



Admiral Castex and the Israeli Navy: A Holistic View of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East

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Abstract: The post-regime change order debates in Syria have strengthened the place of the Eastern Mediterranean on the agenda. In this context, Israel's maritime strategy has been considered noteworthy for both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The study examines this strategy through French Admiral Raoul Castex's approach to naval strategy for non-hegemonic states and seeks an answer to the question of how Israel shapes its contacts with the Middle East through the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean. Admiral Castex focuses on the maritime behaviour of regional powers and emphasizes two important approaches: improving the ability of manoeuvre and the primacy of the offensive. Within the framework of these two approaches, the study examines the Israeli navy in the Eastern Mediterranean between 2011 and 2024. Thus, on the one hand, it draws the hegemonic state-oriented approach of classical naval studies to the regional level, and on the other hand, it aims to portray the naval behaviour of Israel, which is an important party to regional competition, through its contacts with the Middle East.

Keywords: Admiral Raoul Castex, Israel, Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, Naval Strategy

Introduction

The Middle East's position in the maritime geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean is central and multi-layered in terms of energy, security, trade routes and military strategy. One of the prominent points in this direction is energy geopolitics. The Middle East holds a significant portion of the global oil and natural gas reserves and is key to the transportation/transfer of these resources to the Eastern Mediterranean. The potential for natural gas in the Levant Basin (Israel, Cyprus, Egypt), the desire of the Gulf states to diversify their energy export routes, and the pipeline projects between Turkey, Egypt, Israel and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (e.g. EastMed) transform the Middle East into the energy node of the Eastern Mediterranean. Security and military strategy are another topic to be emphasized. The Syrian civil war, Russia's base in Tartus and Israel's naval operations, the Iran-Israel rivalry moving to the maritime domain, and maritime jurisdiction disputes off the coast of Lebanon are flashpoints of security and military strategy. However, Egypt's control of the Suez Canal, Israel's development of the ports of Haifa and Ashdod, and the Gulf states' ambitions for

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access to Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean are also important under the rubric of maritime trade. Alliance behaviour is another theme that strengthens the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean connection. The Israel-Greece-Southern Cyprus trilateralism and the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), the Turkey-Libya maritime jurisdiction agreement, the reaction of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United States (US) and France's naval deployments to the region all affect the geopolitical position of the Middle East in the Eastern Mediterranean.

As one of the key actors in these dynamics, Israel's view of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East geopolitics is characterized by the goals of balancing geopolitical risks, securing energy resources, and taking the initiative in the use of hard power. In line with these objectives, maritime geopolitics is not only a military arena for Israel, but also an arena for diplomacy and energy politics. The Iran and Hezbollah factor is positioned as a direct threat in Israel's maritime strategy, as well as a military-diplomatic priority. Israeli strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean are largely shaped around the asymmetric risks, logistical corridors and attack potentials posed by these two actors. In the context of these points, the study focuses on Israel's contacts with the Middle East in the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics and discusses this focus through French Admiral Raoul Castex's naval strategy approach for non-hegemonic states. Accordingly, the first part of the study presents the Admiral's naval strategy approach for non-hegemonic states at the regional level under two headings: *improving the ability of manoeuvre* and the *primacy of the offensive*. In the second part, in line with the first title emphasized by Admiral Castex, the goal of improving mobility, the manoeuvring dimensions that Israel's contacts with the Middle East in the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics have brought to its navy are revealed. In the third part, the study focuses on revisionist steps taken in the Middle East under the title of taking the initiative to attack, which Admiral Castex emphasized, and seeks an answer to the question of what these steps mean in terms of Israeli naval strategy.

Aim, Scope and Conceptual Framework

This study aims to analyse the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East from an actor-centric perspective and seeks to answer the question of how Israel has structured its naval power within a comprehensive strategic framework. Admiral Raoul Castex's maritime strategy for regional navies forms the conceptual framework of the study. Castex's emphasis on the strategic manoeuvrability of regional navies and the use of hard power when necessary, provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the approach

Israel has taken in building its naval power. The main objective of this study is to assess how the Israeli navy addresses its manoeuvrability in the context of its limited coastline and regional threat environment, how it integrates its technology-driven deterrence capacity and preventive/offensive power into its naval strategy, and how all these strategic choices align with Castex's understanding of 'naval strategy for regional powers.' In this context, the Israeli navy will be examined not only in terms of defence but also in terms of energy security, maritime jurisdiction areas, and its capacity to exert geopolitical influence from the sea. Accordingly, the study aims to evaluate the potential of naval power to create strategic integrity that transcends geographical boundaries, using the example of Israel.

This study treats the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East as geographically separate but strategically intertwined areas. The analytical framework evaluates these two regions not as fixed spatial categories, but as dynamic strategic spaces shaped by Israel's security and energy policies. Israel's energy interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and its perception of security threats in the Middle East establish a transitional and complementary strategic logic between these two regions. Therefore, the study is based on an approach that does not 'integrate' the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, but rather links them within an Israel-centric strategic vision. This approach aims to demonstrate how state-centric geopolitical visions can transform regional boundaries without theoretically disregarding classical regional distinctions. In particular, the intersection between Israel's threat perceptions, which are directly positioned within the Middle East security architecture, and its energy interests in the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrates that these two regions are intertwined on a strategic level. Therefore, the aim of this study is to read the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East not in geographical terms, but within the framework of an actor-centred strategic unity.

