

The Early Phoenix

A first look at today's most notable stories from the Middle East, selected by ACLS experts

10 February 2023

NORTHWEST SYRIA: ACLS On-the-Ground Situation Report for February 9 (Mahmoud Bakour).

- As of 8 am Thursday, an Egyptian technical team had entered Northwest Syria to support civil defense rescue operations and provide medical care to the survivors. The Qatari Red Crescent introduced a specialized team with modern technical equipment to help detect survivors under the rubble. Meanwhile, **3,200 people are still missing** in the area of the city of Jendaris in northern Aleppo province.
- By 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 9, more than 79 hours have passed since the earthquake occurred, but no outside rescue vehicles or teams have entered northern Syria. Meanwhile, the White Helmets and civilian volunteers are working to extract survivors from under the rubble. Because of continuing aftershocks, **the Orontes River has risen and begun to flood** the village of Al-Taloul in the northwestern countryside of Idlib, close to the Syrian-Turkish border. According to local volunteers in Al-Taloul, the White Helmets sent specialized teams to the village to try to rescue people from the flooding and open water relief gates. The White Helmets continue to struggle to cover all areas of Northwest Syria that are exposed to damage, as their rescue teams require 2500 liters of diesel for heavy machinery per hour.
- At 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, several United Nations vehicles entered the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey, bringing previously scheduled routine food aid that is part of the UN's World Food Program, but bringing no aid related to the earthquake disaster response.
- At 5:00 pm on Thursday, the director of the regional office of Doctors Without Borders announced that **the organization's stock of medical supplies in Syria has begun to run out**, and there are fears of an outbreak of epidemics in the earthquake-affected areas given the lack of medical aid.
- At 6:00 pm on Thursday, Mazen Alloush, Director of Public Relations at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, confirmed the entry of a Spanish team specialized in examining neighborhoods under the rubble, in coordination with the Charitable Support Coordination Office in the Department of Political Affairs in Idlib. The specialist team will begin work soon in the areas affected by the earthquake.

- As of 8:00 pm on Thursday, the bodies of 550 Syrians who died in the earthquake in Turkey had been transported back into Syria through the Bab al-Hawa crossing in order to be buried in their hometowns.
- As of 9:00 pm on Thursday, aside from the Egyptian technical team that arrived to assist civil defense rescuers and provide medical care, **no international aid agency or humanitarian organizations had provided any assistance to the affected areas of Northwest Syria**, despite appeals made by the civil defense rescuers throughout the four days since the initial earthquake.
- As of 22:20 pm, the White Helmets announced on their official website that the death toll from the earthquake in Northwest Syria had risen to more than 2,030 deaths, with more than 2,950 injured. The White Helmets reported that search and rescue operations continue under very difficult conditions, more than 87 hours after the initial violent earthquake that struck the region.

TURKIYE - SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

1. [After Four Days, No UN Earthquake Aid Has Entered Northwest Syria](#) (*Syria TV*). On Thursday, about six trucks of UN humanitarian aid entered the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey into northwestern Syria, which is a resumption of previous aid provided by the World Food Program and is not related to the earthquake...The director of the media office of the Bab al-Hawa crossing confirmed that so far no aid has been received for those affected by the devastating earthquake that struck northwestern Syria at dawn on Monday.
2. [Syrian National Coalition Condemns UN's Failure to Provide Aid for Northwest Syria](#) (*Etilaf*). In an official statement, the Syrian National Coalition condemned the failure of the United Nations and its organizations towards the major catastrophe that befell northwestern Syria due to the earthquake. The National Coalition affirms that access roads to northern Syria are available, not disrupted, and not limited to one road, and that the excuses of the UNHCR are unrealistic. If roads are damaged, then helicopters can easily reach the liberated areas of the northwest, which are the areas of Syria most severely affected by the earthquake.
3. [A Custody Battle Over Aid Deprives Northwest Syria During the Height of the Disaster](#) (*Syria TV*). The UN agencies and their partner institutions on the Turkish side

of the border seem to be in a state of neglect, as aid is piled up in their warehouses but they can only enter into northern Syria through Bab al-Hawa, the only crossing authorized by the Security Council. The Syrian regime took advantage of the opportunity to renew its demands for the need to coordinate with Damascus regarding aid. Western countries did not show any willingness to meet the regime's demands or communicate with it, but the difficulty of sending aid across the border from Turkey serves the regime's purpose as it tries to exploit the situation.

4. [About 22,000 Killed In Syria and Turkey, with Hopes for Finding Survivors Fading](#) (*Al Arabiya*). The devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria at dawn on Monday has left about 22,000 people dead in the two countries, in a death toll that is expected to rise. On Thursday evening, the Turkish Vice President announced that the death toll from the earthquake in his country had risen to 17,674, while the number of injured exceeded 72,000. The death toll across Syria as a result of the devastating earthquake reached 3,370, and about 5,300 were injured.
5. [U.S. Will Allow Financial Transactions to Syria for Relief Efforts](#) (*U.S. Treasury Department*). On Thursday, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued Syria General License (GL) 23, which authorizes for 180 days all transactions related to earthquake relief that would be otherwise prohibited by the Syrian Sanctions Regulations. "Our deepest condolences go out to the people of Türkiye and Syria for the tragic loss of life and destruction in the wake of devastating earthquakes," said Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo. "As international allies and humanitarian partners mobilize to help those affected, I want to make very clear that U.S. sanctions in Syria will not stand in the way of life-saving efforts for the Syrian people. While U.S. sanctions programs already contain robust exemptions for humanitarian efforts, today the Treasury is issuing a blanket General License to authorize earthquake relief efforts so that those providing assistance can focus on what's needed most: saving lives and rebuilding."
6. [\\$85 Million in American Aid to Those Affected, While France Says No Normalization with Assad](#) (*Al Arabiya*). The French Foreign Ministry told Al-Arabiya: Our aid passes through the United Nations and through our partners in French and international humanitarian organizations. The US Agency for Development (USAID) announced Thursday that the United States will provide \$85 million in aid to Turkey and Syria after

the devastating earthquake that struck the two countries on Monday...State Department Spokesman Ned Price stressed that "American aid will not go to the Syrian regime," adding, "We will transfer aid to Syria through the organizations we work with."

