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GCC's 'Disaster Diplomacy' toward Türkiye and Syria

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Preface:

This report demonstrates all governmentally announced donations from the six Gulf States of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman to the earthquake victims of Syria and Turkey up to end of march. Furthermore, it combines information from governmental and non-governmental related organizations and charities that have announced their donation sums on their official platforms or via media sources. This data is important as it demonstrates the Gulf's states crisis response and its effectiveness in the region, while considering the regional instability and regional political dynamics. We hope that this report paves the way for further research on the topic and most important, on the effectiveness of foreign aid in times of crisis.

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GCC's 'Disaster Diplomacy' toward Türkiye and Syria

Devastating earthquakes hit southeastern Türkiye and northwestern Syria on 6 February 2023. The 7.8-magnitude earthquake was one of the strongest in the recent history of the region, killing tens of thousands of people, and leaving behind a massive humanitarian catastrophe. In addition to the loss of life, it has already displaced millions of people. The international community mobilized immediately after the news broke out, and the humanitarian response was initiated in both Türkiye and Syria. In addition to emergency aid, several countries dispatched search and rescue teams to assist the efforts to rescue the survivors trapped under the collapsed buildings. The magnitude of the earthquakes, and scale of destruction in its aftermath caused a global outcry, prompting civil society organizations around the world to launch aid and fundraising campaigns to assist the victims.

This report will investigate the disaster response by the six Gulf states toward the humanitarian crisis caused by the earthquake. The report will review each country's response to the crisis based on four main categories, namely official diplomatic response to the crisis, the official emergency financial and humanitarian aid, the aid offered by civil society, and finally, the infrastructural aid offered by the Gulf governments.¹ The conclusion section will discuss how the provision of disaster response has interacted with the regional political developments, considering that the disaster diplomacy was hardly devoid of political considerations.

The State of Qatar

Qatar's Diplomatic Response to the Earthquake

Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani called President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after the first earthquake that hit both Syria and Türkiye on 6 February 2023. In his phone call with President Erdoğan, Sheikh Tamim expressed his condolences to all victims of the crisis, while expressing his full support and solidarity to the country, as well as its citizens.²

Furthermore, Sheikh Tamim used the Twitter platform to express his deepest condolences to all those suffering in the aftermath of the earthquake. This was followed by multiple announcements via Twitter made by governmental entities such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar's National Development Fund, Qatar's Red Crescent and Qatar Charity, with information regarding the earthquake, action plans, as well as humanitarian aid and information infographics.

On 7 February 2023, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu received a call by the Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdelrahman Al Thani. In addition to expressing his condolences and his support, Sheikh Mohammed shared with Çavuşoğlu Qatar's action plan to assist the earthquake victims.³

Furthermore, on 7 February, the official spokesperson for the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Majid Mohammed Al-Ansari expressed his condolences, as well as

1 The data collected from open sources are updated as of end of March 2023

2 "Amir Holds Phone Call with Turkey President," The Peninsula, (February 6, 2023)

3 "Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Holds Phone Call with Turkish Foreign Minister," MOFA NEWS, (February 7, 2023)

announcing Qatar's rapid response and action plan. MOFA uploaded an infographic on Twitter that featured what was included in the first air bridge flight, which amounted to humanitarian aid, aid workers, shelters and more.

The official account of MOFA on Twitter played a large role in generating support through the international community and the Qatari civil society, by providing instant updates and disseminating statistics and infographic images. It also sought to fight misleading information. For instance, when multiple news outlets claimed that Türkiye had received more aid from the emergency response compared to the Syrian side, MOFA was quick to respond with a detailed image of what was being sent to Syria.

Meanwhile, on 12 February 2023, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani paid President Erdoğan a visit, making him the first head of state to travel to Türkiye after the earthquakes to provide support, solidarity and work on the rebuilding of the destroyed areas post-earthquake.⁴ Similar to their neighboring country Saudi Arabia, there were no official phone calls, or diplomatic visits, between the Qatari officials and the Syrian government. This was in line with their stance toward the Assad regime in Syria. Nonetheless, their stance on the Assad regime did not act as an obstacle to the aid sent by these countries to the victims of the earthquakes.

State-Level Relief Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

On 6 February 2023, the Qatari leadership was amongst the first to respond to the crisis and mobilize all efforts and resources into launching air flights to the areas struck by the earthquakes. The first air bridge flight launched from Qatar included humanitarian aid, food, medical supplies, shelters and winter clothing. This was in addition to 120 trained personnel for the rescue missions, as well 12 emergency vehicles. Furthermore, Qatar committed to providing 10,000 mobile homes for the victims of both Türkiye and Syria, which were originally used for the FIFA World Cup.⁵ The delivery of these homes through different cargo ships is under way.

Humanitarian aid included funds and food, shelters and medical supplies. Moreover, Qatar sent humanitarian rescue teams from Lekhwiya, the official police force, as well as doctors from Qatar's governmental hospitals.⁶ On 6 February 2023, hours after the earthquakes, Sheikh Tamim ordered the dispatching of a Lekhwiya team to assist in the search and rescue mission. The team was distributed amongst both Türkiye and Syria and remained there for two weeks. Furthermore, a team of doctors was also dispatched to the affected areas. Two medical convoys were sent to both Türkiye and Syria, which consisted of 25 doctors in total. The doctors conducted hundreds of operations, and helped in setting up field hospitals, as well as the operation of the hospitals on the ground, that were functioning in a catastrophic emergency mode.⁷ Qatar sent additional humanitarian air cargoes to Türkiye for emergency aid, which included mobile toilets, generators, sleeping bags and tents.⁸

4 "Qatari Emir meets Erdoğan for solidarity after earthquake," *Hürriyet Daily News* (February 12, 2023).

