



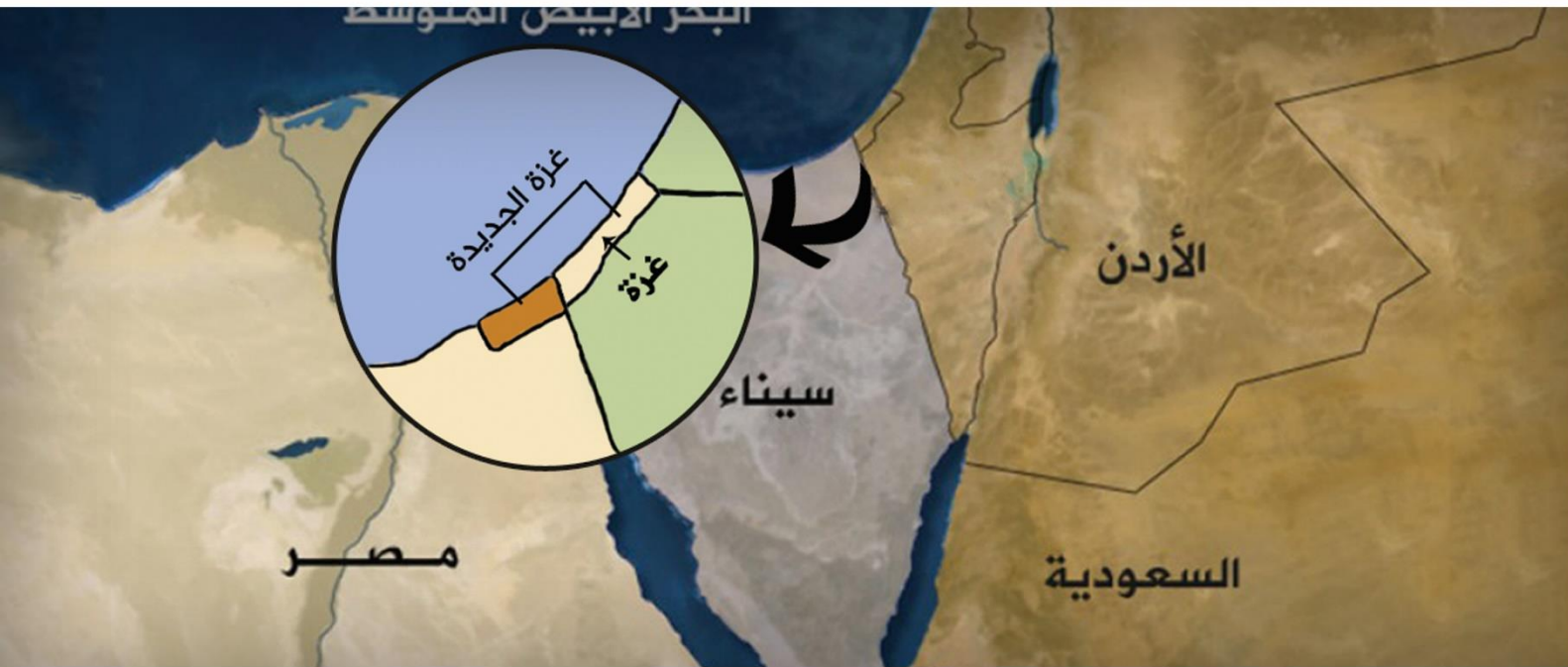
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EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Political  
Assessments

2 MARCH 2018

# Deal of the Century Dimensions and Paths

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## Deal of the Century: Dimensions and Paths Mohamed Abu Saada

### Introduction

There has been a lot of talk recently about ‘something’ that is being prepared in the corridors of US policy in coordination with regional countries known as the "Deal of the Century", which apparently aims to terminate the Palestinian cause. However, the active players in the deal, whether regional or international, indicate that what is being processed is not limited to the Palestinian cause, but it will also include the entire Middle East region.

