

Progress made on southern maritime demarcation talks



Israel has agreed to a number of Lebanese conditions for negotiating the demarcation of their joint maritime border, marking a positive shift in years-long efforts to find a solution to the dispute.

According to a number of reports, including in local newspapers The Daily Star and Al-Akhbar, as well as Agence France Presse a new round of shuttle diplomacy by Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Satterfield had been successful in setting some broad outlines for negotiations. These include a Lebanese demand to negotiate both the land and sea borders at the same time, and to hold negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations at Naqoura, Lebanon's southernmost point, in the same manner that determined the Blue Line that marks Israel's 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon.

Lebanese officials dispute more than a dozen points along the Blue Line, while a sliver of about 860 square kilometers of maritime area is disputed by Israel and Lebanon.

Lebanese officials have described the new round of talks as “positive,” but have said outlying issues remain. This reportedly includes the duration of negotiations, which Lebanon has demanded be open ended, but Israel has called for limiting to a six month window.

In late April, Berri said Lebanon was ready to demarcate its southern maritime border with United Nations supervision, using the same mechanism adopted for the Blue Line. The U.S would act as a facilitator of the negotiations.

A small sliver of maritime Bloc 9, where exploratory drilling is slated to take place next year, sits in the disputed area. Blocs 8 and 10, both included in a second licensing round launched in January, also partially lie in this area.

While several rounds of negotiations have previously failed, Roudi Baroudi, an independent energy analyst with over 40 years experience in the field, said that large hydrocarbon finds in the region, and associated interest from leading companies, meant that all parties involved were keen to find a resolution.

“There are maybe trillions of dollars of hydrocarbons in this zone, and some of the biggest oil and gas players in the world are here,” Baroudi told LOGI. “They are not coming here to see us. They are coming here for our wealth, and big oil and gas companies don’t want to go exploring in an area where there is a problem.

For an explainer on the origins of southern dispute, [click here](#).