

U.S. WILLING TO HELP SOLVE LEBANESE-ISRAELI MARITIME BORDER CONFLICT

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While the US renews its offer to help solve the maritime border dispute between [Lebanon](#) and [Israel](#), Israel prepares to seek a UN opinion on its Mediterranean maritime borders with Lebanon. The dispute is over an 850 square kilometer offshore border area that could potentially be highly rich in gas resources. The U.S. stressed on the country's willingness to assist Lebanon in solving its maritime border conflict with its neighbour and praised Lebanon's efforts to put in place appropriate regulations that would ensure transparent and fair procedures related to its energy sector.

The maritime border conflict did not slow down the two countries' respective energy projects. The conflict however regained topicality when Israel discovered a gas field close to the disputed area. Only a couple of weeks ago did Lebanese caretaker minister of water and energy Gebran Bassil express his concern over Israel reaching Lebanon's gas reserves. Bassil urged the caretaker government to take the necessary measures that would enable Lebanon to issue the pieces of legislation that would enable it to award exploration contracts. Israel's discovery of the Karish well in the Alon license in proximity of Lebanon's EEZ (only 4 km from the Lebanese coast) raised Bassil's concerns that Lebanon's gas could be in danger.

Tel Aviv will be presenting to the UN its position on its maritime borders reiterating its previous maritime border agreement with Cyprus. The Lebanese-Israeli dispute over the 850 square kilometer area has held up the ratification of the 2007 Cypriot-Lebanese agreement by Lebanon demarcating the EEZs of the three countries. Lebanon disputes the 2010 Cypriot-Israeli bilateral agreement over their maritime borders alleging it conflicts with the UNCLOS.

Lebanon and Israel are in a state of war. Israel has recently discovered substantial deposits of natural gas off its shores. Lebanon is moving ahead with its energy plans and is about to reach the licensing phase. Seismic surveys indicated that the Lebanese waters could be home to up to 25 tcf of natural gas. Lebanon suffers from a burdening debt of over USD billion 50 and daily power outages of up to 20 hours a day due to a poor energy infrastructure. Israel on the other hand has a history of energy dependence. It has relied on Egyptian imports for years to satisfy its domestic needs. The recent disruption in the flow of gas from Egypt to Israel has put energy independence on Israel's top priority list.

Lebanon and Israel both have good relations with the Cypriot Island. Cyprus has offered a helping hand in the past in an attempt to solve the maritime border conflict and build fruitful relations with its two neighbours. The attempts have failed. Noble has made a major gas discovery in the Cypriot water, the Aphrodite field, that could contain up to 9 tcf of gas. Noble is currently undertaking its appraisal drilling and is expected to announce the results by the end of the summer. In the meantime, the Cypriot government has partnered up with Noble and its Israeli partners to build an LNG terminal in Vassilikos that would allow exports of gas from Cyprus, Lebanon and Israel.

The gas riches in the Eastern Mediterranean could ensure the countries' energy security and even allow them to become net gas exporters. The amounts of natural gas found and expected to be found in their waters are enough to satisfy their modest domestic needs for decades and the surplus can be sold to export markets. Obstacles of a geo-political nature such as the maritime border conflicts complicate such plans. While the hydrocarbon wealth could have been an incentive for dialogue, many fear that it could provoke a new conflict in a troubled part of the world.