*So, it is important to explore the deal and its different dimensions here as follows:*

The term “Deal of the Century” is nothing new. In 2006, it was used to describe an offer by the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, or the so-called “Olmert-Abbas understandings”. In fact, what was leaked at the time suggested they were conditional agreements pending the results of the Israeli elections, which brought a defeat for Olmert. However, on September 20, 2017, the term was reintroduced with the Trump Administration’s access to power, and the emergence of a supportive regional and international environment for the pursuit of the plan.

### Axes of the deal

First: the geopolitical axis

*The geographical solutions presented to solve the Palestinian cause can be summarized as follows:*

(A) The plan of Maj. General Giora Eiland, a former head of the Israeli National Security Council who later became a senior research associate at the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS): which states the annexation of three times the area of the Gaza Strip from Sinai, and the establishment of a seaport and an international



airport, in return for granting Egypt about 700 kilometers from the Negev desert, south of Israel.

(B) The plan of Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli defense minister, in 2004, which states the annexation of "Israeli" settlement blocs in the West Bank to the future Palestinian state in exchange for the annexation of land inhabited by Arabs under the "Israeli" control.

(C) The plan of Naftali Bennett (a minister in the Netanyahu government and member of the mini-cabinet), which was proposed in 2016. He talked about annexing Area C in the West Bank according to the Oslo agreement, which amounts to about 61% of the West Bank to Israel, in return for the establishment of a communication network in the West Bank that includes roads, tunnels and possibly bridges.

(D) The plan of Yisrael Katz, a member of the Knesset for Likud, minister in Netanyahu government and member of the Israeli Security Cabinet, which includes construction of an artificial island in the Gaza Sea 4.5 kilometers offshore. The island will be connected to shores through a bridge, and may include a port, power installations and even an airport.

*In the context of the controversy over the deal, there were many statements and comments, including:*

- Statements by PLO Executive Committee Member Ahmad Majdalani on January 9, 2018: The proposals of the so-called "Deal of the Century" are aimed at eliminating the Palestinian issue through the exchange of land after the expansion of the Gaza Strip at the expense of Sinai. According to Majdalani, the Palestinian state will be as follows: the expanded Gaza Strip including an international port and airport under international supervision, and the West Bank (A, B areas) that will be connected together in a way or another, provided that Israel maintains security guarantees (air, land and sea) in such a way that the expected Palestinian state loses its sovereignty, in



the sense of extensive autonomy. According to the plan, Gaza residents will benefit from the construction of a large international port (in the western sector of Greater Gaza), an international airport, 25 kilometers from the border with Israel, and . a new city that can absorb at least one million people and a natural growth and development area for the population of Gaza and the West Bank.

- Statements of Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat in a report consisting of 12 items that outline the American plan or the so-called “deal of the century”:

- 1- Recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and transferring US Embassy there.
- 2- The creation of the Palestinian future capital in Abu Dis, an East Jerusalem suburb cut off to the holy city by the Israeli separation barrier. on
- 3- Trump will announce within two to three months his consent to the annexation of a bloc comprising 10 to 15 percent of West Bank settlements.
- 4- Creation of a “shared notion of security” between the two countries, which would include a demilitarised Palestinian state with its own “powerful” police force, security cooperation with Jordan, Egypt and the US, the presence of Israeli forces along the Jordan Valley, while Israel would maintain “overriding security responsibility”, in case of “emergencies”.
- 5- Withdrawal of Israeli forces from Area A and B, and some areas of Area C, in accordance with Palestinian "compliance" with the deal.
- 6- Enforcing international and Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.
- 7- Affording some freedom of movement for Palestinians, including a secure corridor between the West Bank and Gaza.
- 8- Allowing Palestinians access to some parts of the ports of Ashdod and Haifa, and Ben Gurion Airport.
- 9- Israel guarantees freedom of worship in the Holy sites for all, while preserving the status quo.