5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar @MOFAQATAR_EN (February 13, 2023)

6 Asmahan Qarjoui, "Qatar's Lekhwiya Concludes Search and Rescue Operations in Earthquake-Hit Turkey," *Doha News*, (February 12, 2023)

7 Ali Haj Suleiman and Husam Hezaber, "Doctors from Qatar, US Work to Save Quake Survivors in NW Syria," *Turkey-Syria Earthquake News | Al Jazeera* (Al Jazeera, February 18, 2023)

⁸ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/qatar-sends-3-additional-planes-of-earthquake-relief-to-turkiye/2825604>

Meanwhile, Qatar's National Fund for Development allocated separate resources to help the Syrian White Helmet organization's efforts, to help those affected by the earthquake on the Syrian side.⁹ On 11 February 2023, Mr. Yousef Bin Ahmad Al Kuwari, the Head of Qatar Charity Organization, announced the execution of the project "Maras", named for the city Kahramanmaraş in Türkiye, which was at the center of the earthquake region. This project aimed to rebuild a partial area of the devastated city, and since the destruction is so massive, no exact amount for the project cost was announced.¹⁰

According to Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari by mid-March, Qatari aid to both countries amounted to USD 68 million (247.2 million riyals). This aid was disbursed through the operations of Qatar Fund for Development, Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent Society. He noted that the total beneficiaries of the Qatari aid surpassed 2 million individuals.¹¹

Public-Level Response and Campaigns

As soon as the news confirmed the scale of the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, Qatar Charity announced allocating an urgent 1m USD from its Disaster Response Emergency Fund. This was quickly followed by four mobile clinics that were distributed between Türkiye and Syria, to provide urgent medical care, and shelter, as well as psychological help for the survivors.¹²

The Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA) launched a huge campaign with the help of multiple entities in Qatar, such as Qatar Red Crescent, Qatar Charity, as well as Qatar Television on 10 February 2023. In a few hours, around 100m Qatari riyals, which is equivalent to around 27.3m USD, was raised. A total of 50m QAR was donated by Sheikh Tamim. The campaign ended with 168m QAR, which is equivalent to 46m USD. This was later added to by the Qatar Fund for Development, so that the humanitarian fund totaled 253m, which amounts to 70m USD.¹³ There were several more initiatives taking place around Qatar, where people from civil society, as well as official charity organizations came together to collect and arrange aid packages that included medical supplies, food, clothing and shelter items.

Furthermore, Qatar Charity (QC) created a donation platform on its official website, as well as its mobile application, that facilitated the supplying of multiple forms of aid. In addition to monetary donations, QC opened the platform to financially sponsor orphans and families, build and rent homes, erect temporary shelters, and most importantly, sponsor post-trauma psychological support for the people in need.¹⁴

⁹ "Qatar Fund for Development supports Syria Civil Defence / the White Helmets rescue operations in Syria," Qatar Fund, (12 February, 2023)

¹⁰ "الزلازل بعد في سوريا ضمن خطة إعادة إعمار الأراضي المدمرة "مدينة الكرامة" قطر الخيرية تبدأ تنفيذ", The Peninsula, (February 12, 2023)

¹¹ "Qatar says 2 million beneficiaries from aid to quake victims in Türkiye, Syria," Anadolu Ajansı, (March 9, 2023).

¹² "QRCS Allocates \$1 Million from Disaster Response Fund for Initial Intervention in Northern Syria [En/Ar] - Syrian Arab Republic," ReliefWeb, February 8, 2023

¹³ "Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: QR 253 Million Qatar's Humanitarian Aid for the Earthquake Victims," Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Qatar, accessed March 2, 2023

¹⁴ "Qatar Stars League to Donate Qatar Cup Semifinals Ticket Revenue to Earthquake Victims," Anadolu Ajansı, accessed March 2, 2023

In addition to the ‘Oun wa Sanad Campaign’, as well as the other donation initiatives, Qatar’s Star League donated all the ticket proceeds from its semi-final soccer game held on 9 February 2023 to the victims of the earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye.¹⁵ This was augmented by a 2m USD donation by the Chairman of the European Club Association (ECA) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), Mr. Nasser Al Khulaifi, who donated directly to the “shoulder-to-shoulder” aid campaign, which was initiated by Türkiye’s Ministry of Youth and Sports, and aired over multiple international sports channels raising millions of dollars for the victims.¹⁶

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia’s Diplomatic Response to the Earthquake

Upon the news of the earthquake, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman placed a call to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to express his condolences over the tragedy.¹⁷ Moreover, King Mohammed Bin Salman called President Erdoğan and wished Türkiye, and all those injured, a speedy recovery from the earthquake. The phone calls were followed by a diplomatic cable sent from the Saudi Arabian leadership, which expressed their solidarity with the Turkish people.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia issued a message of condolences to all victims of the earthquake. This tweet came on behalf of the King and Crown Prince, as well as the Saudi Arabian leadership. Multiple other accounts also sent their condolences via Twitter, such as the King Salman Humanitarian Aid Center.¹⁹ As regards the official interaction with Syria, there were no on the record phone calls, or diplomatic visits, made by Saudi Arabian officials to the Syrian Government.

