

BIDEN PRESIDENCY OFFERS 'NEW OPPORTUNITIES' TO UNLOCK EAST MED GAS



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ATHENS, Greece: The post-COVID world will still need natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean, and America's new president may have just the right credentials to overcome diplomatic obstacles, a veteran of the regional energy scene told a conference in Athens on Wednesday.

Roudi Baroudi, CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Qatar, told the first day of the Athens Energy Dialogues that Biden had several qualities

that might enable him to break up the logjam.

“Biden in the past has demonstrated considerable understanding of issues affecting the Eastern Med, as well as a perspective that emphasizes legal and diplomatic solutions,” Baroudi said in remarks delivered by video link. In addition, he told an audience including key energy, finance, and government figures, the new president “has already articulated a determination to reassert some of Washington’s key prerogatives on the international stage. These include its traditional stabilizing role in the Mediterranean, as well as its championing of NATO, which happens to include both Greece and Turkey, after four years of Donald Trump undermining the alliance at every opportunity.”

Recent discoveries of offshore oil and gas have brought long-simmering Greco-Turkish tensions back to the front burner, with Ankara becoming much more assertive about its maritime claims, especially where these overlap with those of Greece and Cyprus.

Baroudi, who for years has championed cooperation in energy as a way of defusing tensions among several East Med countries, has recently written a book about how to settle competing claims in the region. Specifically, ‘Maritime Disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean:

The Way Forward’ examines the tools and templates laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

UNCLOS, he told the audience, “provides all the tools and procedural bases for the peaceful resolution” of rival claims. “Biden’s resurrection of a more conventional US foreign policy means new opportunities for Greece, Turkey, and other countries in the region

to chart out a more cooperative and more productive future,” Baroudi added. “The prizes in this endeavor include not just a reduction of tensions and the facilitation of billions of dollars worth of energy sales and savings, but also a crucial component of the region’s transition

to a lower-carbon future.”



With more than 40 years of experience in the energy industry, Baroudi has helped shape policy and investment choices for companies, governments, investors, and supranational organizations like the UN and the European Union. The latter, he explained to reporters after his talk, also has a “key part in keeping the tensions down”.

Senate shift paves way for straight-talking US climate reforms



LONDON: Democratic Senate seat wins in the state of Georgia have given US President-elect Joe Biden a “green light to move forward” on some key shifts in national climate policy, such as much greener pandemic stimulus spending, US policy analysts said.

With Democrats now in control of the Senate, “it’s a huge, huge difference”, Nigel Purvis, CEO of the Washington-based Climate Advisers policy group, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“This almost doubles what he can do – he has a whole additional range of tools and levers at his disposal,” said Purvis, who has worked with three former US administrations on climate policy.

Biden has proposed a \$2-trillion, climate-smart economic stimulus plan, for instance, which he would not have been able to get through if the Georgia election had turned out differently. “Now he has a real chance,” Purvis added. Biden’s thin Senate majority means he is unlikely to be able to pass a single comprehensive climate change bill, which would require

the approval of 60 per cent of senators.

But many measures related to raising or spending money – including stimulus funding for things like electric vehicle infrastructure, or incentives for farmers to sequester more carbon – can win approval with a simple majority.

Biden should, for instance, now be able to back his plans to mainstream climate action into all government agencies with cash to make that possible, said Christina DeConcini, director of government affairs at the World Resources Institute (WRI).

“There are limits for sure, but it’s ... a green light to move forward,” she said. “I really think this is a new day for climate in the United States.”

Talking jobs

How shifts in climate policy are framed for a country politically divided on the issue will be crucial to Biden’s success in bringing change, the analysts said.

Gina McCarthy, former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under President Barack Obama and Biden’s nominee to become the first national climate adviser, for instance, speaks more about the need for a “cleaner, stronger, more resilient economy” than about climate change.

“We know clean energy supports millions of jobs in the United States and it can support millions more,” as well as saving money and improving people’s health, she told an online event in November.

To get people behind climate action, governments “need to give citizens and communities a better life today” – not just promises that future catastrophes will be avoided, she added.

Rachel Kyte, a former UN special representative on energy and dean of the Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Massachusetts, said McCarthy and other Biden

cabinet picks excel at talking about the need for climate-friendly reforms “in language ordinary people can understand”.

“They will find a very main-street narrative for why these are common-sense policies” – and that could galvanize broader bipartisan support, she predicted.

Alden Meyer, a strategic adviser with independent climate change think-tank E3G, noted that during the last fiscal crisis in 2009, the Obama-Biden administration crafted a stimulus package that included \$90 billion for clean energy technology.

Biden’s pick for energy secretary, former Michigan governor Jennifer Granholm, in that crisis helped negotiate a rescue of the US auto industry that included an agreement by Detroit to adopt much more aggressive fuel economy standards.

Such “green strings” on stimulus cash will be needed to help drive effective climate action in the United States and globally, climate analysts say.

“This is not new territory for Biden,” Meyer said. “He knows this game very well. He gets this, he feels this in his bones.”

Pressure from the left

Another challenge for Biden, the analysts said, will be keeping onboard factions of the Democratic Party – such as the youth-led Sunset Movement – that are demanding swift, immediate and aggressive action on climate threats.

The Sunrise Movement has already told Democratic Senate leaders it expects “an enormous green spending bill on day one”, Kyte said – and that desire for rapid change may be at odds with efforts to sell climate action to a broader US audience.

Yet, despite paralysing political polarisation on many

climate-related issues, a few hints of possible bipartisan compromise have emerged in recent months, the analysts said.

Stimulus and relief packages passed in December included policies that could help set the stage for decarbonisation of the US economy, such as tax incentives for clean energy and carbon capture technologies.

Congress also agreed, with bipartisan support, to phase out hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), powerful climate pollutants used in air-conditioning and refrigeration equipment.

As well, a Democrat-controlled US Congress is likely to work more closely with the cities, states and other bodies that have driven US climate action during global-warming skeptic President Donald Trump's administration, said WRI's DeConcini.

