



## [The U.S. Envoy Mediating a Maritime Border Dispute Between Lebanon and Israel Signals Optimism About Making Progress Towards a Deal](#)

Maritime border contentions between Lebanon and Israel could see impending progress towards a deal, according to U.S. Envoy Amos Hochstein and other officials. This decade-long dispute relates to a section of the Karish offshore gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea, and who has rights to the materials in these areas. Negotiations over the maritime border dispute had resumed in 2020 with the help of mediation from the United States, but had been stalled because of a claim by Lebanon that the map used by the United Nations in the talks needed modifying. The United States has played an important mediating role in these talks and appears to be signaling that an agreement may be reached soon. Reports emerged that Hochstein would present a new Israeli proposal to the Lebanese negotiating team that “includes a solution that would allow the Lebanese to develop the gas reserves in the disputed area while preserving Israel’s commercial rights.” This statement has left many observers hopeful that this new proposal will be a compromise that both countries will agree to.

The current proposal from Israel provides Lebanon with the area north of Line 23, a maritime line that was an original demand by the Lebanese government during negotiations. It would also allow Lebanon to explore the Qana Prospect. The last outstanding issue seems to be Lebanon’s request for a guarantee of exploration rights in its southern Block 9 area. Some experts and analysts have outlined the importance of reaching an agreement for Lebanon in particular, as the country looks to access offshore gas reserves to try and alleviate what has become the most severe economic crisis in its modern history. Instances and accounts of Israeli ships in disputed gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea have also fueled tensions and highlighted the need for a deal. Lebanon contends that the Karish gas fields are disputed territory due to the ongoing maritime border negotiations, while Israel claims that they lie within their economic waters. Ultimately, Hochstein and others seeking to reach a mediated agreement have urged both sides to avoid provocative behavior in an attempt to achieve a resolution through diplomacy and the negotiating table.

Adding to the urgency for trying to alleviate the maritime border dispute is the fact that Lebanon and Israel have been prone to escalations in tensions, engaging in varying degrees of conflict over the years. During the past decade, they have avoided any major confrontations since the month-long war back in 2006, but bouts of traded rocket fire between Israel and Hezbollah have elicited fears of the potential outbreak of more serious conflict over contentious and unresolved issues. Further complicating the situation is the significant power that Hezbollah wields in Lebanon. In addition to its political standing, it often operates as its own independent entity within Lebanon. The group recently issued a video warning Israel that “playing with time” could have consequences, signaling the threat of military escalation if a deal was not reached.

Despite all of these complications, it still appears that a deal will be made that benefits both countries. Tensions will likely remain, but such an agreement would be a welcome development. The potential realization of this would not only prevent an escalation in hostilities, but would also be an indicator and reminder to the Middle East that the United States can still play a productive role in the region.