State-Level Relief Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was quick to join the humanitarian air bridge that was created to dispatch aid cargoes. Saudi Arabia sent 12 airplanes, of which 10 were sent to Türkiye, while two were sent to Aleppo Airport in Syria. Each airplane carried between 30 – 40 tonnes of food, medical supplies and tents.²⁰ Meanwhile, the Saudi government facilitated the travel requirements of a collaboration effort between the Saudi Red Crescent and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center that consisted of 95 relief workers, and well as 55 healthcare workers. As of mid-March, the Saudis had dispatched a total of 16 planeloads of humanitarian aid.²¹

It was assessed that in the wake of the catastrophic earthquakes that struck both Türkiye and Syria, thousands of residential and non-residential buildings would need to be rebuilt in both countries. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has announced its solidarity in this matter and

15 فزعة، عون وسند، تغيب متضرري زلزال سوريا وتركيا، ”العرب القطرية“ (February 10, 2023)

16 “European Club Association president donates over 2M for relief efforts in quake-hit Türkiye,” Anadolu Agency (March 2, 2023)

17 “Saudi king, crown prince offer condolences to Erdogan after Türkiye quake”, Arab News. February 7, 2023.

18 “Saudi Arabia expresses solidarity with Turkey, Syria following earthquake,” AlArabiya English. February 6, 2023.

19 Saudi Arabia Government Account @KSAmofaEN, February 7, 2023.

20 Alkhazen, Ibrahim, “ Saudi Arabia sends 14 air planes to quake-hit Türkiye, Syria” Anadolu Agency, February 25, 2023.

21 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/saudi-arabia-sends-new-aid-plane-to-quake-victims-in-turkiye/2845391>

committed to donate sums of money for the rebuilding and infrastructure projects. Al Ekhbariya News Channel announced that the Kingdom signed infrastructural contracts for the earthquake struck areas that amount to around 50 million US dollars.²²

Public-Level Response and Campaigns

Through an initiative called ‘Sahem,’ which translates as ‘contribute’, the Saudi government called upon its people to join in the popular donation campaign launched by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief). Over 3.1 million Saudis joined the campaign.²³ The campaign continues to raise funds for the victims of both Türkiye and Syria, as well as collecting other forms of donation, such as clothing, shelter equipment and food supplies.²⁴ As per the live updates, currently the funds raised reached 117m US dollars, which amounts to over SR 492 million.²⁵

The United Arab Emirates

UAE’s Diplomatic Response to the Earthquake

On 6 February 2023, the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan conveyed condolences and sympathies by personally calling the presidents of Türkiye and Syria.²⁶ In a similar vein, Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai, sent a cable of condolences to both presidents.²⁷ On 12 February, Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, paid a visit to the areas affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye's Kahramanmaraş province.²⁸ During his visit, the Minister also called on the headquarters of the UAE search and rescue (SAR) team in Türkiye, which was carrying out operations as part of the 'Gallant Knight/2' mission. Al Nahyan also held a meeting with Turkish Minister of Interior Suleyman Soylu during his field visit. On the same day, Foreign Minister Al-Nahyan travelled to Syria, where he met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, and visited the areas affected by the earthquakes in northwest Syria²⁹.

State-Level Relief Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

On 6 February 2023, President Al Nahyan directed the establishment of a field hospital and the deployment of two search and rescue teams, in addition to providing urgent relief supplies to those affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria.³⁰ The UAE President allocated a generous aid package of USD 100 million for earthquake relief, equally divided

22 “Saudi Arabia Signs Projects Worth \$48 Million for Quake-Struck Syria and Türkiye,” Arab News (Arabnews, February 20, 2023),

23 “Saudi Campaign's Donations to Relief Turkey and Syria Exceed above Sr440 Million,” Saudi Gazette (saudigazette, February 23, 2023),

24 “نبرعات السعوديين لمتضرري زلزال سوريا وتتركيا تتجاوز 18 مليون دولار حتى الآن,” RT Arabic (RT, February 8, 2023)

25 <https://sahem.ksrelief.org/Pages/ProgramDetails/f5ceca02-17a7-ed11-b84b-005056ac5a6e>

26 <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395303125571>

27 <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395303125601>

28 <https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2023/2/12/12-02-2023-uae-minister>

29 <https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2023/2/12/12-02-2023-uae-syria>

30 <http://www.wam.ae/ar/details/1395303125619>

between the two countries.³¹ Furthermore, on 15 February, an additional USD 50 million was announced for quake-affected people in Syria, with USD 20 million of the sum earmarked for the implementation of humanitarian projects, in response to the emergency appeal from the United Nations.³²

In support of this effort, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Ruler of Dubai, also ordered a significant humanitarian aid contribution of USD 13.6 million (Dh 50 million) to assist Syrian people affected by the earthquakes.³³ The aid was delivered in the form of ration parcels through the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives, and targeted the worst affected groups in Syria.³⁴

According to the state news agency report, regarding Syria, a total of 38 flights airlifted approximately 1,243 metric tonnes of food and medical aid, along with 2,893 tents, providing shelter for around 20,000 people.³⁵ A search and rescue (SAR) team consisting of 42 rescuers was dispatched to carry out SAR missions in the quake-hit areas. As for Türkiye, 32 flights airlifted medical equipment and supplies, along with 927 shelter materials, providing assistance to 5,000 beneficiaries. A field hospital was also opened in the İslahiye district of Gaziantep, with an inpatient ward comprising 50 fully-equipped beds, operating rooms, and a medical team of 75 doctors, nurses, and assistants. Another 200-bed hospital was later completed in the Hatay province. Additionally, a SAR team consisting of 92 rescuers was sent to carry out operations in Kahramanmaraş.