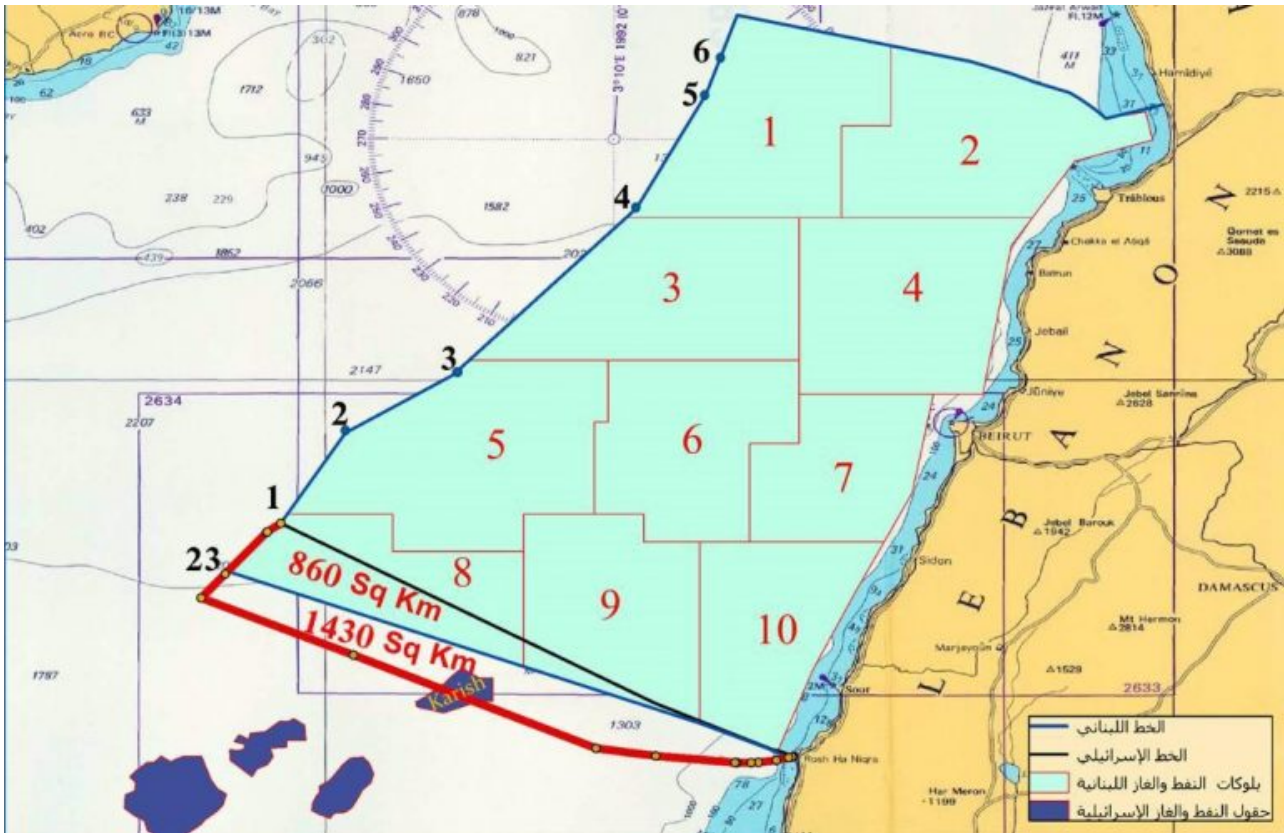
US businesses – a growing number of which have adopted net-zero emissions goals, or are having to adhere to tougher climate policies in other countries where they work – also increasingly want consistent, clear climate policy, she said.

“At some point, the desire to just stay the course – because they see the future on the wall and because it's good for their bottom line – will become so strong it will provide the political momentum for the U.S. to move toward a decarbonized economy,” she predicted.

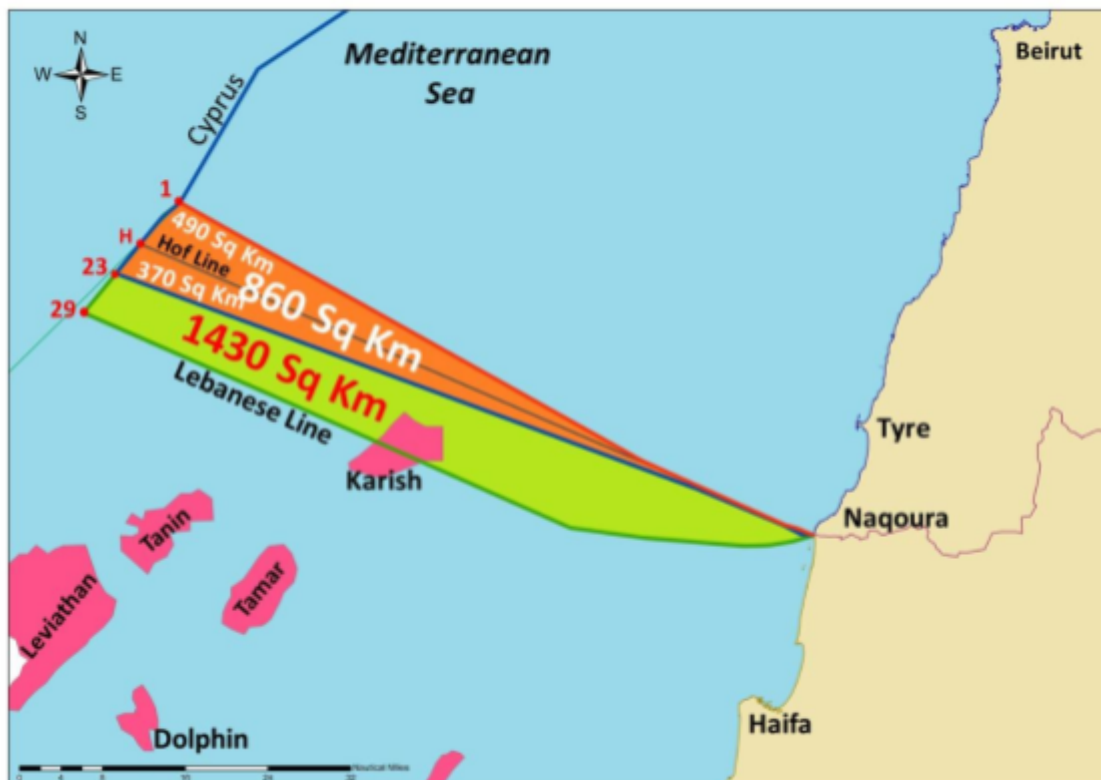
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الجيش اللبناني إمّسا مفوضا

