- 75 L'Orient Today Staff, "Captagon production 'disrupted' in Syria by fall of Assad regime," L'Orient Today, December 23, 2025, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1489396/captagon-production-disrupted-in-syria-by-fall-of-assad-regime.html>
- 76 Lebanese Army's X account (@LebarmyOfficial), accessed Aug. 19, 2026, <https://x.com/LebarmyOfficial?lang=en>
- 77 Lebanese Army's X account (@LebarmyOfficial), June 24, 2026, <https://x.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/2069752920250134578>

Seizures in which Lebanon is the Country of Consignment



Source: Captagon Trade Project Comprehensive Seizure Database

Conclusion

In the post-Assad era, the captagon trade along the Jordanian-Syrian border has been restructured. The collapse of the Assad regime disrupted the centralized production and protection structures that previously enabled large-scale trafficking. However, it did not eliminate the economic incentives, border vulnerabilities, or security fragmentation that sustain the trade. Trafficking networks have adapted by becoming more decentralized, relying on smaller consignments, concealment among legitimate trade products, and increasingly on aerial delivery systems.

Jordan's counternarcotics response has evolved accordingly. Revised rules of engagement, cross-border airstrikes, expanded surveillance, and intensified intelligence coordination have increased operational pressure on smuggling networks operating in Syria. While these measures reduced the amount of large-scale land incursions, criminal networks adapted trafficking methods, enabling them to sustain activity. Smuggling operations now prioritize lower-visibility tactics that reduce exposure to direct confrontation.

In Lebanon, there are clear signs that drug synthesis and pill production, scattered along the Lebanese-Syrian border and Bekaa Valley region, have been fragmented. While the Lebanese armed forces and security agencies have conducted periodic interdiction operations, signs of localized manufacturing and trafficking into Syrian territory remain strong. In response, local and regional law enforcement must not only interdict shipments but also investigate and disrupt the Lebanese criminal networks that facilitate drug production and smuggling in the Levant.

In southern Syria, fragmented authority, economic hardship, and uneven enforcement capacity continue to create permissive conditions for trafficking activity into Jordan and throughout the Middle East region. Although coordination between Syrian and Jordanian authorities has improved, cooperation remains constrained by localized security dynamics and incomplete state consolidation in key border-adjacent areas. Continued demand in destination markets, particularly in the Arab Gulf, further reinforces Jordan's position as a drug transit corridor.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that the captagon economy in southern Syria has evolved – not disappeared. While centralized state sponsorship has receded, decentralized networks persist within a fragmented security landscape. Sustained disruption will likely depend not only on continued interdiction and bilateral coordination, but also on incremental improvements in governance capacity and economic stability in southern Syria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result, the U.S. government and its regional partners should seek to undertake the following policy recommendations:

1 MORE COOPERATION BETWEEN SYRIA AND JORDAN AND LEBANON

Encourage deeper counternarcotics and border security cooperation between the new Syrian administration and Jordan and Lebanon that emphasizes intelligence exchange and tip-offs that can aid raids and seizures; joint training for border surveillance; and routine forensic testing of interdicted drug consignments.

2 DEVELOP SOLUTIONS BETWEEN DRUZE AND SYRIAN ADMINISTRATION TO GROW COUNTERNARCOTICS PRESENCE

The U.S. and its regional partners should push for a security and political solution between the Druze leadership in southern Syria and the Syrian administration in Damascus to facilitate a greater counternarcotics presence in southern Syria. This would lead to interdiction of drug flows across the border while reducing the need for frequent direct Jordanian strikes into Syrian territory.

3 PUSH FOR TALKS TO ENABLE MORE PRESENCE AND COUNTERNARCOTICS EFFORTS IN NORTHEAST SYRIA

The U.S. and its regional partners should support ongoing diplomatic discussions and push for continued progress in talks between the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and the new Syrian administration that would enable a greater governmental presence and enhance counternarcotics efforts in Syria's northeast to stifle transnational drug flows into Iraq.

4 U.S./PARTNERS CONTINUE INTERDICTION IN LEBANON AND FIND WAYS TO ASSIST IT

The U.S. and its partners should encourage continued interdiction progress in Lebanon and identify pathways to invest in the interdiction capacity of Lebanese security forces. This would include identifying instruments that aid intelligence collection and sharing, the provision of equipment such as night goggles, and development of platforms enabling mapping of organized criminal networks.

5 CONGRESS SHOULD UPDATE/ ADAPT THE 2023 CAPTAGON ACT

The U.S. Congress should continue work to update and adapt the counter-captagon interagency task force established in 2023 with the Captagon Act and ensure that agencies expand monitoring efforts beyond Syria to include actors in Lebanon, Türkiye, Iraq, Jordan, and other regional sites susceptible to an overflow of captagon-related activity.



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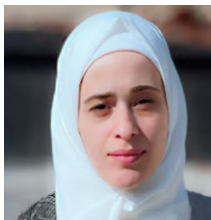
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