10- Palestinians would have access to international border crossings. However, these would remain under Israeli control, as would territorial waters, airspace and the electromagnetic spectrum, which would cover mobile, radio and internet signals.

11- In relation to Palestinian refugees, Trump only offered a “just” status for internally displaced Palestinians.

12- A decision on the final border and the permanent status of the two states would be decided after the deal.

According to the declared deal proposal, we can say that the proposed non-sovereign Palestinian state will probably consist of 39% of the West Bank, the expanded Gaza Strip, at the expense of Sinai.

(See the figure below).



The remaining part of the West Bank that will be under the control of the Palestinian Authority

### Second: Egypt and the deal

Israel would rather forget the geographical shape defined by the plan of Giora Eiland - because of its security threat to the Israeli occupation. Israel is not interested in expanding its border with the Gaza Strip, nor is it conceivable that Israel would put its border with Gaza in the form of the letter Z, intersecting with the commercial crossing known as Karm Abu Salem, for two reasons: first, for security reasons to Israel; and second, for economic reasons to Egypt, as it is not logical for Egypt to give Egypt an important trade crossing like this.

(See figure below)



Exchange of territory between Egypt and Israel

However, this may not exclude the idea of exchanging Egyptian territory with Israel. However, the territories proposed to be exchanged are likely to be very limited, probably less than what was mentioned in the plan of the Giora Eiland (720 km), especially that only one million Palestinians will be settled. It is worth mentioning that



the area of the Gaza Strip, which holds a population of 2 million, is 365 km. Therefore, it is expected that the land swap will be between 100 and 300 km only.

[However, according to the plan of Giora Eiland, Egypt would transfer 720 square kilometers of the Sinai Peninsula to the future Palestinian state. This territory is a rectangle built from a rib of 24 km along the Mediterranean coast from Rafah westward toward al-Arish (but not including al-Arish), and a rib of 30 km long. This would be equivalent to 12% of the West Bank, which Israel wants to annex as part of the final arrangements. In return, Egypt would be given equivalent territory in the southwestern Naqab (Negev) Desert from the 1948 occupied Palestinian territories, in Wadi Firan (Paran).]

In the event that the Egyptian regime agrees to the 'deal of the century', the regime is expected to exercise political pressures on the Palestinian Authority and Hamas or at least one of them to agree to the deal, amid major economic incentives, including employment opportunities, to attract the residents of the Gaza Strip or even Palestinian refugees abroad. Also, the Palestinians would be allowed to settle in Sinai areas that will be annexed to the Gaza Strip; and they will be allowed to build an international airport and seaport.

In fact, the Egyptian regime also desires to achieve an economic boom through this deal as it would be allowed to build a 10-km tunnel link to Jordan under Egyptian sovereignty. Also, a railroad link would also be allowed to be built alongside a highway and an oil pipeline with Egyptian levies would be imposed on "all traffic from Jordan, Iraq, and the Gulf to the Gaza port," as well as international economic aid to Cairo. The Egyptian-Israeli agreement signed in 1979 – the "military annex", would be amended in such a way that allows the presence of Egyptian forces there to protect its economic interests. It is also not unlikely that Egypt will obtain a nuclear power plant for peaceful

purposes to produce electricity in the light of talk about the comprehensive peace process.

If this deal is concluded, Egypt may receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and Cairo will have the right to call for an international peace conference in Egypt, regaining its missing international status. The Sinai Peninsula is also expected to experience a major economic boom as a result of the commercial zone that will be established between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Egypt hopes that this trade exchange with Gaza alone will generate an income of more than \$ 2.5 billion a year, and will reinforce the state of economic security in Egypt.