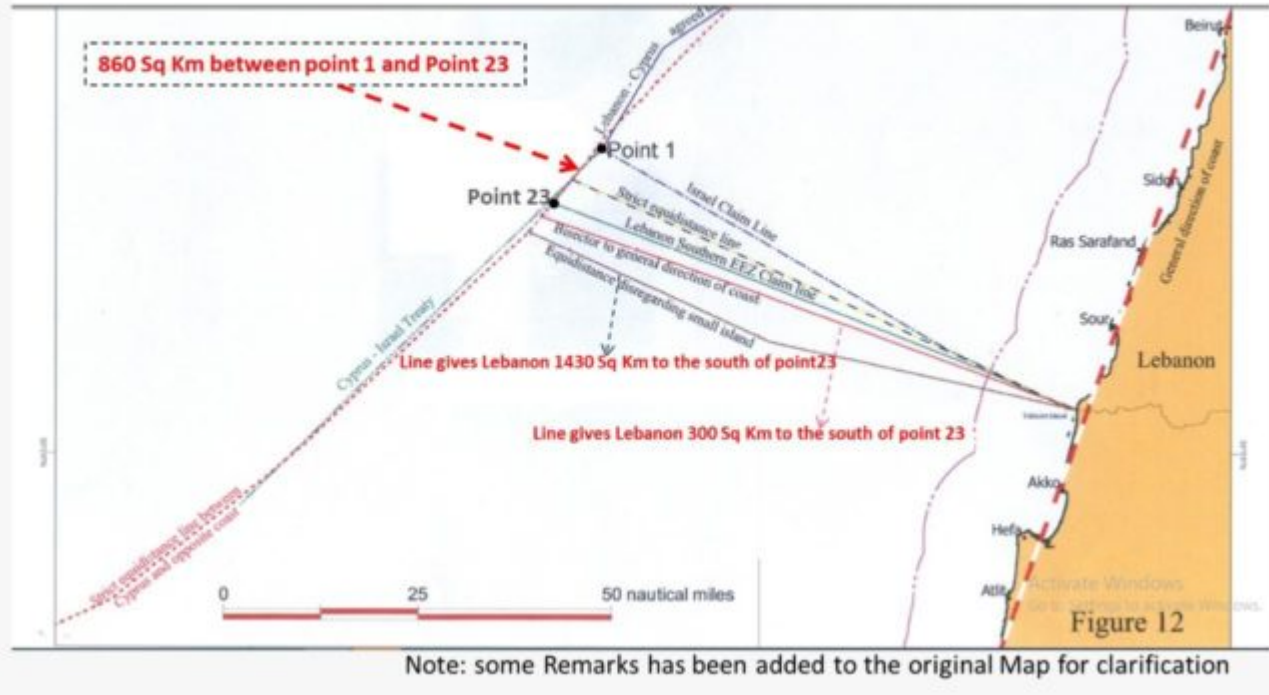
بالترسيم .. أو فليسحبوا تفويضهم



الخطوط البحرية التي يتم التفاوض حولها



UKHO Map presented by John Brown to Lebanese Government in 2011



إستبشر اللبنانيون خيرًا بإنتلاق المفاوضات الحدودية البحرية غير المباشرة مع العدو الإسرائيلي بوساطة أميركية وبرعاية الأمم المتحدة، كون المهمة سلّمت لجيشهم الوطني الذي يثقون به ويعتبرونه المؤسسة الأكثر قدرة على استعادة الحقوق الوطنية التي قد تساهم في إنتشال لبنان من أزمته المالية الخانقة.

خاض الوفد اللبناني الجولات الأربع بكفاءة عالية برغم النيران الصديقة التي تعرّض لها قبل انطلاق مهمته وبرغم تجريده من السلاح القانوني الأهم وهو تعديل المرسوم رقم 6433 تاريخ 1/10/2011 الذي يحدّد النقطة (23) كنقطة حدود ثلاثية في حين أن الوفد اللبناني انطلق من خط يعتمد النقطة (29) أي بزيادة 1430 كلم² عن الخط اللبناني المعلن بموجب المرسوم المذكور وبزيادة 2290 كلم² عن الخط المعلن من قبل العدو الإسرائيلي.

فوجيء وفد العدو الإسرائيلي بصلاصة الوفد اللبناني ودفاعه المحكم المستند كلاً إلى القانون الدولي، ولما لم يجد نفسه قادراً على مواجهته بالقانون شنّ حملة إعلامية شعواء بقصد تشويه صورة لبنان وتقليب المجتمع الدولي عليه وبصورة خاصة الوسيط الأميركي.

لم تُعقد الجولة الخامسة التي كانت مقرّرة بتاريخ 2/12/2020 واستعيض عنها بجولة قام بها الوسيط الأميركي على بعض القيادات

اللبنانية عرض خلالها العودة إلى التفاوض حول مساحة 860 كلم² لكن الجانب اللبناني أكدّ رغبته بمتابعة المفاوضات على أساس القانون الدولي دون حصرها بمساحة معيَّنة.

في ظل عدم تحديد موعد جديد للجولة الخامسة، اعتُبرت المفاوضات بحكم المعلّقة، فاستفاد العدو الإسرائيلي من ذلك لإعادة تنظيم صفوفه من خلال تحصين فريقه المفاوضات بعد أن فهم جيّدًا موقف الوفد اللبناني، وأيضًا من خلال متابعة التحريض الدولي على لبنان.

نجح العدو الإسرائيلي في ذلك فأقدم السيد فريدريك هوف بنشر مقال له بتاريخ 4/12/2020 على موقع " نيوزلاين" شرح فيه بالتفصيل كيف وضع خطه في العام 2012 برضى الجانبين اللبناني والإسرائيلي وذكر إسميًا اللبنانيين الذين عملوا معه في تلك الفترة. طبعًا لم يكن هذا المقال بهذا التوقيت من باب الصدفة بل هدف منه تذكير اللبنانيين بأنهم سبق ووافقوا على المقترح الأميركي، وبالتالي دعم المزاعم الإسرائيلية القائلة بأن اللبنانيين غير ثابتين على رأي.