The national air carrier of the UAE, Emirates, played an essential role in the transfer of humanitarian aid, by establishing an air bridge with the International Humanitarian City (IHC). The first shipments arrived on 10 February, carrying humanitarian aid consisting of high thermal blankets and family tents from UNHCR. This was followed by World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Program (WFP) relief cargos of medical kits and shelter items, coordinated by the IHC in Dubai. Emirates SkyCargo dedicated cargo space for around 100 tonnes of humanitarian relief goods over the next two weeks, across its daily flight operations to Istanbul.³⁶ In a press statement, Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Emirates' Chairman and Chief Executive, emphasized the airline's commitment to providing support to those affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria.³⁷ The UAE's aid operation, titled "Brave Knights 2",³⁸ continued into March. So far, under this operation, 7,658 tonnes of aid have been delivered through 237 cargo planes and one cargo ship.

³¹ <https://www.zawya.com/en/world/middle-east/uae-responds-to-call-for-humanitarian-aid-in-syria-and-turkey-pjeioi3n>

³² <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395303129297>

³³ <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2023/02/07/Dubai-s-ruler-directs-13-million-in-Syrian-aid-after-deadly-earthquake#:~:text=Sheikh%20Mohammed%20bin%20Rashid%2C%20Ruler,thousands%20across%20the%20two%20countries.>

³⁴ <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/uae/sheikh-mohammed-orders-dh50-million-urgent-aid-for-earthquake-hit-syrian-people>

³⁵ <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/4161701/uae-allocates-additional-50-million-quake-aid-syria#:~:text=For%20Syria%2C%2038%20flights%20airlifted,mis%20sions%20in%20quake%20hit%20areas.>

³⁶ <https://www.emirates.com/media-centre/emirates-launches-humanitarian-airbridge-to-transport-emergency-aid-to-victims-of-the-turkey-syria-earthquake/>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ <https://twitter.com/modgovae/status/1640237950972620801>

Public-Level Response and Campaigns

The Emirates Red Crescent (ERC) called for participation in the "[Bridges of Goodness](#)" campaign, to assist in gathering and assembling relief supplies for quake-ravaged Türkiye and Syria. The campaign was supported by other civil society organizations like [Dubai Cares](#) and Sharjah International Charity.

On 17 February 2023, Sheikha Jawaher bint Muhammad Al-Qasimi, the wife of the Sharjah ruler, and the Chairperson of The Big Heart Foundation (TBHF) launched a three-hour telethon for fundraising, and collected 15.6 million dirhams (USD 4.2 million) for the quake victims³⁹. The fundraiser was in support of the UAE's 'Bridges of Goodness' initiative to aid earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria, and the funds would be used to provide immediate relief assistance, as well as supporting sustainable development projects, including housing, healthcare services and education. As of 5 March 2023, International Charity Organization had collected 72% of the targeted 4 million dirhams⁴⁰. A follow-up aid campaign in March sought to fill 15,000 relief boxes destined for Türkiye and Syria. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, along with his family, visited volunteers of the relief campaign to boost the campaign.⁴¹

Fujairah Charity Association and the Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi Foundation for Humanitarian Affairs allocated 770 tonnes of food, as part of the humanitarian airlift within the framework of the 'Bridges of Goodness' campaign.⁴² Thousands of people joined relief efforts through in kind or monetary donations.⁴³ Donation drives organized by the Turkish Embassy in Abu Dhabi and Turkish Consulate in Dubai also witnessed a massive outpouring of support from the public.

The State of Kuwait

The State of Kuwait acted swiftly to support Türkiye and Syria following the devastating earthquakes on 6 February 2023.⁴⁴ Kuwait carried out its humanitarian aid through the state and a number of active non-governmental organizations and foundations, such as the Kuwaiti Red Crescent (KRC). On the public level, Kuwaiti citizens immediately responded to Türkiye's emergency call, extending a helping hand by a rallying call for aid through charities and private companies.

Kuwait's Diplomatic Response to the Earthquakes

On 6 February 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait issued a statement, expressing the sympathy of the State of Kuwait, and its solidarity with the victims of the

³⁹ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230219-7-9-million-raised-for-quake-victims-in-quake-hit-turkiye-syria/>

⁴⁰ Bridges of goodness - International Charity Organization (ico.org.ae)

⁴¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-ae/news/others/dubais-ruling-family-visit-t%C3%BCrkiye-syria-earthquake-aid-event/ar-AA18ARc5>

⁴² <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395303133077>

⁴³ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/2023/02/11/thousands-turn-out-in-abu-dhabi-and-dubai-to-pack-turkey-earthquake-relief-aid/>

⁴⁴ Earthquake in Turkey and Syria kills thousands and devastates cities, The Guardian, 06 February 2023.

devastating earthquakes that hit Türkiye and Syria.⁴⁵ The same day, the cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, also offered condolences to the families of the victims of the devastating earthquake.⁴⁶ The cabinet tasked the Ministry of Social Affairs to launch a donation campaign, in collaboration with charities, non-government organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector, citizens and residents, to collect and send relief aid to the quake-affected people.