In the academic literature, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East are generally treated as separate geopolitical areas. The Eastern Mediterranean encompasses the coasts of Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon and, to some extent, Syria; the focus is generally on maritime jurisdiction, energy resources and maritime security. The Middle East, on the other hand, is a broader land-based region; it is discussed more in terms of energy, security, sectarian politics, and great power competition, involving actors such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, and the Gulf countries. For this reason, many studies are reluctant to treat these two regions as a single 'integrative' geographical unit, as this can lead to analytical confusion. This study, however, aims to analyse how certain actors transcend these boundaries in their strategic visions, while acknowledging the analytical

distinctiveness of the two regions. Israel is both a coastal state in the Eastern Mediterranean and a central military and diplomatic actor in the Middle East. Israel's maritime strategies, such as its gas fields, energy export routes, and direct cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, encompass both maritime and land geopolitics. In particular, Arab-Israeli relations, the Iranian threat, and the Hamas-Hezbollah axis influence both the Middle East security architecture and maritime security strategies. Therefore, the study aims to provide a comprehensive view of a state's strategic scope of action.

Admiral Castex, the architect of the naval strategy on which the study focuses theoretically, was one of the leading French strategists of the 20th century and is particularly known for his ideas on naval strategy. His five-volume work, *Théories Stratégiques* (Strategic Theories), is very important in that it deals with both land and naval strategy in a holistic manner. According to Castex, strategy is not a template bound by fixed rules; rather, it is a practical field that changes according to historical, geographical, economic and technological conditions. Naval strategy should also be approached in this manner. For example, since each country's geographical location, resources, and enemies' strategic priorities are different, the naval strategy to be implemented will also be different. Castex offers significant criticism of Alfred Thayer Mahan's classical naval strategies.¹ In this regard, he argues that naval superiority alone is not sufficient to win a war and proposes a naval strategy coordinated with land forces. In this sense, Castex advocates that a country should plan all its strategic tools (land, air, sea, diplomacy) together. This holistic approach is akin to the precursor of modern 'joint operations' doctrines.

Castex recognises that absolute dominance at sea is not possible for every country. He therefore emphasises the need to develop alternative strategies for countries with weak naval power, recommending the use of asymmetric tools such as coastal defence, naval mines and submarines. He argues that small naval forces can limit even more powerful navies by controlling certain narrow straits, strategic chokepoints, or ports. In this regard, he has made recommendations in his work on the steps that small navies should take regionally, stating that they should remain constantly mobile and, if necessary, take the initiative to use hard power. As can be understood from this point, Admiral Castex has two important approaches regarding the regional presence of small navies: improving the ability to manoeuvre and the primacy of the offensive (Castex, 1993). In line with these two objectives, Admiral Castex states that naval control and, moreover, the naval supremacy emphasised in classical studies are relative and emphasises that this situation could be an opportunity for medium-sized navies. The limited structure of naval forces in contrast to the boundlessness of the seas can have a restrictive

effect on the effectiveness of even powerful states in the oceans, and therefore medium-sized navies can turn these restrictive effects into advantages through certain strategic steps. The first theme that medium-sized navies should focus on in this transformation process is manoeuvrability.

Admiral Castex describes manoeuvring as an art form and states that, despite the possibilities and limitations, it should be reflected on the field as a product of intelligence and imagination. At this point, according to the Admiral, it is not the law of chance but the law of initiative that prevails (Speller, 2012, pp. 3-9). While emphasising the need to take initiative to create a favourable situation, determining and changing the course of events has been set as the main objective. The manoeuvre objective, considered as a combination of strategic deployment and operational manoeuvring space, operates through the expansion of areas where effectiveness can be established at sea, and the main objective of this movement is to create the desired order in nearby and even distant areas (Povlock & Wedin, 2019, pp.12-19). Castex's second important emphasis is that regional actors should move away from a passive defence mindset and adopt proactive and offensive strategies when necessary. According to him, a naval force that merely 'waits and defends' loses its strategic superiority. Therefore, effective steps include short-term hit-and-run operations, cutting off the enemy's supply lines, surprise attacks, and early interventions to destabilise the enemy. While emphasising that attack is kinetic in contrast to the static nature of defence, he acknowledges that defence is necessary in certain situations but stresses that the goal of being the agent of change may necessitate attack (Shurkin, 2024).

By acting in this way, it is essential to make maritime control controversial for the other side and to shape the steps to be taken in this direction using various means (commercial, diplomatic, etc.), including the technical development of the navy. The primary objective of this process, which will establish a manoeuvre network in both near and distant seas, is to foster insecurity within the enemy/rival fleet, thereby conducting a psychological operation (Povlock & Wedin, 2019, pp.12-19). While not denying that the primary goal is to defeat the enemy fleet, the Admiral's views, which emphasise the need to create a favourable environment before taking this risk, provide important clues about the steps taken by Israel, which is currently one of the medium-sized navies in the Eastern Mediterranean. This study will primarily discuss the art of manoeuvre, which Admiral Castex places at the centre of his theory, in light of Israel's actions in the region.