7. [World Bank to Provide Initial \\$1.78B for Türkiye's Recovery after Earthquakes](#) (*Anadolu Agency*). The World Bank announced Thursday it will initially provide \$1.78 billion aid for Türkiye's recovery and reconstruction efforts in the wake of powerful earthquakes. The assistance aims to help relief and recovery efforts following devastating earthquakes and aftershocks in Türkiye that have already resulted in massive loss of life, injuries, and very significant damages in and around southern Türkiye, it said in a statement.

IRAN

8. [Iran Seeks to Expand its Presence to Idlib Under Cover of Earthquake Relief](#) (*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). Iranian media reported that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian had informed the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mirjana Spoliaric Eger, that Tehran was ready to send rescue teams to Idlib, Syria, urgently. Syrian opposition sources told Asharq Al-Awsat that Abdollahian's statements reflect an Iranian effort to expand further in northern Syria and reach Idlib by exploiting a humanitarian catastrophe at the level of the earthquake and under the pretext of transporting aid through rescue teams.
9. [Iranian Official Says China Will Receive Thousands of Iranian Drones](#) (*Iran International*) An adviser to Iran's minister of intelligence has claimed that 90 countries are "customers" of Iranian drones, and China is in the "queue" to receive 15,000 of these drones.
10. [US Sanctions Firms Involved in Iranian Oil Smuggling to Asia](#) (*Iran Wire*). On Thursday the US Treasury Department announced sanctions on six Iran-based petrochemical manufacturers or their subsidiaries and three companies in Malaysia and Singapore that are involved in facilitating the sale and shipment of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Iranian petrochemicals and petroleum.

IRAQ

11. [PM Sudani Says Erbil and Baghdad Have Reached Agreement on Oil Sector Management](#) (*Al Sharq Al-Awsat*). The Iraqi Prime Minister said to Asharq Al-Awsat: We started a road map to solve the problems between Baghdad and Erbil, starting with financing previous budgets. We collided with the decision of the Federal Court and headed to another procedure within the law and within the powers. We are on the cusp of presenting the budget, and we have reached an agreement with the Kurdistan region on the form of oil management and the financing of financial allocations in the budget law.

EGYPT AND NORTH AFRICA

12. [Sisi: Egypt Needs \\$100 Billion in Investments over 7 Years](#) (*The New Arab*). During his inspection tour of the army's "Silo Foods" factory, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said, "When you have a gap of \$30 billion annually, we still have to provide investments of no less than \$100 billion, and this needs 5 to 7 years. The state cannot do that without the help of the private sector, so we are working to encourage investors."
13. [Egypt is Holding Talks to Prevent Escalation Between Israel and the Palestinians During Ramadan](#) (*The New Arab*). Officials said that Egypt has intensified mediation efforts between Israel and the Palestinians in an attempt to stop violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank and prevent its spread to the Gaza Strip before the start of the holy month of Ramadan. Cairo this week hosted leaders from Hamas and Islamic Jihad, according to the officials. They said that talks were held with representatives of Israel earlier. Two Egyptian officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Cairo believes the situation could spiral out of control, particularly given Palestinian sensitivities about Israeli restrictions on access to Jerusalem during Ramadan, which begins in late March.
14. [Lavrov in Khartoum: We Seek a Multipolar World and Are Waiting for Sudan's Approval of a Naval Base](#) (*Al Jazeera*). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that Russia and Sudan agree to "move towards a multipolar world," noting that Moscow is awaiting Khartoum's approval at the parliamentary level regarding a planned naval base on the Red Sea. Lavrov praised "the role of the Sudanese authorities in facilitating the work of Russian companies and attracting more Russian investments to

Sudan." Regarding the European delegations visiting Sudan in conjunction with his visit, Lavrov saw that "these European efforts are trying to obstruct Russia's efforts to establish a multipolar world."

15. [Tunisian President Upgrades Diplomatic Relations with Damascus](#) (*Al Jazeera*). On Thursday Tunisian President Kais Saied decided to raise Tunisia's level of diplomatic representation in Syria. According to the Reuters news agency, since President Qais Saeed took control of almost all powers in July 2021, suspended parliament, and dismissed the government, Tunisia has sent signals indicating that it has changed its diplomatic policy with the Syrian regime.

GULF REGION

16. [Israel Defense Forces Chief Spotted on Unannounced Visit to Bahrain](#) (*Times Of Israel*). IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi paid a secret visit to Bahrain this week to attend a regional security conference held under the auspices of the US Central Command, with the head of the US Army's Central Command Erik Kurilla also in attendance.

ISRAEL

17. [Israel Will Strike Any Weapons Iran Sends to Syria Under Guise of Aid](#) (*Elaph*). An Israeli military official told Elaph that if Iran transferred equipment and weapons to Syria under the cover of humanitarian aid, it would receive a strict military response from Israel without hesitation. Information indicates that Israel has intensified its monitoring by air, land and sea of everything that Iran is transporting to Syria now, and that Israel's spy drones are working overtime to track the trucks and equipment Iran is sending to the victims of the devastating earthquake in Syria.