#### Third: Jordan and the deal

Although there are factors that push Jordan to welcome the deal, however, there are other worrying factors. The positive factors can be summed up in that Jordan seeks to achieve an economic boom through benefiting from the proposed port of Gaza on the Mediterranean, as a transit for European goods imported through Gaza and exported to the Gulf and Iraq. Jordan would also be allowed to repatriate 70,000 refugees from Gaza to the “expanded Strip.”

Jordan's concern is that Amman was not involved in the early preparations of the ‘deal’ to preserve its national security. In fact, Jordan is afraid that the proposed solutions to the Palestinian cause could come at the expense of the Jordanian territory (the idea of alternative homeland). Jordan also fears of a likely collapse of the Palestinian Authority to find itself in charge of the West Bank administration again.

#### Fourth: the deal’s political dimensions

- All the previous initiatives for the peace process between the Arab countries and the Israel focused on the need to establish open Arab relations with Tel Aviv after reaching a peace agreement, including the Arab peace initiative in 2002. However, the situation



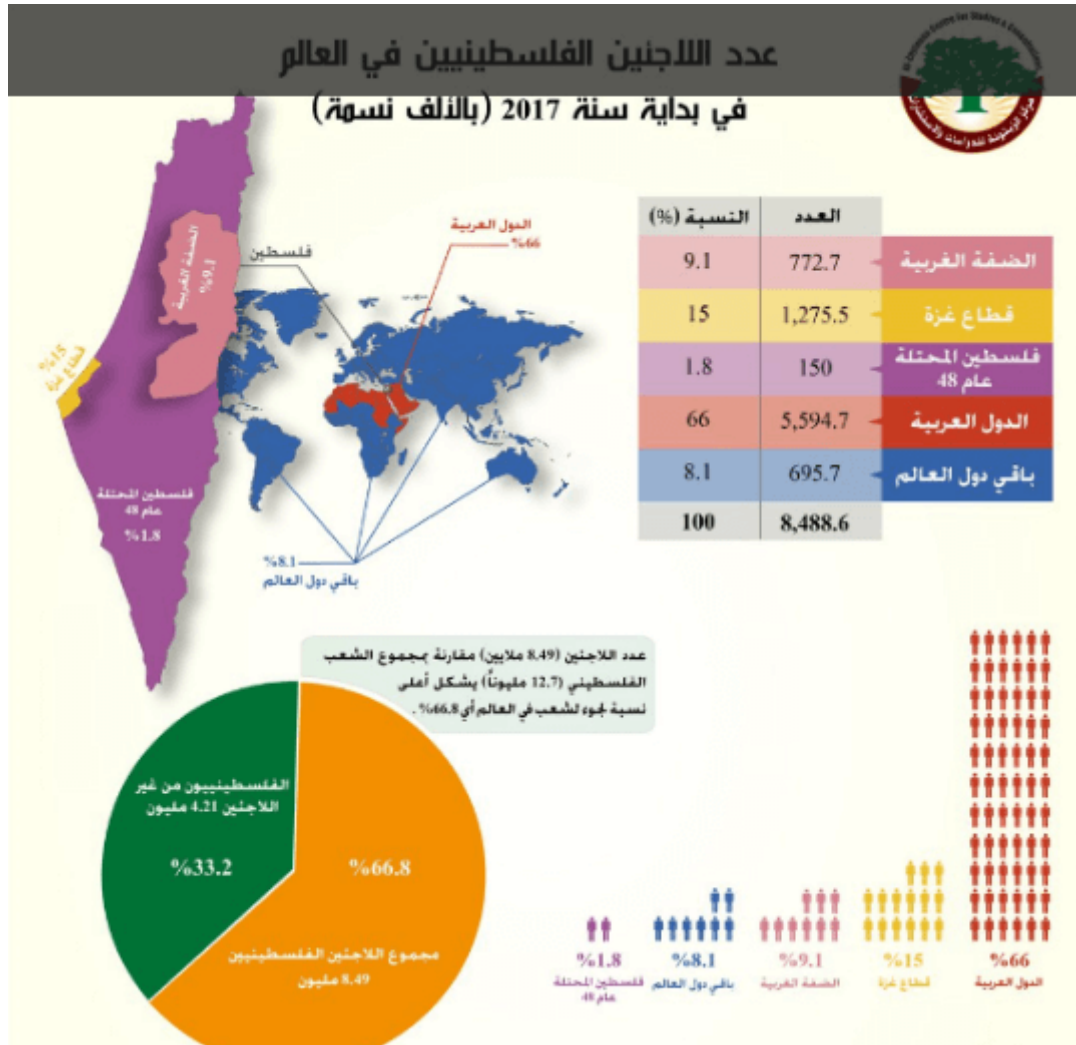
in the 'deal of the century' is different, as it is based on the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations before the start of the peace process, to serve as an "incentive" for Israel to reach a peace process with the Arabs. In fact, this is a very dangerous situation because the Arabs would be completely absent from the scene of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and make it easy for Israel and the US to terminate the Palestinian cause.

Unfortunately, this step was welcomed by many Arab regimes; and Netanyahu has stated that there are secret Arab-Israeli relations. It has become clear that many Arab countries, especially the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain), wish to strengthen their relations with Tel Aviv, based on its vision that "the Iranian project is more dangerous to the Arab countries than Israel". Moreover, some Arab countries believe that in the event of strengthening their relations with Israel, they will protect themselves against the danger of the Iranian project.

There are many indicators on the undeclared positions of some Arab countries through their official statements such as the comments of Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir when he described Hamas as a terrorist organization more than once. Another example for this trend was a Twitter Hishtag, "#Riyadh\_is\_more\_important\_than\_Jerusalem". What is more important is pressure exerted by Saudi leadership on the Palestinian leadership (the Palestinian Authority and Hamas) to accept the 'deal of the century', according to reports circulated by various media outlets.

- The second important political issue in the deal of the century is the issue of "Palestinian refugees". In fact, it is the most important issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially after Washington made a decision to freeze \$ 65 million in US aid allocated to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees. It is noteworthy that the UNRWA is responsible for the education, employment, and treatment of

Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and around the world. To learn more about Palestinian refugees (see figure below)



Distribution of Palestinian refugees in the world

- The Israeli occupation considers the issue of Palestinian refugees as the most dangerous file of the conflict (according to the issue of demographic conflict), and basically seeks to get rid of it in any settlement. Previous peace initiatives have provided many solutions to the question of Palestinian refugees but unfortunately all of them have failed. The reason for this is that the majority of the Palestinian people are refugees.

The file of Palestinian refugees is characterized by two important dimensions: namely, the humanitarian dimension, and the international dimension (as the Palestinian refugees live in many countries around the world, including Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Venezuela, Chile, the Gulf, South Africa and other countries). The issue of Palestinian refugees, therefore, may be one of the main drawbacks of any settlement or deal, for its ramifications. It is very difficult for some countries to settle the Palestinians on their land, because the number of Palestinian refugees may exceed the number of the indigenous population, as it is the case in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

#### Fifth: Axis of energy

It seems that the energy conflict will be present in the 'deal of the century'. The energy struggle in the Middle East is not new, especially in light of the newly discovered gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea which require demarcation of the maritime borders of most Middle East countries, particularly the Zionist entity, Egypt, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey.

A border dispute is currently going on between Lebanon and Israel in the Mediterranean [Block 9, which covers about 860 square kilometres]. Lebanon says that it lies within its territorial and economic waters ("Block 9 lies in the pure economic zone of Lebanon, says Lebanese President Michel Aoun), while Israel claims to have the right to part of that area.

The Block 9 problem dates back to 2009 when an American company, Noble Energy, announced that the waters of the eastern Mediterranean area are home to approximately 83,000 sq km of oil and gas wells, specifically in the waters between Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus and the entire Syrian coast, in short from Sinai to the border with Turkey. In this way, the eastern Mediterranean region becomes the area with the highest amount of gas reserves in the world, surpassing Qatar and Azerbaijan.

