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In Alliance with Al-Qaida, Israel Is Stealing Syria's Oil

By Uprooted Palestinians
3/13/2016

Israel steps up oil drilling in Golan

Israel is moving forward with plans to drill for oil in the occupied Golan Heights, despite warnings that the move violates international law.

For the last year, Afek, an Israeli subsidiary of the US firm Genie Energy, has undertaken exploratory drilling in the Golan. Afek believes there is a vast reservoir of oil under Syria's Golan that could supply all of Israel's energy needs.

In September 2015, Afek announced it had discovered its first oil reservoir at one of the sites where it had been drilling.

Last month, the company was granted the go-ahead to conduct more drilling in the Golan by the Israeli authorities.

In response, Palestinian legal rights group Adalah and Al-Marsad, the Arab Human Rights Center in the Golan Heights, wrote to Yuval Steinitz, Israel's infrastructure minister, demanding that the drilling permits be withdrawn.

In the letter, attorneys Suhad Bishara and Karama Abu Saleh reminded Steinitz that international law requires that residents of the Golan be able to control and benefit from the land's resources.

Population expelled

In 1967, Israel occupied Syria's Golan Heights, expelling most of the Syrian population.

Approximately 130,000 Syrians were driven out and most of the Golan's 200 villages destroyed, according to a 2010 investigation by the Tel Aviv newspaper *Haaretz*.

Today, 22,000 Syrians belonging to the Druze minority community remain amid a similar number of Jewish settlers. The settlers are spread out across 30 settlements, all of which are illegal under international law.

In 1981, Israel formally annexed the territory but governments around the world, including the United States, consider that annexation null and void.

In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that reaffirmed what it called the "inalienable rights" of the Arab population in the Golan over its natural resources.

As the occupying power, Bishara and Abu Saleh write, Israel is "prohibited from altering, transferring or confiscating immovable properties," as well as looting the Golan's resources.

The 1907 Hague Regulations, a cornerstone of international law, state that an occupying power must "safeguard the capital of these properties." Stealing resources from an occupied territory constitutes the crime of pillage.

But in December 2011, Israel's high court ruled that Israel's occupation is unique and not bound by the laws against pillage.

Indeed, Israel has already made profitable use of the Golan's agricultural and water resources.

As journalist Jonathan Cook reported recently, the company behind the drilling expedition may have its own ideological motivations for the oil venture.

"Depths of darkness"

The chairperson of Afek is Effie Eitam, a far-right former politician and military general, who is an Israeli settler in the Golan.



Afek chairperson Effie Eitam has ordered fatal beating of Palestinians and has expressed his desire for them to be killed.

Eitam has previously ordered the beating of Palestinians, some of whom have died as a result. He has also made a series of racist comments telling Jeffrey Goldberg of *The New Yorker* that Palestinians are “creatures who came out of the depths of darkness.”

“We will have to kill them all,” he said. At that time, in 2004, Eitam was Israel’s housing minister.

The members of the strategic advisory board of Afek’s parent company include Dick Cheney, the former US vice-president, the media tycoon Rupert Murdoch and Larry Summers, the former secretary of the US treasury.

The last year has seen Israel attempt to intensify its grip on the Golan Heights, while Syria is consumed by bloodshed and war.

Israel has offered significant financial incentives to its Jewish citizens to settle in the Golan and politicians have sought the world’s recognition of its annexation of the occupied territory.

At a meeting between Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and Barack Obama, the US president, last November, Netanyahu reportedly suggested that the US change its position on the status of the Golan Heights in light of Syria’s civil war.

According to media reports, Netanyahu argued that because Syria is likely to be divided in the future, Israel’s rule over the Golan should be recognized as legitimate.

Last summer, Israel’s education minister Naftali Bennett, who leads the far right Habeyit Hayehudi (Jewish Home) party, called on “the entire world” to “recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.”

Since 2011, President Bashar al-Assad has defended his rule against rebel factions, including Islamic State and affiliates of al-Qaida.

Israel has assisted the opposition to Assad by attacking areas under his force's control and providing assistance to Syrian opposition forces, including Jabhat al-Nusra, an affiliate of al-Qaida.