



Russian Influence in the Levant Basin

OE Watch Commentary: The Eastern Mediterranean's "Levant Basin," home to massive untapped offshore natural gas deposits, is on track to becoming a key flashpoint in the region's tangle of crises and conflicts. The Levant Basin's gas deposits represent an economic challenge for Russia, which is currently the top exporter of natural gas in the world. According to the accompanying passage from the Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, "Russia is ready to wage a world war in order to maintain its influence and safeguard its interests in this vital region."

As the region's countries scramble to claim and exploit resources within their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), Syria's EEZ remains untouched save for a 2013 agreement with Russia to explore parts of these waters. While Russia and its allies in Syria remain preoccupied by operations to regain territory from rebel forces, the importance of littoral projection has not escaped their planning and military thought. Several articles in recent issues of the Syrian Ministry of Defense's quarterly journal *Military Thought (al-Fikr al-Askari)* are dedicated to coastal defense. Russia's 49-year renewable lease on the Tartous Naval Facility is now in effect, and the facility will be expanded manifold, to eventually hold 11 warships. In August 2017, Russia added two submarines to its permanent Mediterranean naval presence.

Russia has also helped the Egyptian government protect and exploit resources within its own EEZ, including by purchasing a 30 percent share in the Egyptian "Zohr" Field and by outfitting Egyptian ships, most notably the two French-built Mistral-class helicopter carriers that were originally intended for the Russian Navy. Russian companies have also negotiated with the Italian company Eni for rights to explore and develop Lebanon's offshore gas resources, some of which are along a contested maritime boundary with Israel. The shifting web of enmity and alliances in the Middle East is compounded in the Eastern Mediterranean by the Turkish-Greek conflict. The second accompanying passage, from the Egyptian semi-official *al-Ahram*, argues that Russia is "the new rising star in the Middle East" and has now joined the United States as a "party that can mediate between Ankara and Nicosia." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

سيطرة روسيا على غاز المتوسط

Adnan Karima, "Russian Control of Mediterranean Gas," *al-Hayat*, 13 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/wGWJg7>

The Mediterranean Basin has among the world's richest natural gas deposits and he who controls Syria controls the Middle East, the gateway to Asia, the keys to Russia (according to Catherine II) and the first Silk Road (according to Chinese strategy). He who controls Syria can control the world economic system. Thus, we can understand the true reasons for Russian commitment to its presence in Syria, which may last for over 100 years according to the agreement signed with the Bashar al-Assad regime. Russia is ready to wage a world war in order to maintain its influence and safeguard its interests in this vital region...

Source:

أطماع تركيا تشعل الصراع.. روسيا النجم الساطع الجديد في الشرق الأوسط

"Turkish Ambitions Spark Conflict... Russia the New Rising Star in the Middle East," *al-Ahram*, 22 February 2018. <http://arabi.ahram.org.eg/News/132870.aspx>

Analysts conclude that compared to 2017, more incidents will occur in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the party that can mediate between Ankara and Nicosia is not only Washington but also Russia, the new rising star in the Middle East.

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"Permanent Russian naval group in the Mediterranean provides air defence over Syria."

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://syria.mil.ru/en/index/syria/photo/gallery.htm?id=27388&cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.