بعد فريدريك هوف، دخل وزير الخارجية الأميركي مايك بومبيو على الخط بتاريخ 22/12/2020 فدعا الجانبين للعودة إلى التفاوض على أساس الإدعاءات السابقة التي أودعوها الأمم المتحدة، أي بمعنى آخر العودة إلى التفاوض ضمن مساحة 860 كلم².

وجدت قيادة الجيش أن العدو الإسرائيلي يعتمد المماثلة والمراوغة فاقترحت تعديل المرسوم 6433 لتصبح النقطة الثلاثية هي النقطة (29) بدلًا من النقطة (23) وإيداع المرسوم الأمم المتحدة قبل بدء العدو الإسرائيلي استخراج النفط والغاز من حقل كاريش حيث من المتوقع بدء الإستخراج منه اعتبارًا من شهر حزيران/ يونيو المقبل، وبالتالي إجباره للعودة إلى طاولة المفاوضات تحت ضغط عاملي الوقت والالتزامات المادية نظرًا لارتباطه ببرنامج زمني مع شركتي شفرون ونوبل انيرجي، الأمر الذي قد يجبره على التنازل ويساعد الوفد اللبناني لتحقيق أقصى الممكن من الحقوق اللبنانية.

انتظرنا الردّ من العدو الإسرائيلي لكن للأسف برزت هجمة سياسية - إعلامية لبنانية، في سياق حملة بدأت بتاريخ 8/1/2020، يبدو أن مطلقها أخطأوا الهدف فبدل التصويب على العدو الإسرائيلي وجّهوا نيرانهم باتجاه الجيش اللبناني فشكّوا علنًا بالخط اللبناني الجديد واعتبروه خطأ إيرانيًا واتهموا الجيش اللبناني باختلاقه لخلق مزارع شبعًا بحرية ولدفع العدو الإسرائيلي لإيصال خطه إلى

قبالة صيدا.

ذنب قيادة الجيش أنها تحلّت بالجرأة فانطلقت من الخط الجديد (النقطة 29) لقناعتها بقانونية هذا الخط برغم معرفتها المسبقة بأن المهمة ستكون أصعب بسبب الأخطاء السابقة التي ارتكبتها عن قصد أو غير قصد بعض الذين تعاقبوا على هذا الملف منذ العام 2006.

فالخط الذي انطلق منه الوفد اللبناني ليس جديدًا بل هو نتيجة آراء ودراسات لبنانية وأجنبية وضعت بتصرف السلطات اللبنانية منذ العام 2011 ولكنها لم تأخذ بها لأسبابٍ ما تزال مجهولة حتى الآن ومطلوب من هذه السلطات شرحها للرأي العام اللبناني. أذكر من هذه الآراء والدراسات على سبيل المثال لا الحصر:

- مداخلات خلال جلسات لجنة الأشغال النيابية أثناء التحضير لإعداد القانون رقم 163 والمرسوم رقم 6433 قدّمها كل من وزير التربية الحالي القاضي طارق المجذوب (ممثل مجلس شوري الدولة حينها)، السفير جوني ابراهيم (ممثل وزارة الخارجية والمغتربين)، بالإضافة إلى محاضرة قدّمها الدكتور نبيل خليفة وجميعها تنادي بحق لبنان جنوب النقطة (23).
- دراسة قدمها مكتب الهيدروغرافيا البريطاني UKHO بتاريخ 17/8/2011 قبل يوم من إصدار القانون رقم 163 وقبل أسبوع من نشره في الجريدة الرسمية وقبل شهرين ونصف من إصدار المرسوم رقم 6433 يقترح فيها خيارين جنوب النقطة 23. (هل تم إخفاؤها عن النواب أم أنهم علموا بها وأهملوها؟).
- بحث أركان أعده العقيد الركن مازن بصبوص في العام 2013 عن الحدود البحرية بيّن فيه حق لبنان بمساحة 1430 كلم² جنوب النقطة (23).
- محاضرة ألقاها السيد نجيب مسيحي خلال مؤتمر أقامه مجلس النواب بتاريخ 18 و19/7/2019 أكد فيها على حق لبنان بمساحات إضافية جنوب النقطة 23.

كذلك فإن محاولات قيادة الجيش لتصحيح الخطأ ليست جديدة، فقد أرسلت مجموعة كتب إلى رئاسة الحكومة اللبنانية تقترح عليها تشكيل هيئة وطنية تعنى بموضوع الحدود البحرية وتلفت نظرها إلى وجود طرق أخرى تعتمد الحل المنصف وتعطي لبنان الحق بمساحات إضافية جنوب النقطة (23) دون الحصول على جواب سلبًا كان أم إيجابًا. أكتفي بذكر ستة من هذه الكتب:

- كتاب رقم 1993 / غ ع / و تاريخ 18-6-2013: على أثر متابعة مؤتمر في لندن حول الحدود البحرية. تم اقتراح إنشاء هيئة وطنية لاجراء دراسات واعتماد الحل المنصف بالاستفادة من الطرق التي اعتُمدت في دول أخرى (كان جواب الحكومة أن هذا الأمر خارج صلاحياتها كونها حكومة تصريف أعمال).
- كتاب رقم 3488/ غ ع / و تاريخ 3-9-2014: تأكيد على الكتاب السابق (كان جواب الحكومة أن لا ضرورة لإنشاء هيئة وطنية).
- كتاب رقم 1801 / غ ع / و تاريخ 12-4-2019: شرح أنه يمكن للبنان تعيين حدوده وفقاً للقوانين والأعراف الدولية بشكل يعطيه الحق بمساحات إضافية جنوب الخط المعلن بموجب المرسوم 6433 بحيث يقع جزء من حقل كاريش ضمن المياه اللبنانية. وطلب إثارة الموضوع في المحافل الدولية لمنع إسرائيل من متابعة العمل في حقل كاريش (بدأت إسرائيل الحفر في حقل كاريش بتاريخ 27 شباط/ فبراير 2020).
- كتاب رقم 10884/ غ ع / و تاريخ 7/11/2019: اقتراح تشكيل لجنة وطنية للبدء بالتحضير للمفاوضات المستقبلية خاصة أن الوقت أصبح داهماً أمامنا في ظل قيام العدو الإسرائيلي بتطوير حقل كاريش.
- كتاب رقم 5918 / غ ع / و تاريخ 27/12/2019: تم فيه التأكيد على حق لبنان بمساحة 1430 كلم² إضافية وأرفق الكتاب بملف كامل أعدته مصلحة الهيدروغرافيا في الجيش اللبناني.
- كتاب رقم 780 / غ ع / و تاريخ 9-3-2020: تأكيد على الكتاب رقم 5918 واقتراح التواصل مع المكتب البريطاني للحصول على المشورة نظراً لتوافر معطيات جديدة لمصلحة الهيدروغرافيا في الجيش اللبناني.

