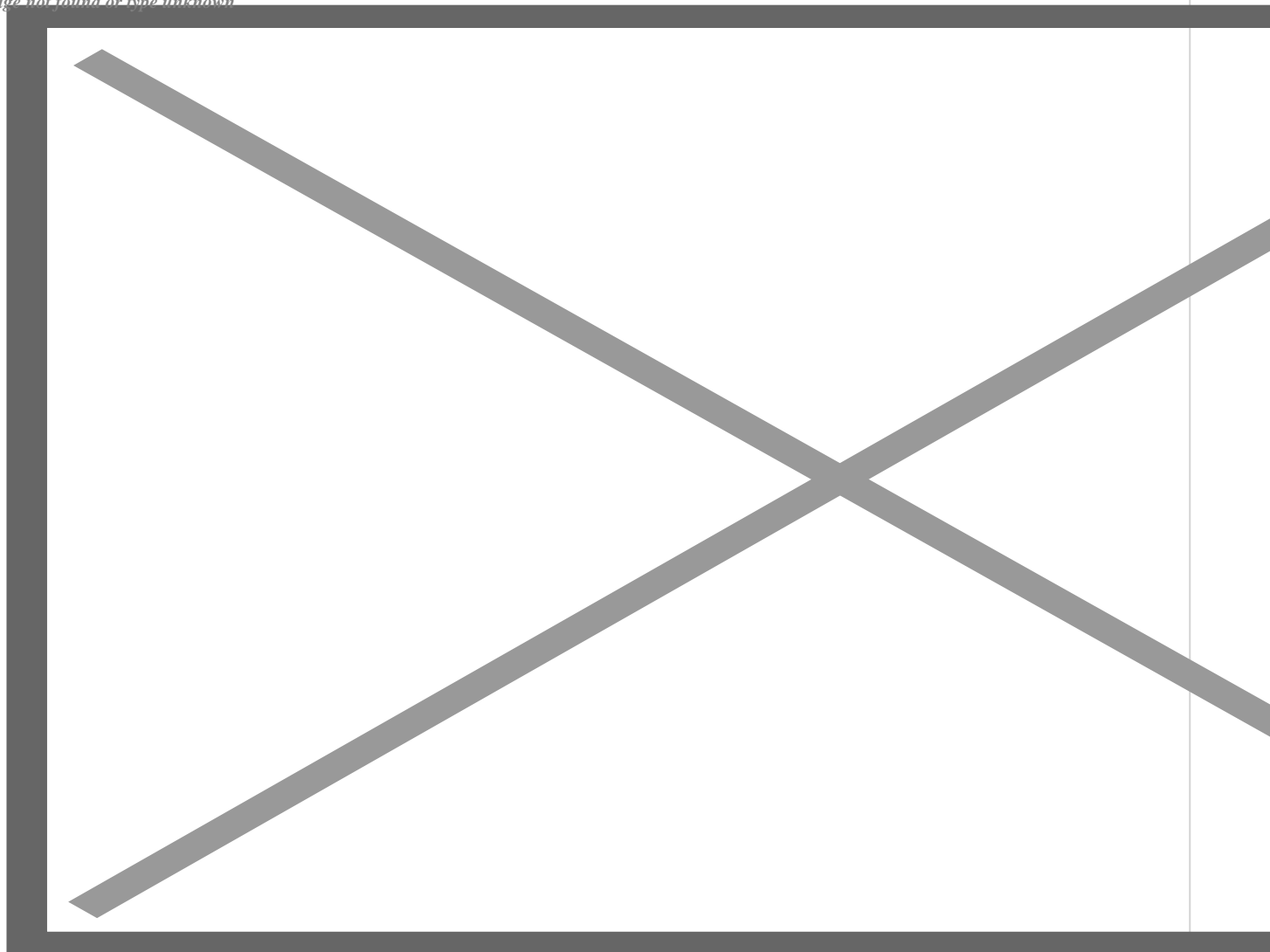


Syria says U.S. must pay for atrocities and withdraw troops

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??U.S. occupation forces deployed at the strategic al-Tanf area in southeastern Syria are reportedly providing significant logistical and military support to Daesh terrorists.???

Damascus, May 23 (RHC)-- Syria has firmly rejected a Pentagon report that the U.S. military was not at fault for a 2019 deadly airstrike targeting civilians in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, saying American forces must pay for their atrocities and immediately withdraw from the war-battered country.

In an executive summary of the U.S. airstrike on March 18, 2019, the Pentagon said the attack, which was claimed to have targeted an encampment for Daesh terrorists in the eastern city of Baghuz and resulted in the deaths of some 70 people, including civilians, did not violate rules of engagement or laws of war.

The summary found that the strike ordered at the behest of the US-allied militants from the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) demonstrated awareness for non-combatants, even though "civilians were within the blast radius resulting in CIVCAS," or civilian casualties.

The final assessment, voiced by Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby, placed the figure at 56 dead, four of whom were said to be civilians.

Reacting to the Pentagon report, Syria's permanent mission to the United Nations told Newsweek that Damascus viewed the deadly attack in Baghuz as one of many perpetrated as part of what the government considered an illegitimate campaign since Syria's own armed forces conducted counter-terrorism operations with help from Russia and Iran.

"These biased investigations cannot deny the fact that a crime against humanity has occurred in Baghuz," the mission said. "Any justifications provided by the US administration for not violating the law of war or the rules of engagement are to circumvent the fact that the U.S. forces deployed in Syria are illegal and they launch military strikes, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, without the approval or coordination of the government of the Syrian Arab Republic."

The mission called the U.S. summary a "clear attempt to absolve the US occupation forces in Syria of their direct responsibility for civilian casualties under the pretext of fighting the terrorist organization, ISIS (Daesh)."

"Claiming that there is insufficient or inaccurate information about the presence of civilians, and that efforts have been made to distinguish between civilians and members of ISIS (Daesh) are all just empty justifications that are refuted by the fact that civilians have fallen," the mission told Newsweek.

The Syrian mission described the Pentagon's recommendations of clearer guidelines to avoid further civilian casualties as "an admission of negligence that calls for accountability." "It also raises serious questions about the reasons for not addressing such loopholes previously," the mission added, "especially since the Baghuz incident is not the first of its kind."

"It is time for the U.S. forces to immediately withdraw from the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, to hold them accountable for their crimes and to force them to compensate the victims," the mission emphasized.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the United States, the Israeli regime, and their Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are spreading insecurity in the country.

The U.S. military has stationed forces and equipment in eastern and northeastern Syria, with the Pentagon claiming that the deployment is aimed at preventing the oilfields in the area from falling into the hands of Daesh terrorists.

Damascus, however, says the unlawful deployment is meant to plunder the country's resources. Former U.S. president Donald Trump admitted on several occasions that American forces were in Syria for its oil.

After failing to oust the Syrian government through proxies and direct involvement in the conflict, the US government has stepped up its economic war on the Arab country.

In June 2020, the U.S. enacted the so-called Caesar Act that imposed the toughest sanctions ever on Syria with the alleged aim of choking off revenue sources for the government.

The sanctions, however, have crippled the war-torn country's economy by prohibiting foreign companies from trading with Damascus. Syria says the real purpose of the measures is to put pressure on Syrians and their livelihoods.

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