The Art of Manoeuvring the Sea: Creating a New Geopolitical Landscape

During his tenure between 2011-2016, Admiral Ram Rothberg of the Israel Navy highlighted two important goals for the navy's regional presence: the protection of gas production platforms and the integration of warships into this protection. While these goals are manifested in the regional stabilization of energy security, they also represent one of the important phases of the manoeuvring theme emphasized by Admiral Castex. With the discovery and extraction of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel has deepened its strategic cooperation with regional actors. This process plays a critical role not only in terms of energy supply security but also in shaping the regional security environment (Hokayem & Momtaz, 2024, pp. 204-210). Accordingly, Israel actively utilizes regional cooperation and infrastructure projects for natural gas exports. Energy diplomacy has enabled Israel to deepen its regional relations and increase economic integration.

This has consolidated Israel's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean both economically and strategically. Israel's alliance steps in the Eastern Mediterranean are centred on the development of energy resources and ensuring regional security (Stergiou, 2017, pp. 328-331). Israel is one of the founding members of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which was established in 2019. The EMGF, the trilateral Greece-Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC) alliance and the strategic cooperation with the United States are the main building blocks supporting Israel's regional policies. The EMGF provides a platform for the development and export of energy resources and regional cooperation. The Forum has enabled Israel to cooperate with countries such as Egypt, Greece, GCASC, Jordan, Palestine and Italy, thus increasing regional integration in the energy field (Klotsman & Reich, 2025, pp. 89-97).

In this regard, Israel aims to expand its maritime network in a diplomatic context by playing an active role in regional platforms such as EMGF. Apart from energy cooperation, the forum allows for the development of common policies on maritime security, sustainable use of marine resources and maritime law. The EMGF is also used as a diplomatic tool to balance Türkiye's influence in the region and create energy corridors (Sukkarieh, 2021, pp. 4-12). In addition, it acts jointly in the areas of maritime security and energy through its trilateral cooperation with Greece and GCASC in the Eastern Mediterranean. This alliance is strengthened through military exercises, intelligence sharing and infrastructure projects (e.g. the EastMed pipeline project). In this context, Greece and Israel effectively use both military and diplomatic tools in shaping their regional maritime strategies. The strategies of

these countries have developed within the framework of energy security, control of maritime areas and creating a counterweight in the region. In the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel's Tamar and Leviathan natural gas fields and Greece's hydrocarbon resources near GCASC and Crete are of great importance for the diversification of energy supply (Kavaz, 2021, pp. 139-145).

Maritime security has become critical in the processes of extracting these resources from the sea and transporting them to Europe via pipelines. Greece and Israel have increased their naval capacity and invested in modernization and training activities to ensure effective control of their maritime domain. Joint exercises and information sharing have strengthened regional deterrence (Lampas & Filis, 2023, pp. 39-47). In this direction, the East Mediterranean Quartet model formed by Greece and Israel, together with GCASC, increases regional cooperation and harmonizes energy and security policies. The quartet alliance aims to contribute to Europe's energy supply security by moving in parallel with the EU's energy strategies. In order to ensure this security, Israel regularly conducts joint naval exercises with Greece, GCASC, Egypt and the United States. These exercises aim to ensure the security of sea routes in the region and increase coordination against potential maritime threats (Helfont, 2021, pp. 38-46). At the same time, these exercises strengthen trust and cooperation between the navies of regional actors. Israel supports the development of infrastructure for maritime transportation and energy exports in the Mediterranean through diplomatic cooperation.

Another diplomatic step was the normalization process with Arab countries. With these steps, the actions taken in the Eastern Mediterranean through energy diplomacy were expanded in line with the Middle East contacts and an increase in the manoeuvrability of the Israeli navy was aimed. Accordingly, Israel's normalization of its relations with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, which means a 'geostrategic opening' in its naval strategy, highlights the following points (Table 1) (Stanojevic, 2020, pp. 8-15):

Table 1

Arab Countries and Maritime Geopolitics

Country	Importance in terms of Maritime Geopolitics
UAE	Strait of Hormuz and the exit to the Arabian Sea; maritime transportation and oil routes
Bahrain	Headquarters of the US 5th Fleet; intelligence-maritime cooperation in the Gulf
Morocco	Exit to the Atlantic Ocean; orientation towards West African ports
Sudan	Red Sea coast; proximity to the Horn of Africa and Bab al-Mandab

The Abraham Accords signed by Israel in 2020 with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco are not only a diplomatic milestone, but they also mark an important geopolitical opening for Israel's maritime strategy (Abraham Accords Peace Agreement, 2020; Alghashian, 2024). In this context, the relations developed with these countries enabled Israel to expand beyond the Eastern Mediterranean and contributed to the construction of new strategic maritime networks in the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Israel's normalization with the Gulf states has enabled it to build a multi-layered security architecture in the context of maritime geopolitics. This development paved the way for Israel to develop a containment strategy through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, especially against Iran's expanding maritime influence. This situation is also directly related to increasing the influence of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) in the region. CENTCOM's cooperation mechanisms through its 5th Fleet in Bahrain have accelerated the integration of the Israeli navy into multilateral maritime patrols and security operations (Vakil & Quilliam, 2023, pp. 18-27; U.S. Central Command, 2023). The trade corridors established between Israel and the UAE have strengthened land-sea connections between the port of Eilat (Red Sea) and the ports of Ashkelon and Haifa (Mediterranean). This creates an alternative energy and trade route, reducing dependence on the Suez Canal.