إن مهمة التفاوض هي مهمة وطنية بامتياز، والمحافظة على حقوقنا واجب وطني كونها ترتبط بمستقبل أولادنا وأحفادنا والتفريط بها خيانة وطنية. فأين المصلحة الوطنية باطلاق النار على الوفد اللبناني المفاوض وفي توقيت جاء استتباعاً لمواقف فريدريك هوف ومايك بومبيو؟ هل تعلمون أنكم بهجماتكم هذه تفتحون ثغرات في الجسم الدفاعي اللبناني قد يستغلها العدو الإسرائيلي للتسلل منها وتطويق الفريق اللبناني؟

تذكروا أنكم لاعبون ولستم متفرجين. البارحة رأيناكم تتصارعون على الصلاحيات فما بالكم اليوم تتراجعون أثناء تحمل المسؤولية؟ المطلوب منكم التحلي بالروح الوطنية العالية واتخاذ القرارات

الجريئة؟ إذا كنتم غير مقتنعين بخط الجيش اللبناني قولوا ذلك صراحة، إتخذوا القرار الذي تريدونه، وزوّدوا الفريق المفاوض بقراراتكم.

أما إذا كنتم مقتنعين، فعليكم تحصين موقف الوفد المفاوض بتعديل المرسوم 6433. لا يمكنكم أن تطلبوا منه التفاوض على النقطة 29 والرسوم رقم 6433 يحدّد النقطة 23. عدّوا هذا المرسوم فوراً قبل أن يبدأ العدو الإسرائيلي بالاستخراج من حقل كاريش.

المطلوب تجنّب التجاذبات السياسية والمطلوب محاذرة الوقوع في الأزمة لا المساهمة في بلوغها أو الإنزلاق إليها.. التخاذل في هذا الموضوع جريمة بحق الوطن، بادروا بالتاريخ لن يرحم المتخاذلين، وإلا فلتبادر السلطة السياسية إلى سحب تفويضها للقيادة العسكرية.

How Brexit talks overcame suspicion, resentment and fish



It was always likely to come down to fish, and even the final hours were occupied by cod and mackerel.

After nine months of bartering, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson could declare that his trade deal with the European Union was done, while the bloc got to keep close ties with one of the world's biggest economies.

Yet, while the outline was agreed around Wednesday lunchtime, it took a night to go through the legal text. Then, with the choreography already in place, last-minute haggling over fish stocks in the draft meant that an announcement didn't come until the afternoon of Christmas Eve. The situation became more frantic because of disagreements over how the figures had been calculated.

For about 200 officials agonizing over the minutiae, it was time to finally emerge from the darkness. They spent more than 2,000 hours shut in rooms with little or no natural light as negotiators confronted each other in London and Brussels while Brexit was overshadowed by the human and economic cost of the

coronavirus pandemic.

Some learned to respect their opposite numbers, others grew to resent them. At times, mutual suspicion and paranoia over listening devices made Brexit look like a chapter from the Cold War, all heightened by COVID-19 restrictions. Intimate chats in cafes were out; liaisons in parks were in. One British diplomat called it “Brexit noir.”

France’s blocking of the U.K.’s biggest port before Christmas was ostensibly to prevent a new strain of the coronavirus spreading to the continent. Yet there was also the sense in Paris that the chaos that halted thousands of trucks would demonstrate to the U.K. what was at stake. Officials said the two-day stoppage had focused the minds on what the EU’s chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, termed the “final push.”

For the negotiating teams, it was just another twist after spending the greater part of 2020 poring over air cargo, fingerprint data and – critically – 100 different fish species. One official described the process as like “pulling out eyelashes, one by one.”

They lived out of suitcases, working through two waves of infections that forced many into isolation. On occasions, tears were shed when they thought they were about to fail, even as recently as the morning of the deal. In the end, many were airlifted out of Brussels on a Royal Air Force plane to get home for Christmas.

This account of how the talks unfolded is based on conversations with officials with intimate knowledge of what went on. All of them asked not to be identified.

While the outcome brought celebration and relief as the final deal took shape, it had looked very different on Dec. 10. In a third-floor conference room in the British government’s building in Brussels, British lead negotiator David Frost told his team a deal looked almost impossible. Johnson was warning

his country that failure looked likely.

The evening before, on Dec. 9, a dinner meeting on the 13th floor of the European Commission's Berlaymont headquarters in Brussels between Johnson and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hadn't gone to plan. After she warned him publicly to "keep distance" when they took their face masks off, they found themselves wrangling over the same points that had bogged down the negotiations since the start.

At one point, von der Leyen's aides showed Johnson a PowerPoint slide that the EU had published in February. It showed how close the U.K. is to Europe geographically and how much the two sides trade with each other, to explain why the EU insisted on fair competition rules in any deal.

But the U.K. had already dismissed the chart at the start of the year. To the people close to the negotiations, it felt like they were back at square one.

"We were numb," said one U.K. official after Frost briefed them the following morning. Another fought back tears. "We just wanted to know when we could go home and see our families," the official said.

As it looked like their efforts had come to nothing, the British negotiating team distracted themselves by challenging each other to come up with the best haiku. But the dinner at least had shown more clearly where the differences lay – helped in some small part by the menu of scallops and turbot – and Johnson and von der Leyen were now in charge.