The part belonging to Lebanon would amount to 22 thousand square kilometers. However, Blocks 8, 9 and 10 are points of disagreement between Lebanon and Israel.

(See figure)



Oil and gas reserves in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea

In light of the dispute between Beirut and Tel Aviv, US former ambassador Frederick Hoff suggested an agreement in 2011 to demarcate the maritime border between Lebanon and Israel, by giving Lebanon about 550 square kilometers from the 860 square kilometers area.

On February 16, 2018, David Satterfield, the acting U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, resumed the US mediation efforts to resolve the Israeli-Lebanese dispute maritime borders. However, Lebanon rejected the proposal on the grounds that the entire region was within Lebanese territorial waters. Lebanon's share of the natural gas in this part of the Mediterranean is estimated at 96 trillion cubic feet, a wealth that could help Lebanon reduce its public debt, which by the end of 2017 reached about \$ 77 billion, one of the highest in the world.

Also, there is a conflict between Greece and Turkey on the southern coast of the Greek Cyprus after an Italian company discovered gas fields there, which led to the formation of an undeclared alliance between Greece, Egypt, Italy and Israel against Turkey on the other.

(See figure)



The dispute between Turkey and Greece over gas

Sixth: the deal between failure and success

The complexity of the deal and the sensitivity of the files it addresses make it difficult to be implemented on the ground, taking into consideration the following:

- The political problems suffered by the Israeli occupation, because of the ambiguous fate of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is facing one of the greatest challenges of his career after he was charged with bribery. It was reported on Tuesday (Feb 13) that the Israeli police, after investigating Netanyahu for over a year, found evidence that he had traded his influence for favors. The decision on whether to press charges now rests with Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit. The accusations against Netanyahu are grave, even when compared with a long list of other ministers, including his predecessor Ehud Olmert, who served prison sentences. Anyway, whoever may succeed Netanyahu would not be able to undertake the requirements of the proposed deal, especially if his successors belonged to the extremist right wing. Also, likely Israeli leaders may be involved in problems and wars that could adversely affect or even disrupt the 'deal of the century'.

- In the United States, the administration of President Donald Trump is taking rapid steps towards the 'deal of the century', which the US apparently did not coordinate internationally, leading to likely intersection with international schemes, specifically with Turkey and Russia, which may obstruct the deal. Also, the US-European relations strained after Trump's decision to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem, a step that created a gap and a crisis of trust in the relations between some European countries and the United States.

- The official position of the Palestinians considered the 'deal of the century' "very dangerous" to the Palestinian cause, and aims to liquidate and terminate it. Despite the divisions in the Palestinian political situation, the Palestinian Authority and all the Palestinian movements and organizations are taking a stance against the deal, and are working to thwart it by all means, whether diplomatic through the steps taken by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas; or perhaps militarily by igniting a war between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Past experience has shown that no solutions could

be imposed by force on the Palestinian people, especially if it was related to Jerusalem, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the issue of refugees.

- International legitimacy: Trump is fully aware that his decisions and procedures related to the 'deal of the century' are inconsistent with the international resolutions and laws. On the other hand, Palestinian president has power cards represented in the international and regional institutions supporting him, especially the UN General Assembly, the European Union, the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Unity (OIC). Abbas also relies on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 on which the whole peace process is based on; in addition to the fact that solutions to the conflict should come through negotiations, not by imposition on the parties.