This development has also led to the establishment of port management, digital maritime infrastructure and direct investment relationships between Gulf ports and Israeli ports. For example, the acquisition of a stake in the Port of Haifa by the UAE-based AD Ports Group in 2022 is considered part of Israel's vision to transform

its ports into regional logistics hubs (Vidal, 2023, pp. 4-11). Israel's naval exercises with Gulf states are a direct response to Iran's maritime arms shipments and regional influence strategy. Multilateral naval operations conducted under the auspices of the United States offer a structure that integrates Israel's intelligence, cyber defence and naval capabilities with the geographical location advantages of the Gulf states (Blanchard, 2024, pp. 7-11; 22-29; Jones, 2025, pp. 321-328). These alliances play a critical role in ensuring Red Sea security, especially against the Yemen-based Houthi threat. This strategic structure shaped in the aftermath of the Abraham Accords has transformed Israel's naval strategy from being limited to the Eastern Mediterranean to a transregional strategy.

Israel's diplomatic overtures with actors such as the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan may give the impression of significant strategic expansion on a regional scale, but these relationships are structurally fragile. In particular, the critical view of Israel held by the public, which is sensitive to the Palestinian issue, reinforces the fragile foundation of these relations. Israel's security policies in Gaza and the West Bank create foreign policy pressure that could undermine the internal legitimacy of the regimes in these countries, exposing the normalisation process to periodic crises. Furthermore, the fact that these relations are mostly based on security cooperation, technology transfer and economic benefits, combined with the lack of a common strategic vision or normative framework, makes it difficult to achieve long-term institutional stability. Furthermore, the dynamic power balances in the Middle East make the foreign policies of these actors flexible and sometimes variable, which provides Israel with tactical advantages rather than strategic certainty in its regional alliances (Dana, 2023). Considering all these factors, it is imperative that Israel pursues a cautious and prudent policy in any situation where its regional maritime strategy is built on diplomatic relations with these countries.

Another important dimension of diplomatic contacts manifests itself in energy projects and the steps taken with regional actors in this direction. Together with GCASC and Greece, an undersea pipeline is planned to transport natural gas to European markets under the EastMed project. This project aims to strengthen Israel's strategic position not only in the energy field but also in maritime trade (Ellinas, 2022; Tzogopoulos, 2023, pp. 3-10). The EastMed pipeline project stands out as a critical project that will enable Israeli gas to reach Europe. With the EastMed pipeline project, Greece, GCASC and Israel aim to increase energy exports from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. In addition to deepening regional cooperation, this project creates an alternative route for Europe in terms of energy security. The project also strengthens the biographical continuity and identity cooperation of the three countries. By supporting the EastMed Pipeline project,

Israel is strengthening its strategy of transporting Mediterranean gas to European markets directly and bypassing Türkiye (Mazis, 2018, pp. 16-25). This aims both to reduce Türkiye's role as an energy corridor and to reshape energy geopolitics in the region. The project aims to change the existing energy sharing balances and infrastructure control in the region.

Although the steps taken within the scope of the EastMed Project are significant, the United States' announcement in 2022 that it was withdrawing its support has created a significant gap in Israel's energy-centric maritime strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean, both geopolitically and economically. This withdrawal can be seen as the first major international setback to Israel's vision of energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean, which it was trying to establish through natural gas exports to Europe. Considering Castex's emphasis on strategic manoeuvring and hard power, Israel's goal of positioning its energy resources and infrastructure as a kind of maritime influence tool has encountered certain limits with this move by the United States. This development also raises questions about the sustainability of the alliances Israel has developed with regional powers (Greece, Cyprus, Egypt) without international support (Middle East Strategic Perspectives, 2022). The US withdrawal decision has shown that the strategic capacities of these countries alone are not sufficient to implement such a mega project. At this point, it is understood that Israel will try to maintain its manoeuvrability in the maritime geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean with its military-diplomatic capacity, but will continue to be dependent on international legitimacy and capital in economic infrastructure projects supported by hard power.