On 8 February, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah al-Jaber al-Sabah visited the Turkish Embassy and signed the book of condolences.⁴⁷ On 8 February, the foreign minister also held a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart, in which both sides discussed the implementation of the relief assistance and aid provided by Kuwait, with the directives of the Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.⁴⁸ The emir also ordered that no celebrations should be held at the final match of the Kuwait Crown Prince Tournament, citing sympathy and solidarity with the people of Türkiye and Syria.⁴⁹ The first official visit from Kuwait came when Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development May Jassem Al-Baghli visited Gaziantep province on 14 February, along with a military cargo plane carrying 40 tons of humanitarian aid materials.⁵⁰ While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinated the aid effort, the Kuwaiti army took responsibility for transporting aid and equipment.⁵¹

State-Level Relief Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

On 7 February, Kuwait created a humanitarian air corridor between Türkiye and Kuwait, allocating military cargo planes for the fast and efficient transportation of search and rescue teams, medical teams, health supplies, and other post-disaster needs.⁵² On 7 February, the first flight of Kuwait's humanitarian "Air Bridge" departed for Türkiye upon the orders of the emir. As of 1 March, within the scope of the air bridge, 13 military cargo planes⁵³ had delivered approximately 500 tons of humanitarian aid. Medical supplies, tents, blankets and food were delivered to Türkiye and Syria. The Gulf country also immediately dispatched a search and rescue team of 46 people, and an emergency medical team led by the Kuwait Fire Department with six vehicles.⁵⁴ Kuwaiti emergency teams arrived in Gaziantep on 7 February, to help with search and rescue efforts.⁵⁵ On 9 February, the Kuwaiti Cabinet pledged 30 million USD for relief efforts in Türkiye and Syria, \$15 million for each state.⁵⁶ As of late March, it has been reported that in response to the United Nation's UN appeal for USD 398 million for

45 Foreign Minister expresses the sympathy of the State of Kuwait, Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, 06 February 2023.

46 Cabinet sympathizes with families of quake victims in Türkiye, Syria, KUNA, 06 February 2023.

47 Foreign Minister visits Turkish embassy and offers condolences, Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, 08 February 2023.

48 Foreign Minister holds a call with his Turkish counterpart, Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, 08 February 2023.

49 سمو ولي العهد يأمر بإيقاف الاحتفالية المصاحبة لنهائي كأس سموه تضامناً مع تركيا وسورية, Al Rai Media, 06 February 2023.

50 Minister Al-Baghli expresses Kuwait's solidarity with Türkiye, Syria, KUNA, 14 February 2023.

51 First Kuwaiti flight carrying aid for earthquake victims takes off for Türkiye, Arab News, 07 February 2023.

52 First relief flight of Kuwait's humanitarian "air Bridge" departs to Türkiye, KUNA, 07 February 2023.

53 KRCS: Kuwaiti plane arrives with relief supplies to Türkiye, Syria, KUNA, 01 March 2023.

54 Kuwait continues to stand with Türkiye in earthquake disaster, Anadolu Agency, 17 February 2023.

55 Kuwaiti teams continue searching for survivors in quake-hit Türkiye, Anadolu Agency, 16 February 2023

56 Kuwait pledges USD 30 mln to relief effort in Türkiye, Syria, KUNA, 09 February 2023

urgent response in Syria and USD 1 billion for Türkiye, Kuwait's total pledge reached USD 90 million, topping the list.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ministry of Social Affairs approved 30 charities and NGOs to carry out humanitarian aid campaigns for the earthquake victims.⁵⁸ The KRC, which is considered a key aid channel in Kuwait, and is often the first responder to humanitarian relief operations, started a donation campaign on 7 February which lasted until 7 March, and signed an agreement with the Qatari and Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay) for a 1 million USD aid material commitment.⁵⁹ The KRC also signed a 5 million USD international cooperation deal to help Syrian victims of the earthquake.⁶⁰ Hundreds of tons of aid materials have been collected so far in the aid campaign, which was initiated by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Ankara. The Turkish Embassy in Kuwait continues to receive donations and delivers humanitarian aid collected within the framework of the aid campaign.

Public-Level Response and Campaigns

Under the theme, “Kuwait is with you”, a live donation program was organized on 10-11 February, which was supported by around 129,000 individuals, companies and charities, signaling the solidarity of the Kuwaiti people. The Kuwaiti fundraising campaign for the quake-struck people in Türkiye and Syria was broadcast on the state channel of Kuwait. It yielded 67.7 million USD (KD 20.7 million).⁶¹ In addition to the campaigns, many Kuwaiti charities have participated in food distribution and treatment activities in the disaster areas. The Namaa Charitable Society has distributed 8,000 meals and more than 3,000 blankets to people in the disaster areas in Türkiye and Syria.⁶² It also established a mobile clinic in the province of Antakya, to provide medical treatment. Al-Salam Humanitarian and Charity Society also donated more than 1 million USD to the victims of the quakes in Türkiye and Syria.⁶³ On 14 March, Kuwait extended the licenses for associations to collect donations for the victims of the earthquakes.⁶⁴

In addition, the Kuwaiti charities which were already active in Türkiye and Syria, even before the disaster, carried out campaigns. Besides Namaa and Al-Salam, 37 aid organizations were involved in aid operations, including Kuwait Society for Humanitarian Work, Rahma International Society, International Islamic Charity Organization, Kuwait Zakat House, Balad AlKhair Society, Elaaf Charity Association, and Al-Najat Charity. The private sector in the country, including financial institutions, telecommunications firms and more, also mobilized to donate to quake victims, and the country's leading companies pledged more than 30 million USD in donations. Burgan Bank, which is currently the third largest bank by assets in Kuwait,

⁵⁷ Kuwait pledges \$90m to support earthquake survivors in Türkiye, Syria, Arab news, 23 March 2023.

⁵⁸ Kuwaiti ministry supports efforts by 30 charities to aid victims of quake in Türkiye, Arab News, 08 February 2023.

⁵⁹ Turkish embassy in Kuwait continues bringing home quake donations, Anadolu Agency, 24 February 2023.

⁶⁰ Kuwait Red Crescent Society signs \$5m cooperation deal to aid Syrian earthquake victims, Arab News, 11 February 2023.

⁶¹ Kuwait raises USD 67.7 mln in aid of quake-hit Türkiye, Syria, KUNA, 12 February 2023.

⁶² Namaa Charity distributes aid to quake-struck people in Türkiye, Syria, KUNA, 09 February 2023.

⁶³ Al Salam Charity allocates KD 350.000 to earthquake-struck people in Syria, Türkiye, KUNA, 12 February 2023.

⁶⁴ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/kuwait-allows-more-donations-for-quake-victims-in-turkiye-syria/2845201>

announced donation of 2 million USD.⁶⁵ In the same vein, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said on 26 February that some nine trucks laden with 120 tons of humanitarian aid crossed into Syria, carrying food and healthcare supplies, inter alia.⁶⁶

The Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain's political leadership also mobilized resources in support of the earthquake-stricken Türkiye and Syria. Bahrain, through its state and the public, has extended all kinds of diplomatic, humanitarian and material support.

Bahrain's Diplomatic Response to the Earthquake

Bahrain issued condolences to the presidents of Syria and Türkiye. On 7 February, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani visited the Turkish Embassy and signed the book of condolences.⁶⁷ He also paid a visit to the Syrian Embassy in Manama, and signed the book of condolences.⁶⁸ On 7 February, the cabinet offered condolences to the families of the victims, underlining that, with the directives of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, urgent humanitarian relief aid would be provided to Syria and Türkiye.⁶⁹ On 28 February, Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF) Secretary-General Mustafa Al Sayed stated that Bahrain is implementing various projects to support the victims of the earthquakes in both countries.⁷⁰

State-Level Relief Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

Bahrain also dispatched a 35-person search and rescue team from Bahrain Defense Force (BDF), to be sent to the province of Hatay.⁷¹ Their rescue work was praised by the Turkish Ambassador in Bahrain.⁷² A Bahraini delegation was also dispatched to Syria, where they followed a first relief aid shipment delivered by Bahrain to Syria. Bahrain also sent a medical team to Syria, to contribute to the treatment of victims of the quakes.⁷³

Public-Level Response and Campaigns

On 10 February, Bahrain launched a donation campaign for the earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria. A week later, on 17 February, the country also held a telethon, under the

65 Burgan Bank Group comes to the aid of the earthquake victims with \$2mln donation, Zawya, 12 February 2023.

66 Kuwait sends truckloads of humanitarian aid to quake-hit Syria, KUNA, 26 February 2023.

67 Foreign Minister offers condolences to Türkiye, Bahrain News Agency, 07 February 2023.

68 Foreign Minister offers condolences to Syria, Bahrain News Agency, 07 February 2023.

69 Bahrain Cabinet Condoles with Quake-hit Syria and Turkey, The Daily Tribune News of Bahrain, 07 February 2023.

70 Bahrain's humanitarian commitment to earthquake victims stressed, Bahrain News Agency, 28 February 2023.

71 HH National Security Advisor bids farewell to Türkiye-bound search and rescue team, Bahrain News Agency, 11 February 2023.

72 Turkish Ambassador: Thank you Bahrain, Türkiye will never forget your solidarity, Bahrain News Agency, 18 February 2023.

73 Bahrain Sends Medical Team to Syrian Earthquake Victims, The Daily Tribune News of Bahrain, 27 February 2023.

theme, “The Day of Solidarity.” The Bahraini fundraising campaign was broadcast on Bahrain’s National TV for three hours and yielded 3.7 million USD.⁷⁴ Bahrain TV organized the event in cooperation with the Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF) under the auspices of a national campaign to support the earthquake victims. Both the citizens and the residents of Bahrain mobilized to gather much-needed supplies, such as hygiene products, clothes and medicines, for the affected places in Türkiye and Syria at the Turkish Embassy in Manama.⁷⁵ In the same vein, the Syrian embassy in Manama also accepted donations for the quake victims. Also, at the first Friday prayers after the earthquakes, funeral prayers in absentia for the victims of the earthquake in Syria and Türkiye were held in all mosques across Bahrain.⁷⁶

Sultanate of Oman

Oman’s Diplomatic Response to the Earthquake

The Sultanate of Oman expressed its condolences and sympathy to both Türkiye and Syria following the earthquake. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement⁷⁷ on 6 February 2023 conveying the country's condolences to the two nations. Moreover, the Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, personally made a telephone call⁷⁸ to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 7 February to express his condolences. Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi took to social media to express his condolences as well.⁷⁹ Additionally, Foreign Minister Albusaidi's tweet highlighted the country's commitment to offering all possible support to Türkiye and Syria, including the mobilization of search and rescue teams to assist with recovery efforts. This demonstrated Oman’s dedication to providing assistance and aid to other countries in times of crisis.

On 20 February 2023, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received Syrian Arab Republic President Bashar al Assad in Muscat. It marked the Syrian President’s first visit to Oman since the Syrian War started in 2011. According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Oman, Sultan Tarik “renewed his sympathy and condolences to the guest and the brotherly Syrian people on the devastating earthquake that hit Syria and the Republic of Türkiye.” He affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman would continue its support to help overcome this natural disaster.⁸⁰

State-Level Relief Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

Oman issued a royal decree on 8 February, to establish an air bridge to transport relief aid and medical supplies to Türkiye and Syria.⁸¹ Omani Civil Defense and Ambulance

⁷⁴ Three-hour “Solidarity Day” fundraiser telethon for Quake victims today, The Daily Tribune News of Bahrain, 17 February 2023.

⁷⁵ Bahrain Rallies to help as quake toll passes 21,000, The Daily Tribune News of Bahrain, 10 February 2023.

⁷⁶ Mosques in Bahrain offer absentee prayers for Syria, Turkey quake victims, Bahrain News Agency, 10 February 2023.

⁷⁷ <https://fm.gov.om/oman-sends-condolences-to-turkey-and-syria-over-earthquake/>

⁷⁸ <https://fm.gov.om/hm-sultan-haitham-and-turkish-president/>

⁷⁹ Badr Albusaidi - بدر البوسعيدي Twitter'da: "Heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives or been injured in the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey. May they find strength in the coming days. We are offering all we can in support of both countries, and our search and rescue teams are mobilised." / Twitter

⁸⁰ His Majesty receives Syrian President - FM.gov.om

⁸¹ <https://fm.gov.om/by-royal-order-oman-launches-airbridge-to-turkish-and-syrian-earthquake-zone/>

Authority also sent a search and rescue team to participate in global operations in southern Türkiye. The rescue team from Oman set up camp in Türkiye's southern province of Hatay, to provide search and rescue operations and medical care to the injured.⁸² On 12 February, Omani Organization for Charitable Activities received a financial donation worth 160,000 Omani riyals from the Omani National Engineering and Investment Company (ONIC), as part of aid campaign.⁸³

Public-Level Response and Campaigns

The Omani Organization for Charitable Activities received in-kind donations from different institutions, including schools, in support of the donation campaign for those affected by the earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye.⁸⁴ As of 20 February, the total amount of aid donations was around 400,000 Omani Riyals (approximately USD 1 million).⁸⁵ According to the online donation portal www.donate.om, the total money received online reached 154,129 Omani Riyals between 6 and 19 February. 'Pain and hope to help those affected by the earthquake in Syria and Türkiye' campaign launched by Dar Al Atta'a collected 76,722 Omani Riyals, and the Oman Charitable Organization (OCO) raised 77,407 Omani Riyals. The OCO also said that it received 220,000 Omani Riyals from the Omani National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) for relief in Syria and Türkiye, with total donations reaching 373,629 Omani Riyals. In support of the aid campaigns, several influential figures including the Omani writer and journalist Hamoud Al-Touqi,⁸⁶ called on people to make donations. The Embassy of Türkiye in Muscat also announced a relief campaign in support of earthquake victims.⁸⁷

Evaluation and Conclusion

The massive destruction caused by the earthquakes far surpassed the emergency response capability of Türkiye and Syria. In response to the calls for assistance, international aid was mobilized immediately. The rapid dispatch of search and rescue teams, humanitarian aid, medical assistance and other forms of financial and material support was quite understandable considering the magnitude and scale of destruction. Humanitarianism is a strong force that shapes states' reactions to such international events, especially considering the wide coverage of the earthquake in the conventional and online news media, which created public pressure on the governments to act.

