

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 17-3-2021

AUB IFI Panel Discussion

“Maritime Boundaries Delimitation: The Legal and Technical Aspects of the Negotiations”

On Tuesday March 16, 2021, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) held a panel discussion (webinar) titled “Maritime Boundaries Delimitation: The Legal and Technical Aspects of the Negotiations.” Convened in the IFI auditorium starting 10:00 am, the event was broadcast live on the Internet.

Taking part in the webinar were members of the Lebanese delegation for negotiations for the maritime delimitations dispute headed by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations in the Lebanese Armed Forces Brigadier General Pilot Bassam Yassin; and the members: Assistant to Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Navy Staff Colonel Mazen Basbous; Maritime Borders International Law Expert Mr. Najib Messihi; and Head of the Geology and Geophysics Department in the Lebanese Petroleum Administration Engineer Wissam Chbat. IFI Researcher in the Energy Policy and Security Program, Marc Ayoub moderated the webinar.

The webinar began with an opening address by IFI Director Dr. Joseph Bahout. He welcomed the official delegation and said, “The American University of Beirut and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs are privileged to be among the first academic and educational institutes that shed light on this sensitive subject that involves technical and scientific information of high importance, and that has been over the past decade a linchpin of debate and political rhetoric.”

He added, “IFI, through its Energy Policy and Security Program, has been following the issue of the maritime conflict between Lebanon and the Israeli enemy in recent years. We have issued a series of research papers by experts and specialists in this field, and we have organized panel discussions on this matter.”

He continued, “our role as an institute has been and remains to bridge the gap between academics and public opinion on one side, and policymakers on the other side, and to narrow the gap between different views by displaying overwhelming scientific evidence.”

He pointed out, "this conflict, like many maritime conflicts in the region and around the world, is not purely technical in nature, but involves other commercial, geopolitical and international domains. However it is always important to rely on science, law and international conventions, and the lessons of history from past experiences."

Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations in the Lebanese Armed Forces Brigadier General Pilot Bassam Yassin, and head of the delegation, was next to speak. He stressed on the importance of popular support for Lebanon's position in the negotiations, pointing out the importance of this support being based on knowledge. He added, "The aim of the delegation meeting with university students is to increase public awareness." He concluded saying, "We negotiate, we do not bargain."

For his part, Navy Staff Colonel Mazen Basbous addressed the course of the delimitation of the Lebanese maritime border from 2007 until the start of negotiations in 2020. He mentioned the matter of delimitation with Cyprus in 2007 then moved on to the issue of the unilateral designation of the Lebanese maritime border by the Lebanese government in 2009 and 2011, when Decree No. 6433 was issued on 1/10/2011. He spoke about the British Hydrographic Office report and his own 2012 study, which showed Lebanon's entitlement for additional space in its marine waters south of Line 23. He then referred to the establishment of the Hydrographic Department of the Lebanese Army, which carried out the necessary surveys on the delimitation of the maritime border. He then talked about the preparation of an integrated technical and legal file by the Lebanese Army Command showing Lebanon's rights to its maritime waters, which are sought by the Lebanese negotiating delegation today, and the awareness by most officials in the Lebanese state of this file, which was referred to the Council of Ministers at the end of 2019. He concluded by showing the strength of the Lebanese position demanding Line 29 and the weakness and fragility of the previous Line issued by Decree No. 6433/2011, and which ends with Point 23. He also showed the weakness of the other lines, particularly the Israeli Line, which ends with Point 1 and the Hof line, which lies between Line 1 and Line 23, which was proposed in 2012.

This was followed by an address by Mr. Najib Messihi, showing the legal aspects of the border delimitation between Lebanon and Palestine, as the maritime delimitation line must start from the point of Ras Naqoura stipulated in the 1923 Paulet–Newcombe Agreement and conform to the middle line that ignores the Palestinian island of Takhilit, based on the international rules and jurisprudence that stipulate that the islands that have a disproportionate effect on the demarcation line should not be taken into consideration.

Mr. Messihi stressed that Line 29, on which Lebanon bases its negotiations, is, legally, the soundest of all the lines on the negotiating table, stressing the need to lodge it with the United Nations in order to strengthen the Lebanese position and preserve Lebanon's rights to its maritime wealth.

Engineer Wissam Chbat gave an exposé which included a detailed presentation on the direct impact of the Lebanese negotiating position on the energy security and gas production activities of the Israeli enemy, particularly the economic effects of turning the Karish gas field into a disputed field as a result of Lebanon's holding on to its rights and sovereignty over its resources, and the effect of the delimitation as per international law on the protection and fortification of Lebanon's rights to its gas and oil resources. He described the continuing exploratory activities carried out by companies operating in Lebanon since the beginning of 2018. He stressed that these companies are bound to their commitments in terms of completing drilling and exploration work, and showed that the delay was caused by the Corona pandemic and the by Total benefiting from Law No. 160 suspending legal, judicial and contractual deadlines issued by the Parliament on 8 May 2020.

At the end of the webinar, the floor was open to questions and answers, where Brigadier General Pilot Bassam Yassin, head of the negotiating delegation, answered all the questions along with the rest of the negotiating delegation, stressing on the importance of amending Decree No. 6433 of 1/10/2011 on the designation of the borders of the Lebanese Exclusive Economic Zone, for its national importance and its strategic dimension that restores rights and gives a trump card to the Lebanese State and the Lebanese delegation in its indirect negotiations, to reach a just solution for the Lebanese-Israeli maritime dispute.

ENDS

Text by:
Safa Safa
Senior Writer
Office of Communications
American University of Beirut

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar, PhD
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:

Website: www.aub.edu.lb

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>

Twitter: http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon