

Why it is Israel's Duty to Protect Its Gas Rigs

The fight over the export of natural gas, which is controlled by privately owned companies operating in the Mediterranean Sea, has been characterized by populism and pathos that often is not based in facts but rather interests and politics.

The government ultimately made the correct decision, which will facilitate the development of the discovered gas fields and allow for more drilling, in the hope that further resources are found that will lead to expanded investments in all facets of life.

In the heat of the argument, the matter of protecting the gas rigs at sea has been somewhat forgotten. This protection is meant to ensure that the gas can be processed safely in a region rife with threats. But even on this matter, the debate has revolved around populism and political interests.

The natural gas discovered at sea is almost entirely situated in Israel's "economic waters." According to international law, a country is permitted to declare an area of up to 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from its coast as its "economic waters." In Israel's case, it must share this area with neighboring countries Cyprus, Lebanon and Egypt.

Israel's resources, located in economic waters, which it controls and for which it receives royalties, must be protected from hostile terrorist elements. In my view, there is no difference between securing the oil refineries in Haifa's port or the chemical plants near the Dead Sea, and the gas fields at sea. In all cases, Israel is expressing its sovereignty and implementing taxation, and is therefore required to provide security on the external sphere without asking for additional payment. Factories located within the

state's boundaries are subject to the full protection provided by the police, the Israel Defense Forces and the systems the state deploys, such as Iron Dome and the other security branches. Meanwhile, these factories are required to provide security in the internal security sphere by employing guards and by funding the actual daily operation of the facility.

These rules should be applied to the natural gas fields at sea. Israel's economic waters, which span an area larger than the land mass of the entire country, should be defended by the Israel Navy, as part of its duty to defend the country's maritime border and its vital interests at sea. The companies will be responsible for protecting the rigs along the internal security sphere the same way factories inside the country are responsible for protecting their own backyards.

In the near future, following numerous delays and postponements, the government will be asked to approve the Navy's jurisdiction along the external security sphere, which will include the deployment of ships and various other weapons systems.

It is clear this debate will immediately come under waves of populism. The gas companies will be asked to fund the entire defense apparatus by themselves, despite being the same companies that needed to win a drilling tender from the government, pay taxes and royalties and are owed the same defense as other factories in the country.

The defense of the gas rigs is among Israel's most vital national interests. The decision to give the Israel Defense Forces the resources to carry out this mission needs to be expedited, and the sooner the better.

Vice Adm. (Res.) Eliezer Marom is a former Israel Navy commander. For the original article, visit .