Compromises were found on one of the longstanding sticking points: the level playing field for fair competition, or rules to ensure neither side held a post-Brexit advantage for companies. The U.K. knew a deal was attainable if it backed down on some of its objections to the EU being able to impose tariffs if Britain does not follow the bloc's toughening of labor, social and environmental standards.

But the U.K. wanted something in return. The final days came down mainly to the fishing rights in British waters. Johnson and von der Leyen held further phone calls and, although officials said they still seemed to be talking across each other, on the ground the sides started to converge.

On Dec. 19, the prime minister was preparing to announce to the nation that he was taking drastic action to lock down London and ban Christmas gatherings because of a new highly virulent coronavirus strain. He also signaled to Frost that the time had come to do a deal.

As talks focused in on the issue of fishing rights, British negotiators were taken aback that the EU wasn't budging as much as they thought it would, and by the following night things looked bleak again.

In an attempt to get the deal over the line, Johnson and von der Leyen held two tense phone calls Monday. The Commission president said the EU, particularly France, wouldn't accept anything more than a 25% reduction in the amount of fish it could catch in British waters – and that this was the final offer.

Johnson had been pushing for 80%, though had just proposed 30%, a figure that might already be difficult to sell to his party in Parliament. Both sides were now feeling nervous about the prospects of a deal before Christmas, and when Johnson and von der Leyen spoke on Tuesday afternoon, they were still sticking to their guns.

That all changed on Tuesday night. After frantic phone calls between Brussels, Paris and Berlin, the EU came through with a new offer: Von der Leyen's Brexit adviser, Stephanie Riso, called Frost and told him the bloc would drop its longstanding demand that it should be able to impose far-reaching tariffs on the U.K. should it restrict fish access in the future, a power known as cross-retaliation.

That was the final piece of the jigsaw. The U.K.'s top team sent urgent messages to their colleagues, some of whom were already back at their Brussels hotel packing their suitcases to go home for Christmas. They got down to work on fishing rights immediately and worked late Tuesday night.

By Wednesday, when Johnson and von der Leyen spoke again – four times that day – the outline of a deal was there. In return for the dropping of cross-retaliation, Johnson accepted a reduction of 25% on fishing, with a five-and-a-half-year transition period. That means that he can say that in June 2026, on the 10th anniversary of the EU referendum, the U.K. will have full control of its waters.

“This moment marks the end of a long voyage,” von der Leyen told a news conference in Brussels on Thursday. “At the end of such voyages, I normally feel joy. But today I feel satisfaction and relief. It’s time to leave Brexit behind.”

The most recent leg of that journey started in March, but made little progress until after the summer. The coronavirus pandemic derailed arrangements almost immediately.

Shortly after the first negotiating round, several members of the two teams, including Frost and Barnier, were laid low either because they tested positive or were displaying symptoms. They continued talks over videoconference, though couldn’t meet in person again until the end of June.

That meant negotiators couldn’t strike up a rapport. “There were no handshakes, no gentle pats on the back, no opportunity to chat things over informally over a drink,” said one EU official. “That’s how deals are normally done.”

Intimacy came in the form of web cameras into people’s homes. One EU negotiator worked from a blood-red room with a bird cage, while a British official spoke from his shed in the English Midlands. Another from the U.K. sat in her kitchen between a bouquet of lilies and a set of knives. “It was

perfect for her,” one person involved in the talks joked.

There were technical problems with video technology, and both sides were worried about the security of discussing sensitive issues online. Officials found it difficult to work jointly on documents.

When they did resume face-to-face contact, the British side tried to win Barnier over. Over the summer, Frost wooed the Frenchman during private dinners at Carlton Gardens, an elegant 19th century London townhouse carefully chosen because of the emotions it might stir. The building served as the headquarters of the “Free France” government in exile during World War II led by Charles de Gaulle, Barnier’s political hero – though also the French leader who vetoed Britain’s membership of the EU’s precursor.

Months went by in almost constant deadlock, though. Barnier told Frost that before going into a submarine you need to make sure the doors are firmly shut, in response to Frost’s requests to intensify negotiations. As one negotiator put it: “There’s only so many times you can tell each other exactly the same thing about fish without going slightly crazy.”

The coronavirus weighed on the talks almost from the start. The revised train timetable under the English Channel meant there was only one shuttle to Brussels in the morning and one to London at night. Lockdowns closed bars and restaurants, and officials were forced to eat tepid dinners dropped off in paper bags alone in their hotel rooms for days on end.

In November, Barnier worked at home by candlelight after a power cut affected part of Brussels while he was in quarantine after one of his team tested positive for COVID-19.

Indeed, darkness became a theme of the talks. In London, they took place in an underground conference center belonging to the U.K. government’s business department dubbed “The Cave.” In Brussels, meetings in the drab 1970s-style Borschette

center took place from early morning to late at night. Starved of fresh air and exercise, negotiators started sharing vitamin D pills.

And with darkness came the sense of noir. During the first set of Brexit negotiations in 2018, the EU's trade supremo, Sabine Weyand, told attaches of her concern they were being bugged by the British secret service, something the U.K. flatly denied. Two years on, that paranoia persisted, an EU diplomat said. Johnson and his aides were asked to surrender their phones when they met von der Leyen for dinner.

Brussels officials in normal times might have allowed trusted journalists into their offices to view documents too sensitive to email. Now, they hid print-outs in the pages of the *Le Soir* newspaper as they sipped takeaway coffees on street corners.

While nervousness extended to both sides, key decision-making was taking place elsewhere anyway. Johnson exchanged text messages with French President Emmanuel Macron. Frost was in regular contact with Uwe Corsepius, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's top adviser.

For all the hours together, the two sides spent most of the time talking past each other. Even when Johnson and von der Leyen spoke again on the phone, officials said it sounded like they were talking from completely different positions.

The reasons for Brexit were something many on the EU side struggled to understand. While "sovereignty" became the U.K.'s mantra throughout the nine months, it was a running joke among the EU negotiators. Whenever Frost tweeted the word, they expected little to be achieved for the next few days.

In her speech Thursday, von der Leyen pointedly remarked that everyone should ask themselves what sovereignty actually means in the 21st century.

At various times, the talks were very close to collapse, not

least when the British government threatened to break international law by unpicking part of the withdrawal agreement on leaving the EU. But the EU saw the move as just provocation. It was clear that, despite everything, both sides desperately wanted a deal.

