

LEBANON: ISRAEL'S INTENT TO UNILATERALLY DEMARCATATE ITS MARITIME BORDERS VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL LAW

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Lebanese caretaker Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour stated on 21 December 2013 that [Israel's](#) intent to unilaterally demarcate its maritime border with Lebanon is a violation of International Law and of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and will not have any legal repercussion on [Lebanon](#).

Both Israel and Lebanon claim as their own a maritime area of 854 square kilometers. The dispute gained topicality after substantial amounts of natural gas were found off Israel's coast. [Lebanon](#) will be launching its [first licensing round](#) in early 2015 motivated by promising seismic surveys suggesting that 45% of Lebanese waters could contain up to 95 Tcf of natural gas.

The 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides nations with a 200 mile offshore area (an "Exclusive Economic Zone") for exploiting maritime reserves. When another country lies less than 400 nautical miles away (as Cyprus does in relation to Lebanon and Israel), governments are expected to negotiate a mutually acceptable line. This is also the case for countries with adjacent coastlines like Israel and Lebanon.

Disputes over the demarcation of maritime boundaries are often triggered by the discovery of new oil and gas deposits and settled through the interpretation of UNCLOS and/or negotiation. Israel and Lebanon are in a state of war and direct negotiation is not possible between the two states. Additionally, Israel (as well as the United States and Turkey) is not a signatory of UNCLOS.

Cypriot and [American](#) officials have invested efforts in an attempt to mediate the dispute between the two countries and create an environment of peace and stability that would give confidence to investors interested in oil and gas explorations in the Levantine basin. So far, all efforts have failed to reach a settlement of the dispute. A recent visit by American officials to Lebanese caretaker minister of energy and water [Gebran Bassil](#) to this effect have allegedly achieved some progress but no real result has materialized yet.

Although no exploration activity is currently taking place in close vicinity to the disputed area, a settlement of the dispute is paramount for the effective development of the hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Lebanon and Israel's mutual [accusations](#) of maritime border violations risk escalating into violent confrontations that could stall the energy progress and deter international oil and gas companies from investing in troubled waters.