- The risk in the files dealt with by the 'deal of the century', especially the economic dimension (gas), is that they are considered national security issues for many countries. Therefore, you cannot resolve these issues through a deal; which could ignite a regional war in the future. There are some indicators for this, most notably the warning of EU leaders to cancel a pre-planned meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, scheduled for March 26 in Bulgaria, expressing their solidarity with Greek Cyprus and Greece over the Nicosia's accusations that Turkey stopped a drillship hired by Italian Eni Company and threatened to use force against it. Also, Greek Deputy Minister of National Defense said Turkey was trying to solve its internal and external problems through a provocative vision of retroactive reaction to international interactions. "If Turkey tries to expand its maritime borders, Greece has the ability to respond diplomatically and militarily to this expansion, although it does not wish that things reach this point." It is noteworthy that the European escalation came after the Turkish navy stopped a drillship on February 9, used by Italy's Eni, which was on its way to explore gas in Cypriot waters. What is really worsening the situation there is the fact that France and the United States are also involved in the Cyprus energy file.



- Another aspect that may lead to the failure of the deal is the risk of "future conflicts and wars" – the conflicts between global exploration companies, including French “Total”, Italian “Eni” and Russian “Novatech”, which are exploring oil and gas in Blocks 4 and 9, within the disputed territories between Lebanon and Israel.
- The most likely factor in the outbreak of a regional war is the conflict between Lebanon and Israel, especially after Lebanese Energy Minister Cesar Abi Khalil said Friday (Feb. 9) that there would be full exploration in an offshore energy block that partially lies in waters disputed by neighboring Israel. “We have confirmed and reaffirmed that Block 9 is located within the Lebanese maritime waters and is fully subject to the sovereignty of the Lebanese state,” Abi Khalil said. “And its exploration activities will be fully implemented.” Lebanon said on Friday (Feb. 9) it had signed its first offshore oil and gas exploration and production contracts for two energy blocks, including the disputed Block 9. A consortium of France's Total, Italy's Eni and Russia's Novatek signed the agreements for the two blocks, which are among five that Lebanon put up for tender in the country's much-delayed first licensing round. Israel and Lebanon have exchanged threats and condemnation over the tender, amid rising tensions over territorial and marine boundaries between them. In response, Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said: “When they issue a tender on a gas field, including Block 9, which by any standard is ours ... this is very, very challenging and provocative conduct here.” “Respectable firms” bidding on the tender “are, to my mind, making a grave error - because this is contrary to all of the rules and all protocol in cases like this,” he told an international security conference hosted by Tel Aviv University’s INSS think-tank. Meanwhile, the Secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah threatened to target the Israeli gas platforms, in case the Israelis violated the Lebanese gas.



## Conclusion

We are not in front of a historic deal that offers effective or acceptable solutions to the parties to the conflict with Israel; however, we are in front of a new attempt to liquidate the Palestinian cause and loot the revolutions of the peoples of the region again, as happened in Sykes-Picot and San Remo agreements. It is therefore not a deal between two parties, but an expression of the arrogance of the American/Israeli power, and an attempt to impose a new equation on the region aimed, in the first place, at terminating the Palestinian cause.

The hegemony power of the United States and Israel in the region is likely to achieve some successes for the deal (Perhaps in Israel's acquisition of a part of the Lebanese gas after a war). But, pressures will be maintained on the Palestinians to make some changes in positions such as the return of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to negotiations without pre-conditions and acceptance of the United States as a mediator. An international peace conference is also expected to be convened. In addition, Arab regimes are expected to rush for publicly normalizing relations with Israel, in return for some economic support for the Palestinians.

However, many aspects of the 'deal of the century' are expected to fail. The peoples of the region nowadays are not the same people who lived 100 years ago when Sykes-Picot and San Remo agreements were passed. Also, the files dealt with by the deal are very important and touch strategic issues for many countries, especially in light of the presence of major regional players such as Turkey and Iran, and an important international player like Russia.

In light of what is currently going on in the region, including internal and international conflicts, and in coincidence with a US and Israeli strong desire to achieve greater economic gains that intersect with Iranian, Turkish, Russian interests, as well as some

European visions, the 'deal of the century' is most likely to lead to escalation of regional military conflicts.



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