



Mathurin Hybrid Initiative

Global Advisory Report

The Geopolitical Struggle Over Gaza's Natural Resources.

Fraser Brown
30/11/2023

Introduction:

The discovery of significant natural gas reserves offshore the Gaza Strip in the year 2000 marked a potential turning point for the Palestinian economy and regional cooperation. Two major gas fields, Gaza Marine 1 and Gaza Marine 2, were estimated to hold 1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. However, geopolitical complexities and conflicting interests, particularly involving Israel and Hamas, have hindered the development of these resources.

Historical Context:

Despite the Oslo Accords granting the Palestinian Authority sovereignty over its maritime territory in 1995, political developments shifted the dynamics. The victory of Hamas in the 2007 legislative elections led to an Israeli naval blockade, preventing offshore development. In 2008, Israel's unilateral declaration of sovereignty over the Gaza Marine area further strained international relations and violated established legal norms.

UN Study on Palestinian Natural Gas Reserves:

A 2019 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) study highlighted the potential of Palestinian oil and natural gas reserves in the West Bank and Gaza. The Levant Basin Province, covering 83,000 square kilometres in the eastern Mediterranean, was identified as a crucial natural gas resource. Despite the wealth lying beneath Palestinian territories, occupation and Israeli claims have impeded Palestinians from exploiting and benefiting from these assets.

Economic Impact and Violation of International Law:

The UNCTAD estimated the net value of Gaza Marine's natural gas at \$4.592 billion in 2019, resources that could significantly alleviate poverty in the region. However, Israel's continued prevention of Palestinian development and benefit from natural resources violates international law governing occupied territories.

Global Energy Significance:

Renewed interest in developing the Gaza Marine field emerged in 2022 against the backdrop of global energy concerns. The war between Russia and Ukraine, the Nord Stream Pipeline's destruction, and sanctions on Russia prompted joint meetings involving Israeli, U.S., Egyptian, Jordanian, and Palestinian officials. Pressure from President Joe Biden and the Egyptian government pushed Israel to pursue the project, aligning with U.S. foreign policy goals in the Middle East.

Israel's Ongoing Exploitation:

Israel's commitment to further oil and gas exploration, exemplified by the awarding of licenses for additional offshore natural gas fields, underscores its determination to control regional resources. The takeover of the Meged oil and natural gas field in the occupied West Bank and participation in the G20 plan to build an economic corridor highlight Israel's ambitions to become a major gas and oil exporter.

Escalation of Conflict:

The recent declaration of war on Hamas in October 2023 by Israel, led by Netanyahu, raises concerns about the underlying military objectives, particularly regarding the expulsion of Palestinians and confiscation of Gaza's valuable natural resources. This follows Israel's previous invasion of Gaza in 2014, revealing a consistent pattern of military actions tied to territorial and resource control.

Importance of a 'Resource Lens' in Contemporary Conflict:

As the world faces a climate emergency and essential resources dwindle, understanding global conflicts through a 'resource lens' becomes paramount. The Israel-Palestine conflict, like many others, involves complex geopolitical and resource-driven dynamics. The struggle over Gaza's natural gas reserves exemplifies how non-renewable resources can become central to conflicts, shaping the actions of global powers.

The saga of Gaza's natural gas reserves illustrates the intricate interplay between geopolitics, regional conflicts, and resource exploitation. The ongoing struggle over these resources reflects

not only the economic interests of the involved parties but also the broader geopolitical implications in a world increasingly focused on essential and finite resources. The international community's response to such conflicts will likely set precedents for addressing resource-related disputes in the future.

Reference material:

- <https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-shell-relinquishes-gaza-gas-field-rights-1001226973>
- <https://tomdispatch.com/michael-schwartz-israel-gaza-and-energy-wars-in-the-middle-east/>
- <https://mondediplo.com/outsidein/israel-s-war-for-gaza-s-gas>
- <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/03/palestine-gaza-gas-field-energy-power-crisis-talks.html#ixzz4rsGdB7G9>
- <https://www.workers.org/2023/11/74864/>
- <https://world101.cfr.org/rotw/middle-east/us-foreign-policy>
- <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-us-policy-israeli-palestinian-conflict>
- <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-palestine-war-geopolitics-gaza-multibillion-dollar-gas-field>