

US Troops Return to Oil-rich Kirkuk Despite Talks to Withdraw from Iraq

The US claims it must remain in Iraq to counter ISIS

By [The Cradle](#)

Global Research, August 13, 2024

[The Cradle](#) 6 August 2024

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence, Oil and Energy](#)

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Troops from the US-led international coalition have returned to the K-1 military base in the oil-rich Iraqi city of Kirkuk for the first time since 2020, The New Arab (TNA) [reported](#) on 6 August.

An informed Kurdish source told TNA,

“The force, comprising about 40 soldiers and 10 to 15 US-made armored Hummer vehicles, was sent from Erbil and deployed at the K-1 military base.”

The US-led coalition did not respond to requests for comment.

The reason for the new US deployment of troops to Kirkuk after four years is unclear.

The source suggested that it may be a response to increased ISIS activities in the disputed province, which leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have long wished to annex to the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (IKR).

Another source, also speaking on condition of secrecy, told TNA that ISIS has recently resumed its insurgency in and around the Diyala province in eastern Iraq.

The Iraqi armed forces have [increased](#) security along the country’s western border with Syria following the release of hundreds of ISIS fighters from prison camps controlled by the US-backed and Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

In mid-July, authorities from the SDF-controlled Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) issued a [general amnesty](#) that has so far secured the release of over 1,500 Syrian ISIS fighters convicted of terrorism-related offenses, [provided](#) they “did not participate directly in combat” against the SDF.

Informed Iraqi sources speaking with *The Cradle* stated the US military ordered the release of the ISIS prisoners.

The US-backed SDF holds thousands of ISIS fighters and their family members in around two dozen prison camps in occupied northeast Syria. These include 2,000 foreigners whose home countries have refused to repatriate them.

The deployment of US and coalition troops to Kirkuk follows the Iraqi government’s [signing](#)

on 1 August of a deal with UK oil giant BP to develop oil and gas fields in Kirkuk.

Iraqi Oil Minister Hayan Abdul Ghani and BP CEO Murry Auchincloss signed a memorandum of understanding, according to a statement from the office of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

“The memorandum includes the rehabilitation and development of the four oil fields of the North Oil Company in Kirkuk, namely the Kirkuk oil field and the Bai Hassan, Jambur, and Khabbaz oil fields,” Sudani’s office said.

The US and Iraqi governments have been in negotiations for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq for months. In January, Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani [stated](#) that US forces are no longer needed to maintain security in the country. US military leaders claim they must remain in Iraq to counter ISIS.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iran-backed groups, has carried out attacks against US forces, including at the Ain al-Assad airbase on Monday, to pressure US leaders to order their withdrawal.

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Featured image: US soldiers in Kirkuk, Iraq on 29 March 2020 [Murtadha Al-Sudani/Anadolu Agency]

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