

US and NATO plot wars while ignoring Turkey/Syria earthquake victims

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The February 6 earthquake disaster in Turkey and Syria is a devastating indictment of world capitalism and its horrific waste of the social resources created by human labor.

The quake and its aftershocks devastated an area in which 25 million people live. The official death toll is approaching 50,000, with at least 42,000 in Turkey and 7,000 in Syria confirmed dead. Countless thousands are still buried under the rubble.

A governor in the quake zone in Turkey has admitted that the real death toll in Turkey alone could well surpass 150,000, making the earthquake one of the deadliest in modern history.

These mass deaths were preventable. Modern science and technology allow humanity to build housing that survives even powerful earthquakes with minimal loss of life. In the 2022 Fukushima earthquake in Japan, which was of a similar magnitude as the latest Turkish-Syrian quake, only four people died.

Yet in 2023, more people died from the Turkish-Syrian earthquake than did in the great earthquakes that shook the same region in 1759 or in 847, both of which claimed an estimated 20,000 lives. The last earthquake that likely killed more people in this region took place in the year 526, when an estimated quarter-million people lost their lives.

Why, despite the immense advances in technology and industry since the time of the Roman Empire, do earthquakes still claim tens or hundreds of thousands of lives and leave millions homeless in the freezing cold?

The answer is that capitalist governments squander vast resources on war and death, while neglecting the most urgent necessities. The life-saving work of building earthquake-resistant housing is deemed unprofitable by governments and corporations, and so it is ignored. This reality is strikingly exposed by the aid

announced to earthquake victims by the NATO powers, as they pour billions of dollars into a war with Russia that has brought the world to the brink of nuclear conflict.

The Biden administration is expected to request in March the largest military budget in US history, around \$900 billion. Under its leadership, the NATO powers, including Turkey, have provided at least \$100 billion worth of military equipment and financial aid to their proxy forces in Ukraine to wage war on Russia. Based on US estimates that Russia has suffered 100,000 losses, this means spending a staggering \$1 million to kill or wound each Russian soldier lost in the war.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who visited Turkey on Sunday and flew over the earthquake-hit area in a helicopter, announced that Washington has increased earthquake aid to Turkey and Syria from US\$85 million to US\$185 million. This amounts to just US\$7.40 for each of the 25 million people affected by the quakes.

German imperialism last year increased its military spending by 100 billion euros, embarking on the largest rearmament drive since the fall of the Nazi regime led by Hitler. Last week, it announced that it had sent “goods worth 6.9 million euros for Turkish and 1.5 million euros for Syrian earthquake zones.” This is less than the cost of a single one of the Leopard 2 battle tanks that Berlin is sending to Ukraine.

In Turkey, the greatest share of the budget goes to the military and security apparatus. Of Turkey’s budget of approximately 4.5 trillion Turkish liras (TL) in 2023, 390 billion TL (US\$20.7 billion) went to the war machine. The Turkish bourgeoisie boasts of reportedly being the eleventh strongest in the world, and the strongest military power in the Middle East-North Africa region. Yet it cannot provide millions of its

citizens with decent housing or, therefore, protect their right to life.

As the Turkish government boasted last week that it had collected 115 billion TL (US\$6.1 billion) in aid—85 billion of which in reality came from state-owned banks—thousands of people in the earthquake-hit area are still without tents or containers for shelter. This forced many people to return to their damaged homes where, on February 20, they were caught in a new 6.4 magnitude earthquake. At least six died, and around 300 were injured. Meanwhile, countless hotels and apartments remain empty across Turkey.

In Syria, Washington and the other NATO imperialist powers bear the principal responsibility for the earthquake disaster, which affected nearly 10 million people and left 5.4 million homeless. The war for regime change they launched in 2011 to topple President Bashar al-Assad's regime left one of the most advanced countries in the Arab world in rubble even before the earthquake.

Washington and its NATO allies, including Turkey, have spent hundreds of billions of dollars on a war that has killed more than 500,000 people and turned more than 10 million into refugees.

Four days after the earthquake, facing international outrage, Washington partially lifted its crippling sanctions on Syria, for six months. This token step, which came too late for the thousands of people buried under the rubble, was not followed by any comprehensive search-and-rescue or relief effort. Instead, Syrian earthquake victims were largely abandoned to their fate.

Since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Washington has spent trillions of dollars on imperialist wars and regime-change operations in the region. Baghdad, Kabul, Fallujah, Mosul and Aleppo were all bombed and shelled into rubble before this earthquake devastated the region. The imperialist rampage across Central Asia and the Middle East, as the imperialist powers vied for world domination, cost millions of lives.

These endless wars, carried out by NATO governments with utter disregard for public opposition at home, set the stage for the current disaster. The NATO-Russia proxy war that erupted in Syria as NATO tried to topple the Russian-backed Assad regime spread to Ukraine after the 2014 NATO-backed coup in

Kiev toppled a pro-Russian government. Now, having goaded Russian President Vladimir Putin into a reactionary invasion of Ukraine, NATO is calling for a war economy to orient ever more of industry to military production.

In today's globally integrated society, earthquakes, critical environmental problems like climate change, and public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic are all interconnected world problems, requiring a coordinated, international response. But it is impossible to mount such a response within the bankrupt framework of the capitalist nation-state system, dominated by financial oligarchies that are unanswerable to working people and demand that all available resources go to waging war.

Their policy on the Turkish-Syrian earthquake disaster—like their failure to carry out any globally coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has cost a staggering 20 million lives—is proof that these oligarchies are unfit to rule. To prevent new disasters and a catastrophic escalation of war, it is urgent for the working class internationally to take power out of their hands and build a socialist society, based on social need, not private profit.



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