Arab Gulf countries have emerged as major actors in global humanitarian regime and relief efforts, notwithstanding differences in priority and approach among them. Through official and private channels, they have provided various forms of support to other countries throughout the world, including development assistance and humanitarian aid. They have past

⁸² <https://timesofoman.com/article/126806-team-from-oman-carrying-out-relief-rescue-in-turkey>

⁸³ <https://oco.org.om/oco/2023/02/12/%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%b1%d8%b9-%d9%85%d9%86-%d8%b4%d8%b1%d9%83%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%88%d9%86%d9%83-%d9%84%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b6%d8%b1%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%b2%d9%84%d8%b2%d8%a7%d9%84-%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d9%88/>

⁸⁴ https://oco.org.om/oco/2023/02/15/donations_1/

⁸⁵ <https://arabiandaily.com/nearly-ro-400000-raised-for-turkey-syria-earthquake-victims/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/gulf-states-extend-helping-hand-to-earthquake-victims-in-turkiye-syria/2812974>

⁸⁷ <https://www.muscatdaily.com/2023/02/08/oman-sets-up-air-corridor-to-send-aid-to-turkey-syria/>

experience in assisting those in need in conflict zones, those affected by natural disasters or medical emergencies, or in case of refugee movements. Traditionally the main recipient of humanitarian or developmental aid originating from the Gulf countries has been the Middle Eastern and North African countries, irrespective of their global operations. Considering this background, it was no surprise that they quickly mobilized major amounts of financial and material disaster relief.

As much as it is driven by humanitarian motivations and feelings of solidarity, aid is rarely disassociated from political considerations. Disaster relief responses or the provision of humanitarian aid are often used by countries with broader political factors in mind. More often than not, countries instrumentalize such moments of humanitarianism by employing disaster response for the betterment of their image internationally, or in order to bolster political ties with the outside world or specific target countries. Indeed, it is not uncommon that such massive humanitarian disasters have a pacifying impact on interstate relations. The sympathy created by human suffering can trigger disaster diplomacy, which helps downgrade political disagreements. Therefore, beyond humanitarianism, disaster diplomacy is a major factor shaping how countries respond to major catastrophic events.

The earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria occurred during one of the very critical turning points in Middle Eastern affairs. As a result, the emergency response from the neighbors and international actors became immediately mired in disaster diplomacy considerations. There were definitely such moments where disaster diplomacy was fully at work. The Turkish-Armenian border was temporarily opened for the delivery of aid, after 30 years of closure. The dynamics of escalation that had dominated Turkish-Greece relations were replaced by a more friendly course in the two countries' relationship. Türkiye also used the momentum generated by the post-earthquake environment to consolidate the normalization process with Egypt that was already under way.

A major item on the regional agenda prior to the earthquake was the regional wave of normalization, which has dominated discussions since 2020. The disaster diplomacy seems to have overlapped with the ongoing normalization process regionally. In addition to the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid, visits to the countries affected by the earthquakes served as important occasions not only to demonstrate solidarity but also reflected the underlying political dynamics. Indeed, while it may be farfetched to claim that aid has been politicized, nonetheless it was not independent of the regional political dynamics either.

Türkiye's already close ties with Qatar were furthered in this process, which was undergirded by the visit of the Emir, who was the first foreign leader to visit Türkiye in the aftermath of the disaster. For its part, Türkiye had already taken steps to mend fences with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The disaster diplomacy that succeeded the earthquakes provided an opportunity to move faster with the normalization agenda. Consequently, the willingness of Saudi Arabia and UAE to continue on the path of normalization with Türkiye provided further motivation for their rapid deployment of disaster relief assistance.

In terms of assistance to Syria, again political considerations came to the fore. Türkiye had already been a major hub for the cross-border international humanitarian assistance to Syria, prior to the earthquakes. As the tragedy affected mainly Aleppo and Idlib governorates, Türkiye again came to the fore as an entry point for international aid operations. While the tensions had been high along the border areas, the earthquakes imposed an urgency to move beyond such obstacles, as humanitarianism somehow triumphed over geopolitics. Indeed, the

existing sanctions on the Assad regime complicated the provision of emergency relief operations, which had been overcome through ad hoc arrangements. The Biden administration temporarily eased the sanctions while other international donors also mobilized for earthquake relief.

The Gulf countries' disaster diplomacy too was closely related to the regional realities. In terms of reaching out to the earthquake victims, all Gulf countries expanded their emergency assistance, to which Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad also responded positively. In an official statement, he thanked his "Arab Brothers" for their quick action, solidarity and generosity toward his country and people.⁸⁸ Beyond humanitarianism, however, political differences among Gulf countries resurfaced. When it comes to interactions with the regime at a diplomatic level, their response was framed by their previous positions on the normalization with the Assad regime which had already taken shape. Qatar and Saudi Arabia mobilized emergency relief, despite their lack of political ties, but they fell short of moving toward political dialogue with the regime. The Gulf countries which were advocating the ending of the regime's isolation and reinstating diplomatic ties capitalized on the post-earthquake climate. In addition to visits to Syria, the warm welcome Assad received in Oman and later in the UAE were indicative of how disaster diplomacy could open a new watershed in regional affairs.

While the Gulf countries rose to the challenge of an emergency disaster response, now is the time for post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation. They have experience in funding the reconstruction and developmental projects in the wake of natural and man-made disasters. Now that the initial response is over, the attention has already shifted toward provision of sustained humanitarian assistance, as well as the question of how to rebuild the areas destroyed by the earthquakes. In March 2023, the European Union organized a major donor conference for fundraising and coordination of the response. Perhaps it might be high time the Gulf countries too move in the direction of coordinating their response at the GCC level. While their emergency response has been mainly unilateral, regionalizing the post-disaster reconstruction might lend a new momentum to intra-GCC normalization.

⁸⁸ "Syria's Assad thanks 'Arab brothers' as quakes stir aid diplomacy," Turkey-Syria Earthquake News, Al Jazeera (February 17, 2023)