Moreover, Israel aims to actively use international legal mechanisms to resolve regional disputes by engaging in diplomatic initiatives on maritime borders and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In particular, it seeks to protect its territorial rights by signing EEZ agreements in coordination with GCASC and Greece (Mizrachi, 2018, pp. 99-105; Yiallourides, 2023). Accordingly, Israel is seeking to expand its rights to natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean through exclusive economic zone delimitation agreements with Egypt and Lebanon. These agreements amount to a redrawing of regional maritime borders and contradict some of the demands of Türkiye and GCASC. The regional repercussions of these steps are reflected in Israel's emphasis on communication networks in the region. In line with the goal of strengthening this network, Israel, Greece and GCASC regularly conduct maritime security exercises, contributing to the maintenance of freedom of navigation and security in the Eastern Mediterranean. These exercises also enhance military coordination in the region and reinforce common threat perceptions. Along with Greece and GCASC, Israel has been taking diplomatic and legal steps on maritime

boundaries and EEZ agreements, emphasizing adherence to international maritime law (Rubin & Eiran, 2019, pp. 979-985; Tziarras, 2016, pp. 410-419). This plays a critical role in shaping the balance of power and maritime policies in the region.

Trilateral cooperation finds support not only on regional but also on international platforms. The US and the European Union's (EU) support for this alliance in the region helps Israel, Greece and GCASC strengthen their maritime network. With strong military and diplomatic ties with the United States, Israel benefits from US policies in the Eastern Mediterranean that support its regional interests. This diplomatic support is crucial in maintaining the regional balance in Israel's favour. With the support of the United States, this situation is enabling Israel to become a more active regional player in both the security and energy sectors (Eiran, 2020, pp. 8-12). The US increased military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and regular joint exercises with Israel are one of the cornerstones of Israel's maritime security strategy. With these steps, Israel is trying to redefine the regional balance of power in its favour by forming new alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially acting in partnership with Greece and GCASC and trying to expand its maritime efficiency in terms of manoeuvrability. At this point, the second important practice of regional maritime powers emphasized by Admiral Castex, the primacy of the offensive, comes to the fore.

Shaping Maritime Strategy Towards Offence-Defence Balance

Israel's actions in the region demonstrate a two-pronged strategy. As stated in the first section, the first objective is to improve regional manoeuvrability. The second stage, as emphasised by Admiral Castex, is the need to take steps for regional progress, if necessary, with hard power. The first step in this direction, Israel's advance into Palestinian territories, has maritime as well as territorial objectives. The second important line of advance for Israel was Lebanon and the steps taken in Syria strengthened Israel's maritime presence in the region as a third stage. Israel's maritime strategy towards Lebanon and Palestine serves the purpose of shaping maritime security in the region in line with its own superiority and interests. Accordingly, Israel's naval blockade of the coastal Gaza Strip severely limits Palestinian maritime economic and security opportunities. By restricting fishing activities off the Gaza coast, Israel aims to tighten maritime control to prevent arms smuggling and terrorist attacks (U.S. Department of State, 2021; United Nations, 2010). The Palestinian side is taking diplomatic initiatives to protect marine resources and fishing grounds, improve maritime transportation and enhance coastal security with the support of the international community. While increasing international trade by sea is seen as critical to the revival of Gaza's

economy, Israeli restrictions have turned into a strategic constraint (Qumsiyeh & Abusarhan, 2021, pp. 4-17; United Nations, 2010).

With these steps, as part of its strategy to access energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel defines the waters off Gaza as a 'security zone'. This prevents Palestine from establishing an economic maritime zone (EEZ) and makes it virtually impossible for it to achieve energy independence through the sea. Moreover, a peripheral encirclement is created, which strengthens the ports of Ashdod and Ashkelon as military and commercial centres (Bialer, 2007, pp. 32-40). At the same time, the maritime border dispute between Israel and Lebanon deepens the competition over the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean. Lebanon has long been in a border dispute with Israel over maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Lebanese government has applied to the United Nations for the delimitation of maritime boundaries within the framework of international law and initiated the process of determining the EEZ boundaries. This move is part of Lebanon's effort to gain access to natural gas reserves in the region and increase its economic independence (Salameh & Chedid, 2020, pp. 1-9). Israel has vigorously defended its claims to the Karish and Leviathan gas fields, which are close to the southern Lebanese coast. Responding to Lebanon's claims over Block 9, Israel has taken steps to deter Lebanon while diplomatically consolidating its strategy of effective control through a limited maritime border agreement signed in 2022 with US mediation (Yiallourides & Ioannides, 2024, pp. 290-301).

With this step, Israel took advantage of Lebanon's lack of naval power to gain a strategic advantage in terms of energy security and the security of maritime trade routes in the northeastern part of the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, it has taken steps to strengthen its naval bases and increase submarine intelligence operations, citing Hezbollah's presence in this region. As Israel continues its efforts to extract and exploit natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean, it is increasing its maritime surveillance against the potential for logistical support or attacks by Hezbollah in Lebanon through the sea, which increases the likelihood of military confrontation in maritime security in the region (Bloom, 2008, pp. 66-79). At this point, the addition of the Iranian connection to Hezbollah's effectiveness in the seas increases the competition for maritime areas. Iran's "Proxy War from the Sea" (Levy, 2023, pp. 1-6) follows the strategy of arming and deploying proxy actors such as Hezbollah over the sea.

