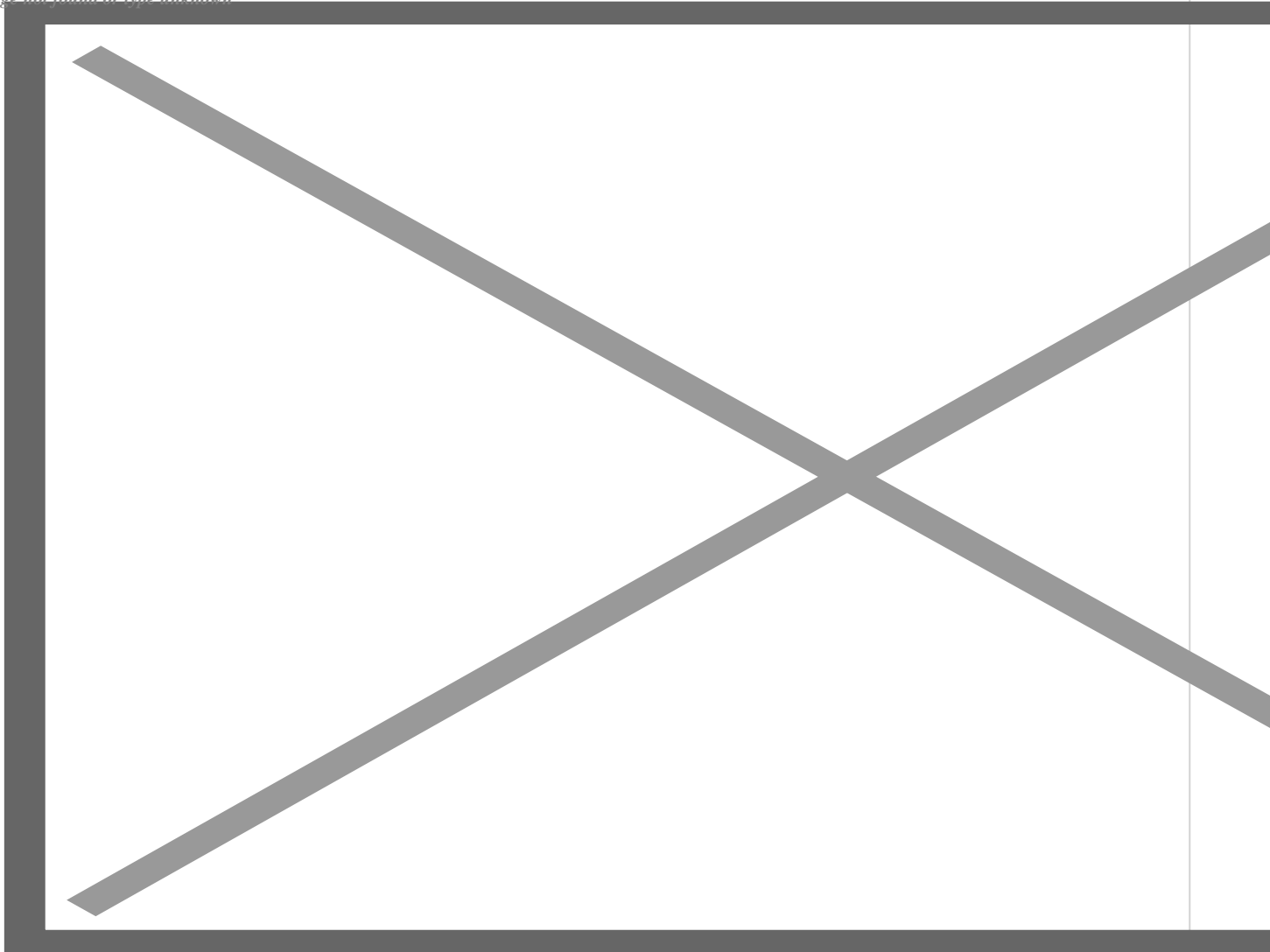


Pentagon claims U.S. troops ‘not guarding’ oil fields in Syria

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Mask-clad U.S. soldiers walk during a patrol near an oil production facility near al-Malikiyah (Derik), in Syria’s northeastern Hasakah Province. (Photo: AFP)

Washington, February 10 (RHC)-- In the U.S., a Pentagon spokesman has claimed that the American troops deployed to Syria are not protecting oil reserves in the Arab country, while admitting that an American firm is exploiting Syrian oil without authorization from Damascus.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told a news briefing in Washington, DC that since an American firm had signed a deal with Kurdish militants in northern Syria last year to help exploit the country's oil reserves, U.S. troops were not involved.

Damascus has said the agreement — signed between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militant group and an American oil company named by media sources as Delta Crescent Energy LLC — is null and void, and that the parties involved are plundering Syria's national resources.

Kirby said the U.S. military personnel and contractors “are not authorized to provide assistance to any other private company, including its employees or agents seeking to develop oil resources in northeast Syria.”

However, in an apparent justification for the continuing presence of American forces near Syrian oil fields, Kirby said the only exception was when US troops in Syria were operating under existing authorizations to guard civilians.

Kirby said about 900 US service members were deployed to Syria to fight the remnants of the Daesh terrorist group. “It's important to remember that our mission there remains to enable the enduring defeat of ISIS,” he said, using an alternative acronym for Daesh.

Several times during his presidency, Trump contradicted the account often offered by his advisers and US military officials that the US was fighting Daesh in Syria, saying explicitly that the American troops in the Arab country were there “only for the oil.”

In 2019, Trump decided to keep hundreds of US troops in Syria to “secure” the country's oilfields despite a campaign promise to end U.S. wars abroad.

The U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting Daesh has been conducting airstrikes and operations inside Syria since September 2014, without any authorization from the Damascus government or a United Nations mandate. Damascus has repeatedly condemned the attacks.

Kirby's remarks come as Damascus has urged the administration of new US.. President Joe Biden to withdraw the American forces from Syria and stop the plundering of Syrian wealth. “The new US administration must stop acts of aggression and occupation, plundering the wealth of my country, withdraw its occupying forces from it, and stop supporting separatist militias, illegal entities, and attempts to threaten Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity,” Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar al-Jaafari said during a virtual session of the UN Security Council on January 20.

Earlier this month, Syria's permanent mission to the UN also said that the country was willing to consider reestablishing ties with the US if the Biden administration reversed the policies of its predecessors.

“The reason for the existing disputes with the United States of America is the policies of previous American administrations that include: interference in the Syrian internal affairs, occupation of territories in the Syrian Arab Republic, stealing its natural resources, and supporting separatist militias and armed terrorist entities in Syria,” the mission told Newsweek.

Syria needs to control its major oil deposits in order to address its energy needs and rebuild the country amid years of militancy and Western sanctions. The Arab country has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. Syria is currently extracting oil at only 10 percent of its pre-war capacity.



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