

Aid to earthquake victims requires the immediate lifting of US sanctions against Syria

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One day after a devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake and its aftershocks struck the western border region of Turkey and Syria, the death toll has surpassed 7,700 and is expected to continue to rise as rescue and recovery efforts continue. The quake is one of the strongest ever recorded in the region and the deadliest in nearly 25 years.

More than 11,000 buildings were destroyed by the quake across 10 provinces in Turkey, including skyscrapers and hospitals. Videos posted on social media show entire apartment blocks suddenly collapsing into dust. In northwest Syria, whole families were left trapped under the rubble of their collapsed homes. Tens of thousands across both countries have been left wounded, and hundreds of thousands are now homeless, struggling to survive in freezing winter temperatures.

All told, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that as many as 23 million people have been directly impacted by the earthquake, including 1.4 million children. “It’s now a race against time,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement. “Every minute, every hour that passes, the chances of finding survivors alive diminishes.” According to a WHO estimate, the death toll could rise as high as 30,000.

Despite this catastrophe, the Biden administration is refusing to lift the US sanctions imposed against Syria, which drastically impede the flow of relief supplies, meaning that many more Syrians will die from the disaster. Much less does Washington intend to provide any humanitarian aid to the Assad government in its recovery efforts. Instead, State Department spokesman Ned Price made clear that the Biden administration saw

the disaster as an opportunity to rekindle its regime-change operation and funnel more money and aid to its proxy forces.

“It would be quite ironic—if not even counterproductive—for us to reach out to a government that has brutalized its people over the course of a dozen years now,” Price told reporters Monday. “Instead, we have humanitarian partners on the ground who can provide the type of assistance in the aftermath of these tragic earthquakes.”

The ruthless refusal of the Biden administration to provide aid to the Syrian government, when it knows its actions will result in more suffering and death, recalls the remark of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1996 that the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children caused by US economic sanctions against Baghdad was “worth it” in the furtherance of regime-change.

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden pledged “any and all needed assistance” to Turkey in remarks on Monday. However, one can be sure the Biden administration will seek to exploit the disaster to press its geopolitical interests against Ankara, in particular, over the war against Russia.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government has stood in the way of the rapid accession of Finland and Sweden into the NATO military alliance, of which Turkey has been a member since 1952. Turkey maintains strong economic and military ties with Russia, and Erdoğan has sought to mediate the conflict in Ukraine, even as the US and the imperialist powers in Europe press forward with an escalation which threatens a catastrophic nuclear war. Erdoğan survived a military coup attempt in 2016 which bore

the hallmarks of a plot hatched in Washington, and the US maintains a military alliance with Kurdish nationalist forces in Syria and Iraq deemed by Turkey to be terrorist organizations.

Despite these differences, Erdoğan and his predecessors have played a key role in the imperialist interventions in the Middle East, including in Syria, where it has also supported anti-Assad Islamist groups in the civil war and deployed troops under the cover of waging a “war on terror” against Kurdish forces.

Ultimately, the earthquake disaster exposes the hypocrisy of American imperialism and explodes the narrative that the US intervenes around the world to defend “human rights.” American imperialism is the greatest mass murderer in the world today, using its military might to trample on human rights and human life wherever it treads.

The wars it has waged since the 1990s, from Iraq and the Balkans to Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Somalia, have killed millions, displaced tens of millions and left entire societies defenseless against the privations of natural disasters. These wars have metastasized into an open war against Russia, even as US imperialism prepares further escalation of its murderous interventions in the Middle East, with preparations for war against Iran and throughout the region.

Since 2011, beginning under the Obama administration, the US has fueled a civil war in Syria aimed at toppling the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Through the arming and funding of Islamist militias and punishing economic sanctions, Washington has left Syrian society shattered and entire cities laid to waste. The war has displaced 13 million Syrians, including 6.7 million refugees, many of whom reside in rudimentary camps and inadequate housing on both sides of the border in the earthquake struck region. More than half a million Syrians have been killed in the more than decade long war.

Under the cover of nearly total media blackout, the United States maintains an occupation force of approximately 900 troops split between the Al Tanf military base in southern Syria and the country’s eastern oil fields, where they have been deployed since 2014, denying the country access to critical resources needed for rebuilding infrastructure destroyed in the war and now in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The US sanctions on Syria must be lifted immediately, and its occupation and regime-change operations must end. This must be combined with the mobilization of social resources to provide emergency relief and rebuild infrastructure on a scientific basis to protect the population from earthquakes. This effort must be paid for with the enormous sums that are spent on war and funneled into the bank accounts of the rich. Such a progressive program requires the building of a working class movement against war and against the capitalist system.



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