Within the 'Shiite Crescent' extending to the Mediterranean, Syrian ports (especially Tartus and Latakia) have become important logistics centres, and Israel has been concerned about the operation of these logistic lines through the sea.

From this point of view, the destruction of the Israeli warship INS Hanit by Hezbollah with a C-802 anti-ship missile during the 2006 Lebanon War demonstrated the seriousness of the maritime threat. In the following years, Hezbollah continued to work on naval commandos, underwater explosives, and submarine capabilities (Milburn, 2017, pp. 36-43). Along with these steps, Israel has also developed a defence line against sea-based missile threats by integrating advanced radar systems and Iron Dome naval version on Sa'ar 6 class frigates. By increasing electronic warfare capabilities, the aim is to detect and suppress Iranian anti-ship missiles. In addition, Israel's Leviathan and Karish gas fields are very close to the Lebanese border. Since these fields have been declared as 'strategic targets' by Hezbollah, Israel's navy and air force have been conducting constant patrols, radar surveillance and intelligence operations in coordination. These developments highlight the following points (Table 2) in the maritime contacts between Israel and the Iranian-Hezbollah wing (Teff-Seker et al., 2019, pp. 236-249; Kaunert & Wertman, 2020, pp. 100-109):

Table 2:

Naval Contacts between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah Wing

Element	Iran and Hezbollah's Impact on Israel	Israel's Reaction
Military Threat	Anti-ship missiles, naval commandos	Navy modernization
Logistics Line	Arms shipment through Syrian ports	Air strikes against the target
Maritime Jurisdiction Crises	Threat to gas fields	US-brokered agreements
Energy Security	Leviathan & Karish fields under threat	Naval patrol and military exercises
International Partnership	Maritime security alliances against Iran	Cooperation with the US, France, Greece

Syria, the third stage of hard power-based steps in the region, has a strategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially in terms of natural gas pipelines and energy infrastructure. Israel's military interventions in Syria are aimed at ensuring the security of these corridors and preventing the interruption of energy

projects in the region. In particular, the rise of Iranian-backed militias and Hezbollah in Syria has increased Israel's perception of threats from the sea. Israel's naval forces support its military operations along the Syrian border, increasing its capacity to intervene in the region from both sea and airspace. The security of naval bases and ports is critical to the sustainability of Israel's operations in Syria. This has led to an increase in the importance Israel attaches to its naval forces (Boms & Cohen, 2022, pp. 34-51). The fact that Iranian-backed groups and militias in Syria receive weapons and logistical support by sea poses a threat to Israel. Israel's interventions in Syria aim to break such maritime logistical support networks and ensure maritime security in the Mediterranean. In this context, land and air strikes are integrated with maritime security operations (Cordesman, 2007, pp. 112-119; 168-170).

Through these steps, Israel aims to reduce the instability in Syria and secure the maritime trade routes in the region. The ongoing conflict in Syria puts maritime traffic and energy transmission lines in the region at risk; therefore, Israel's intervention is presented as a strategic move to protect these critical maritime areas (Cordesman, 2007, pp. 189-193). During the civil war in Syria, Israel carried out systematic air and naval attacks, particularly targeting the logistics lines of Iranian-backed elements around the port of Latakia. Thus, Israel has de facto limited its coastal control by suppressing Syria's attempts to gain strategic depth through the sea. The attacks on the port of Latakia indicate a pre-emptive strategy not only against Iran's supply chain but also against Syria as a potential maritime trade hub (Wastnidge, 2024, pp. 56-67). Israel has focused its maritime surveillance systems (signals intelligence (SIGINT), radar, etc.) on these areas, taking care not to confront the Russian naval base presence in Tartus. Moreover, it uses its activities off the Syrian coast as a geostrategic ground to increase its overall surveillance and intervention capacity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Based on these points, the following points (Table 3) stand out in the steps taken by Israel in the region (Chorev, 2024, pp. 145-156; Teff-Seker et al., 2019, pp. 235-241):

Table 3

Israel's Advance with Different Elements of Power at three Fronts

Country/ Size	Energy Security	Military Technology	Diplomatic Reflections
Palestine (Gaza)	Preserving its energy monopoly by blocking access to potential natural gas fields off the coast of Gaza.	The naval blockade is maintained by drones and naval patrol systems.	The legitimacy of the blockade is being defended; the discourse is being developed in line with the US in particular.
Lebanon	Natural gas extraction in the Karish field is secured by a maritime border agreement with Lebanon.	Military ships, radars and offshore platform protection systems have been activated.	A US-brokered agreement was reached; Israel gained diplomatic credibility.
Syria	A strategy to disrupt energy transfers and supplies by interfering with Iranian and Hezbollah’s logistical channels around Latakia-Tartus from the sea.	Naval signals intelligence (SIGINT) and precision munitions operations against the Syrian coast.	Low-profile but effective interventions due to the Russian factor; regional balance is taken into consideration.