Indeed, they always returned to the table. As it became closer to Christmas, and the end of the U.K.'s post-Brexit transition period, tensions increased. British officials said they observed cross words between Barnier and senior members of the EU team. Witnesses reported hearing shouting from the U.K. team's base in London.

Asked how they planned to celebrate the deal, one member of the British group already knew: "I'm going to sleep."

Qatar Airways allowed to reroute some flights through Saudi airspace



Qatar Airways on Thursday said it had started rerouting flights through Saudi Arabian airspace.

“This evening, Qatar Airways began to reroute some flights through Saudi airspace,” Qatar’s national carrier tweeted, adding the first flight to use Saudi airspace was QR1365, which was scheduled to leave Doha for Johannesburg at 8.45pm.

Flight-tracking websites later showed QR1365’s flight path over Saudi Arabia on its way to the South African city.

This was the first scheduled Qatar Airways service to fly over Saudi Arabia since the start of the Gulf crisis in mid-2017.

Earlier this week, the Al-Ula Declaration was signed during the GCC Summit for the restoration of full relations between Qatar and the four nations – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt – that had cut ties in 2017. This includes the reopening of borders and airspace.

Meanwhile, aviation analyst Alex Macheras told Gulf Times that

“this is the most significant development in more than three and a half years, as ‘NOTAMs’ (notices to flight crew issued by country aviation regulators) were updated by Saudi Arabia on Thursday, removing the airspace ban on Qatari-registered jets”.

“The removal of the ban was effective immediately, meaning just moments later a Qatar Airways A350 bound for South Africa became the first commercial airline flight in over three years to cross into Saudi airspace, reducing flight time and saving fuel,” he said. “The airspace of Saudi Arabia is now open to Qatar without restriction, and we should expect Qatar’s national airline, Qatar Airways, to resume flights to Saudi Arabia very soon.

“For now, flights that have been avoiding Saudi airspace for the duration of the blockade will now overfly the kingdom.”

Qatar Airways pilots will once again be communicating with Saudi’s air traffic controllers, and the airline will enjoy the fuel savings immediately – a win for the environment too, he noted.

“We’re expecting the ‘NOTAMs’ of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt to also be updated in due course, following Saudi Arabia in removing their airspace bans on Qatar,”

Macheras added.

China set to bail out Iraq with multibillion-dollar oil deal



Baghdad: Iraq is poised to sign a multibillion-dollar contract with China ZhenHua Oil Co., a bailout from Beijing for the cash-strapped government which will receive money upfront in exchange for long-term oil supplies.

The deal is the latest example of China, via state-controlled trading companies and banks, lending to struggling oil producers such as Angola, Venezuela and Ecuador, with repayment in the form of oil barrels rather than cash. This year's crash in oil prices has hammered Iraq's budget and the government has failed to pay teachers and civil servants on time.

The Iraqi agency in charge of petroleum exports, SOMO, picked ZhenHua after asking oil traders for bids, according to people familiar with the matter. Cabinet spokesman Hassan Nadhim said on Tuesday there had been “several offers” and they were being studied before Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi makes the final decision.

Upfront payment

Under the terms of a letter SOMO sent last month, the winning bidder will buy 4 million barrels a month, or about 130,000 a day. They will pay upfront for one year of supply, which at current prices would bring in more than \$2 billion, according to Bloomberg calculations. The deal runs for five years – but the upfront payment is only for one year.

The deal attracted widespread interest among major oil traders, according to the people. The deadline for the tender was extended from late November to allow companies more time to bid.

ZhenHua Oil didn't reply to an email seeking comment that was sent to its headquarters in Beijing after normal business hours on Tuesday.

All major producers have taken a hit from oil's coronavirus-triggered plunge. But Iraq, where crude accounts for almost all government revenue, is in a worse position than most. Its economy will contract 12% this year, more than that of any other OPEC member under a production quota, according to International Monetary Fund forecasts.

Thousands of Iraqis have taken to the streets in recent months to protest about worsening living conditions. The government has struggled to fulfil its commitments to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which agreed at the height of the pandemic in April to cut output. Baghdad has pumped above its cap on several occasions, angering OPEC's de facto leader

Saudi Arabia.

Rare deal

Energy-rich nations short on revenue have often relied on pre-payment deals to raise money, but Baghdad hasn't done so until now. The semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq has used similar contracts in the past, as have Chad and the Republic of Congo.

In a pre-payment deal, the oil buyer effectively becomes a lender to the country. The barrels are security for the loan.

Iraq's woes make it harder for the government to raise money more conventionally, such as through the bond market. The country's dollar yields average 7.5%, one of the highest levels for any sovereign. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. said this week that Iraq was among the most vulnerable bond issuers heading into 2021.

The pre-payment part of Iraq's contract is one of the largest in recent history, although less than the record \$10 billion that Russia's state-run Rosneft raised in 2013 from trading houses Vitol Group and Glencore Plc.

Besides its size, the Iraqi deal is rare because it allows the winner to ship crude to wherever it wishes for a year. Normally, Middle Eastern crude is sold with strict clauses preventing traders and refiners from re-selling the barrels to different regions.

The exclusion of that clause was probably seen as advantageous enough to compensate for the fact the pre-payment money is effectively interest-free for Iraq. A country usually pays a yield for the cash it receives upfront.

Revitalize China

ZhenHua produces and trades oil. The company has played a large role in Beijing's so-called "going global" policy for energy. It has invested in oil concessions in the United Arab Emirates, Kazakhstan and Myanmar, and trades crude originating from the likes of Kuwait, Brazil and the Republic of Congo.

The company was founded in 2003 as a subsidiary of the largest Chinese state-owned defense contractor, known as Norinco. According to its website, ZhenHua trades about 1.3 million barrels a day of oil and finished products.

Other major Chinese traders include Unipecc, Chinaoil and Sinochem. Shrouded in relative secrecy in the past, these state companies are gaining prominence as China's oil consumption rises. It's set to soon overtake the U.S. as the world's largest crude importer.

ZhenHua, meaning "Revitalize China" in Mandarin, started a joint-venture with SOMO to market barrels into China in 2018, though it was later scrapped.

