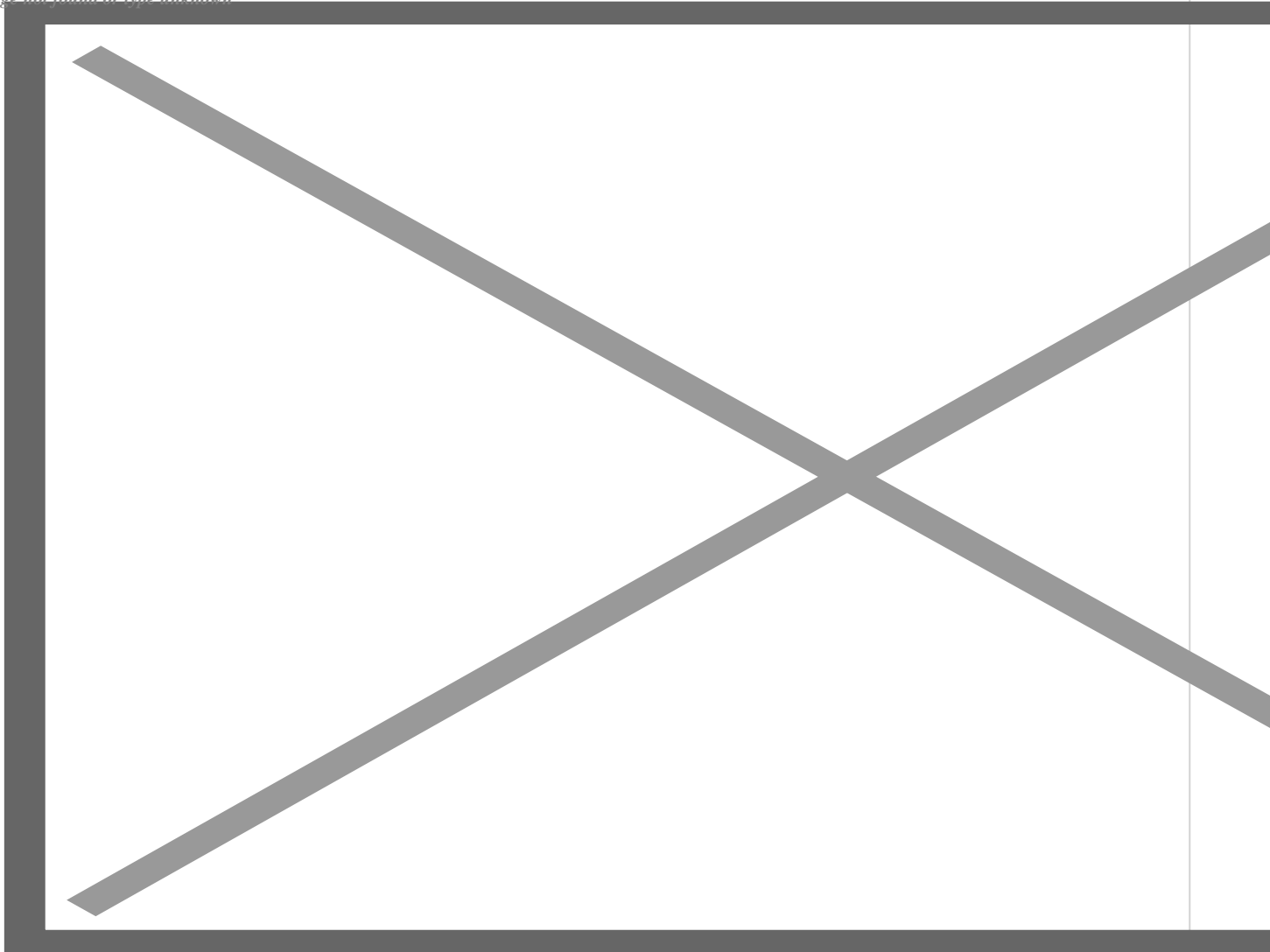


# *Syria condemns illegal visit of U.S. General Mark Milley*

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**US Joint Chiefs Chair Army General Mark Milley speaks with American troops in an occupied Syrian territory during an unannounced visit on March 4, 2023. (Photo by Reuters)?**

Damascus, March 5 (RHC)-- Damascus has condemned a recent visit by top U.S. military officer General Mark Milley to northeast Syria, saying the move is "illegal" and a "flagrant violation" of the country's sovereignty.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry made the remarks in a statement on Sunday, a day after the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff made a surprise visit at an undisclosed base in the occupied Syrian territory to talk with American troops and commanders about recommendations for the future of the Pentagon's operations in the Arab country.

"Syria strongly condemns this flagrant violation by the U.S. military official of the sovereignty and territorial integrity," the ministry said, calling on Washington to immediately stop its systematic and continuous violations of international law as well as its support for militant groups in Syria.

The ministry said such practices will not make Damascus stop its fight against terrorism and it will remain steadfast in protecting its sovereignty, security and stability. The U.S. and its allies put boots on the ground in Syria in 2014 under the pretext of fighting Daesh. The Takfiri terrorist group had emerged as Washington was running out of excuses to extend its regional interference. The U.S.-led coalition keeps its illegal presence on the Arab country's soil, although Damascus and its allies defeated Daesh in late 2017.

Damascus has repeatedly urged the United Nations Security Council to end the US-led military presence, saying the illegal U.S. deployment is tantamount to occupation and aimed at plundering Syria's natural resources.

Former US President Donald Trump admitted on several occasions that American forces were in the Arab country for its oil wealth. Damascus also strongly protests that Washington's theft of Syrian oil, natural gas and other resources has led to energy shortages.

According to data released by Syria's Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources, in the first half of 2022, US forces stole more than 80 percent of Syria's oil resources every day.

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