



# Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



## REGIONALIZING EAST MEDITERRANEAN GAS: ENERGY SECURITY, STABILITY, AND THE U.S. ROLE

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The East Mediterranean has been witnessing an unparalleled natural resource boom since the late-2000s, when Israel, followed by Cyprus, made its first significant offshore hydrocarbon discoveries in many years. These discoveries have since proven to be substantially larger than any other resources previously explored in the East Mediterranean Sea. At the time of this writing, these discoveries consist primarily of natural gas, although liquids are expected to be discovered offshore as well, including in the potentially hydrocarbon-rich waters of Lebanon and Syria. A 2010 U.S. Geological Survey suggests the Levant basin—the area including Cyprus and Israel’s offshore zones and the offshore and some onshore territories of Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories—could hold as much as 1.7 billion barrels of oil and up to 122 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas, leaving as much as two-thirds of the region’s potential resource base still undiscovered.

The East Mediterranean’s newly discovered and potential future hydrocarbon resources are of tremendous economic and geostrategic significance not only for the region itself but also for its main allies, including the United States. Economically, emerging gas producers Israel and Cyprus stand to gain considerably from their newly discovered gas wealth, which provides both a cost-effective source of energy for their historically import-dependent energy economies, and a potential high-value source of revenues from gas exports into and beyond the region.

Geostrategically, the presence of hydrocarbon resources in the East Mediterranean opens a great deal of opportunity for closer regional cooperation, but it also raises the potential for conflict over these

valuable resources. The region also hosts two of the world’s most intractable border conflicts: the Arab-Israeli conflict, involving territorial disputes between Israel, the Palestinians, Lebanon, and Syria; and the unresolved Cypriot question, leading to disputed boundaries on land and at sea and disputed ownership of hydrocarbon resources between the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities.

This shifting energy landscape in the East Mediterranean is also significant for the region’s main political and military partnerships. Israel, Cyprus, and Turkey are key strategic U.S. allies. Neighboring Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon play important roles from the European and U.S. perspective, both as direct neighbors to Israel and the Palestinian Territories, as well as because of their strategically important location as the geographic interconnection between Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Regional and extra-regional military alliances could be put under tension as a result of shifting geopolitical weight and relations between key regional players, as well as the risk of re-emerging boundary conflicts following discoveries of subsea hydrocarbon resources. There is the potential for considerable policy dilemmas for the United States, if its local security partners find themselves in conflict over hydrocarbon resources and maritime boundaries.

This monograph explores the strategic consequences of recent natural gas discoveries for the East Mediterranean security landscape, through the lens of U.S. security interests in the region. It provides an overview of recent hydrocarbon discoveries and their significance for the region’s resource holders and explores the possible implications of these resources for the region’s security landscape, their potential to fuel

conflict, and the options to foster closer regional cooperation and trade integration. Finally, the monograph discusses the role U.S. diplomacy and military support could play to ensure continued stability, security, and regional support within the East Mediterranean's shifting geoeconomic framework.

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