

ANALYSIS WARNS LEBANON OF IMPERILLING GAS BONANZA

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[Lebanon](#)'s political and sectarian rivalries, along with its maritime dispute with Israel, could hamper the country's drive to exploit large natural gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean, a new study warns.

A report by [Oxford Analytica](#) cautioned that corruption endemic among Lebanon's political class is likely to cloud the country's effort to develop extensive gas production and relieve a massive national debt.

[UPI notes](#) that the government last week announced the debt has risen to \$58 billion (€44.5bn), more than 135% of its annual gross domestic product.

"Communal rivalries risk impeding its progress," Oxford Analytica observes. "Sectarian groups dominate the political system and infighting could represent a major hurdle to oil and gas production if a zero-sum mentality ensues."

The political divisions were exemplified in the prolonged deliberations to appoint a Petroleum Authority to supervise and regulate the planned energy industry.

It took months of squabbling between Muslim and Christian sects before the six-member body was named in late 2012, with, Oxford Analytica observed, "appointments based on the need to appease member of each confessional group rather than on merit."