As can be seen from Table 3, the technical development of the navy is an important part of Israel's naval strategy. This development also serves to support regional progress and increase naval effectiveness. Accordingly, Israel's strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean includes a strong dimension of ensuring maritime dominance through the effective use of military technological capacity. Naval forces play a critical role in Israel's protection of energy resources, regional deterrence and rapid response capability. The Israeli Navy is seen as an effective and modern military instrument in the regional balance of power. With its technological equipment and modernization moves, it is focused on increasing its deterrence in the Eastern Mediterranean (Almog, 2011, pp. 29-39). The Barak-8 Missile System is a long-range air defence system that can be integrated into ships to provide protection against both air and sea targets. This system is an advanced technology developed jointly by Israel and India (Naqvi, 2023, pp. 20-29; Matejcek &

Sostronek, 2023, pp. 21-28). Popeye Turbo Cruise Missiles are missiles that can be launched from submarines and ships, can hit land targets with high precision and play a key role in Israel's deterrence strategy (Hoffman, 2021, pp. 16-19). Israel has the most advanced submarine fleet in the region, with Dolphin-class submarines procured from Germany. These submarines are of strategic importance for the protection of energy infrastructure, with advanced sonar systems, cruise missiles, and low visibility. Dolphin submarines are equipped with cruise missile launch capability, enabling them to strike strategic targets from land. This is a critical technology that strengthens Israel's submarine-based deterrence. Modern frigates and corvettes are equipped with electronic warfare systems, radar and missile defence technologies. These ships provide comprehensive protection against both air and sea threats. The Israeli navy plays an active role in maritime patrol operations, especially thanks to its fast mobility and technological equipment. Technologies such as unmanned underwater vehicles and remotely piloted surface vehicles are being developed and deployed (Barak et al., 2020, pp. 347-356).

Israel is one of the leading countries globally in defence technologies. The radar systems, electronic warfare and cyber security measures used in the naval forces increase the intelligence capacity in the maritime domain. In addition, high-tech weapon systems such as land-land and sea-air missiles increase the operational effectiveness of the Israeli navy. The Barak Air Defence System, integrated on ships, provides automatic and high-precision response to air threats. Cruise missiles launched from submarines and surface ships enable precision strikes against strategic targets. Saar 5 Frigates are equipped as multipurpose warships. They are equipped with advanced radar systems, air defence missile systems and anti-submarine warfare systems (Almog, 2011, pp. 33-41). Thanks to their high-tech radars, electronic warfare and command and control systems, surface ships can instantly monitor air and sea threats in the region and take countermeasures. With its technological capacity and integrated defence systems, the Israeli Navy is positioned as a strong naval power in the Eastern Mediterranean. The sophistication of its submarine fleet, modern frigates and high-tech weapon systems are the cornerstones of Israel's regional strategy. This technological superiority directly serves Israel's goals of protecting its energy resources, providing regional deterrence and maintaining maritime dominance (Bar, 2020, pp. 331-340).

There are also important signs of balancing Israel's hard power-based moves in the region. First and foremost, alliance relations at the regional level are noteworthy. In this context, while the cooperation between the US, Israel and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is of strategic importance, the functioning of this

partnership is challenging due to the different national interests of the actors and the complexity of their relations with regional actors. The US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean is primarily based on energy security, limiting Russia's influence in the region and strengthening the strategic alliance with Israel (Yegin, 2022, pp. 445-461). However, the US also seeks to maintain balanced relations with its NATO ally Türkiye, which complicates its military and diplomatic activities in the region. Israel has developed strategic cooperation with Greece and GCASC to secure energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and increase its regional influence. This cooperation causes frictions with regional actors such as Türkiye (Novikau & Muhasilovic, 2023, pp. 3-8). Israel's military interventions and maritime border agreements in the region increase competition over maritime space, especially in its relations with Lebanon and Palestine. While NATO is obliged to ensure stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, disputes over maritime jurisdiction and energy policies between two important members of the alliance, Türkiye and Greece, make it difficult for NATO to act in unison (Binder, 2012, pp. 95-106; Rehman & Abbas, 2020, pp. 133-140). This leads to intra-alliance discord and operational challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean. The interests of the US, Israel and NATO form a complex network of relationships with other actors in the region, such as Russia, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

On closer inspection, Russia's naval and air bases in Syria form a continuous line of contact with NATO's southern flank, which could create a rift between the 'proactive deterrence' approach of the US and Israel and the 'strategic caution' tendency of some NATO members. At the same time, Cairo's multifaceted foreign policy (simultaneous relations with the US, Russia and China) could make the alliance's balance of pressure and engagement controversial. Egypt's diplomatic discourse on the Palestinian issue may not be fully in line with the Israeli-US stance. The severing of Iran's logistical lines and operations against proxy forces in Syria are priorities for the US and Israel, which may be considered a secondary or even marginal threat by some NATO members. Furthermore, an Israel-Hezbollah conflict emerging through Lebanon could trigger collective defence engagement; however, a joint will to engage in such high-intensity scenarios is unlikely to emerge within NATO (Czarkowska & Koniecko, 2023, pp. 199-210; Cook, 2021, pp. 5-18; Qian, 2023, pp. 2-6). Therefore, while the United States is more proactive and military solution-oriented in the face of these actors, Israel is focused on pre-emptive strikes and regional deterrence, whereas some NATO members prefer diplomacy and limited engagement. This complexity stands out as a factor that challenges the strategic coherence and effectiveness of the partnership.