Lebanon sets starting point for sea border negotiations with Israel



BEIRUT (Reuters) – President Michel Aoun on Thursday specified Lebanon’s starting point for demarcating its sea border with Israel under U.S.-mediated talks, in the first public confirmation of a stance sources say increases the size of the disputed area.

Israel and Lebanon launched the negotiations last month with delegations from the long-time foes convening at a U.N. base to try to agree on the border that has held up hydrocarbon exploration in the potentially gas-rich area.

A presidency statement said Aoun instructed the Lebanese team that the demarcation line should start from the land point of Ras Naqoura as defined under a 1923 agreement and extend seaward in a trajectory that a security source said extends the disputed area to some 2,300 square km (888 sq miles) from around 860 sq km.

Israel’s energy minister, overseeing the talks with Lebanon, said Lebanon had now changed its position seven times and was contradicting its own assertions.

“Whoever wants prosperity in our region and seeks to safely develop natural resources must adhere to the principle of stability and settle the dispute along the lines that were submitted by Israel and Lebanon at the United Nations,” Yuval Steinitz said.

Any deviation, Steinitz said, would lead to a “dead end”.

Last month sources said the two sides presented contrasting maps for proposed borders. They said the Lebanese proposal extended farther south than the border Lebanon had years before presented to the United Nations and that of the Israeli team pushed the boundary farther north than Israel’s original position.

The talks, the culmination of three years of diplomacy by Washington, are due to resume in December.

Israel pumps gas from huge offshore fields but Lebanon, which has yet to find commercial gas reserves in its own waters, is desperate for cash from foreign donors as it faces the worst economic crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war.

Additional reporting by Ari Rabinovitch in Jerusalem; Writing by Ghaida Gbantous; Editing by Janet Lawrence

Athens responds to US State Department’s claim that Greek air space is only 6 nautical

miles



Regarding the report by the US State Department, which was forwarded to the US Congress on March 18 and in the framework of the provisions of the “Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act,” diplomatic sources pointed out that the borders of Greece’s territorial waters, as well as the maritime borders between Greece and Turkey, have been clearly defined for years on the basis of international law and are not in any dispute.

In particular, they stated in response to the State Department that regarding the Southeastern Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, the maritime borders have been defined by the Italy-Turkey Agreement signed in Ankara on 4 January 1932, as well as the minutes which was signed in Ankara on December 28, 1932.

Greece, as the successor state under the Treaty of Paris of 1947, gained sovereignty over the Dodecanese without any change in the maritime borders, as agreed between Italy and Turkey.

Regarding the sea borders in Thrace (up to the point of a distance of three nautical miles from the Evros Delta), they emphasise that these were defined by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and the Athens Protocol of 1926.

Finally, regarding the sea borders between the above two areas (from Thrace to Dodecanese), where the territorial waters of Greece and Turkey intersect, they pointed out that the sea borders follow the middle line between the Greek islands and islets and the opposite Turkish coasts.

The same diplomatic sources noted that Greece's external borders, including its territorial waters, are at the same time the external borders of the European Union.

The recently released State Department report states that Greece claims an airspace that extends up to 10 nautical miles and a territorial sea of up to 6 nautical miles, but that "under international law, a country's airspace coincides with its territorial sea."

"The US thus recognizes an airspace up to 6 nautical miles consistent with territorial sea. Greece and the US do not share a view on the extent of Greece's airspace," the report said.

The State Department report adds that although Athens currently claims up to a 6-nautical-mile territorial sea in the Aegean, "Greece and its neighbors have not agreed on boundary delimitation in those areas where their lawful maritime entitlements overlap."

"Lack of such delimitation means there is no clarity on the extent of Greece's territorial sea and corresponding airspace in these areas rendering any assessment of total violations not feasible," the report said.

The State Department report said Washington encourages Greece and Turkey "to resolve outstanding bilateral maritime boundary

issues peacefully and in accordance with international law.”

Mediterranean crisis calls for ‘civilized solution’, energy expert tells EU-Arab gathering



‘Do we want the benefits of our own rightful shares more than we want to deny the same benefits to our neighbors?’

ATHENS, Greece: The latest legal and technological tools can resolve rival claims in the Mediterranean without anyone firing a shot, a veteran of the region’s energy industry told a conference in Athens on Monday.

“We have both the legal mechanisms and the high-precision

mapping technologies to draw up fair and equitable boundaries at sea,” Roudi Baroudi said in a speech to the 5th European Union Arab World Summit. “That means that countries in the Mediterranean region can settle their differences amicably, setting aside the costly and ultimately self-defeating ways of war.”

Appearing via Zoom from Doha, Qatar, Baroudi said the region had a long history of spawning great civilizations, but that each of these had squandered their good fortune by making war on their neighbors.

Thanks to huge deposits of natural gas having been found beneath the Mediterranean, he noted, “the region faces another crossroads”, largely because “the vast majority of maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean remain unresolved.” With neighboring states laying claim to the same undersea real estate, Baroudi said the resulting “patchwork of claims and counter-claims” only served to hamper all parties by jeopardizing their respective offshore oil and gas activities.

With more than four decades in the business – including significant experience in both the public and private sectors – Baroudi has become a leading proponent of the East Med’s emergence as a major energy producer. Having long argued that safe and responsible exploitation of the resource in question would allow regional countries to make historic gains, both at home and abroad, his most recent interventions have focused on how to draw fair and equitable boundaries at sea. In fact, his book “Maritime Disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Way Forward” is widely regarded as the most authoritative guide to the current situation.

Currently serving as CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Doha, Baroudi said all parties need to be honest with themselves by answering single question: “do we want the benefits of our own rightful shares more than we want to deny the same benefits to our neighbors?”

Those that want to focus on getting their share, he argued, need to put their faith in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Roudi Baroudi is CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Doha.

He also is the author of “Maritime Disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean: the Way Forward”, published earlier this year by the Transatlantic Leadership Network and distributed by the Brookings Institution Press.

5th EU- Arab World Summit – Maritime Borders in the Mediterranean: the Cradle of Civilization Deserves a Civilized Solution



ROUDI BAROUDI

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DELPHI
ECONOMIC
FORUM

الاقتصاد والابتكار
Al-Iqtisad wal-Itikad