

## Pompeo to warn Israel over Chinese involvement in water plant

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is expected to warn Israel on his Wednesday visit against letting a Chinese firm build and operate the biggest seawater desalination plant in the world.

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is scheduled to arrive in Israel on May 13. Though there are many issues on his agenda, one specific topic is particularly sensitive, since it revolves around tiny Israel's involvement in the worsening clash between Washington and Beijing. The Americans are worried that the Chinese firm Hutchison will win the tender to build the world's largest desalination plant planned for the Palmahim Mediterranean coast in the south of Israel.

[...]

"The Americans are very worried about China's efforts to expand its foothold around the world by investing in strategic infrastructures. They regard this as a threat to their national security," says **Galia Lavi**, a post-doctoral student in the East Asian Studies department of Tel Aviv University who also conducts research for the China-Israel program at Israel's **Institute for National Security Studies**. She tells Al-Monitor, "This is not one of [President Donald] Trump's whims. The current president may say it more sharply than his predecessors, but the Americans have been keeping a worried eye on what China has been doing for several years now. What concerns the US most is what they identify as a Chinese attempt to dominate the future technology market. Israel has the reputation of being a greenhouse for advanced technologies, so China shows interest in what is happening here. That is exactly what alarms the United States."

[...]

"In the case of the desalination plant, the Americans see it as a test case for them to assess whether Israel really is investigating Chinese investments. They expect the committee to convene," says **Galia Lavi**. "In 2015, the Americans lost the tender for Haifa port, and the Chinese ended up acquiring the concession to run it. What makes this deal different is that it has yet to be signed. This means that they still wield influence over it."

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