Moreover, the EU attaches great importance to Eastern Mediterranean gas resources in line with its energy diversity and security policies. Israel is a strategic partner for the EU as a major natural gas producer in the region. Through regional structures such as the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), energy cooperation between Israel and EU member states (especially GCASC, Greece, Italy) is increasing. This cooperation is seen as part of the EU's strategy to reduce its energy dependence on Russia. However, criticism from within the EU regarding Israel's policies towards Palestine and its human rights record can lead to the politicization of energy cooperation (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024, pp. 61-73). The EU seeks to enhance security cooperation with Israel in the areas of border security, cyber security and counterterrorism. Increasing geopolitical rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean and Russia's military presence in the region have brought the EU and Israel closer regarding common security concerns. However, the EU's weak common foreign policy structure and the different approaches of the member states may cause consistency problems in Israel-EU relations (Asseburg, 2019, pp. 38-48).

As the EU has been critical of Israel's policies towards Palestine, this has created political tensions between some EU countries and Israel. Differences in this area are seen as a factor limiting the development of energy and security cooperation, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. Israel, for its part, criticizes some EU decisions for not understanding regional balances. The partnership between Israel and the EU can be characterized as an area in the Eastern Mediterranean, where strategic interests intersect but at the same time political and ethical differences are evident (Ronen & Goren, 2019, 21-29). While energy and security cooperation has increased, political and human rights issues have at times strained relations. This dynamic remains an important factor shaping the balance of power and diplomatic relations in the region. These differences with the US, NATO and the EU are prominent topics for balancing Israel in the region. As a regional naval power, Israel's navy seems to be able to observe the balance of defence and offence in the long run taking these limitations into consideration.

Conclusion

This study approaches Israel's maritime strategy not merely as a limited defence doctrine specific to the Eastern Mediterranean, but also as part of a broader, comprehensive geopolitical approach that encompasses the Middle East region. The theoretical framework developed by Admiral Raoul Castex regarding maritime strategy—particularly his emphasis on manoeuvrability and the use of hard power—has provided an important foundation for this strategic analysis. Israel's

naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean is shaped by energy security, maritime jurisdiction areas, and coastal defence requirements, while this strategy is complemented by perceptions of asymmetric threats to the Middle East and the need for forward projection. Castex's understanding of a 'regional navy' directly corresponds to Israel's approach to naval power, which seeks to achieve maximum strategic output with limited resources. In particular, high-mobility platforms, deterrence capabilities based on advanced technology, and the ability to intervene pre-emptively when necessary are fully consistent with Castex's theoretical framework. As a result, Israel is redefining the strategic ties between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East through its naval power, viewing these two regions not as separate but as complementary areas of threat and opportunity. This demonstrates that regional naval strategies are not limited to coastal defence but have transformed into tools for shaping the geopolitical order.

The study shows that Castex's historical strategic approaches remain valid in today's geopolitics and that such comprehensive readings are particularly useful for in-depth analysis in dynamic security environments. Another important finding of the study is that Israel seeks a careful balance between defence and attack in its long-term maritime strategy. As Castex predicted, the maritime strategy of regional powers is constrained not only by military considerations but also by political and diplomatic contexts. On the one hand, Israel's sometimes critical stance in its relations with the United States and the European Union, and on the other hand, the fragile nature of its diplomatic overtures with actors such as the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, determine the limits of an aggressive maritime policy. Therefore, despite possessing a highly equipped naval force, Israel prefers to utilise this capacity primarily for strategic deterrence, targeted engagement, and symbolic presence. From this perspective, establishing a balance between power projection and legitimacy, particularly in the long term, and supporting hard power capabilities with diplomatic groundwork are steps that could be taken. As a result, Israel is developing a flexible, agile and multi-layered strategy as a regional maritime power, as suggested by Castex; however, the sustainability of this strategy will depend not only on military capability, but also on diplomatic coordination and the management of the regional balance of power.

Notes

1. Alfred Thayer Mahan, who served at the United States Military Academy in classical naval studies, British naval historian Julian Corbett, and Admiral Herbert Richmond, an officer in the British Royal Navy during World War I, occupy an important place. These figures, who are primary sources in naval strategy due to their theoretical and conceptual analyses and

the practical applications of these analyses, have contributed to studies centred on the United States and Great Britain. In these studies, the question of what are the ways and means of dominating the seas comes to the fore, and theoretical and geopolitical approaches have been developed to ensure that this dominance is stable in the long term. In this sense, the studies in question were conducted on a hegemonic basis and aimed to produce a maritime strategy for the dominant power of the time and, moreover, to implement it in the field. Therefore, the importance of navies for countries with global goals was emphasised, and the main objectives of the navies were designed to destroy enemy fleets at sea. French Navy Commander Raoul Castex (1878-1968), on the other hand, focused on small navies rather than large naval powers and their goals of maritime supremacy, and aimed to outline a framework for the regional presence of these navies.

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