

What Is Wrong with the “Humanitarian Crossing” into Syria?

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A friend sent me a link to a Foreign Policy [news story](#) about the Turkey / Syria border crossing at Bab al Hawa. He asked, “Is this accurate?” What could be wrong with humanitarian aid?

There have been many such stories, both short and [long](#). The essence of them all in western media is that Bab al Hawa must be kept open for humanitarian reasons. Many of the articles castigate Russia or any other country such as China which might vote to block a renewal of United Nations authorization of the border crossing.

UPDATE

On Friday July 9 the UN Security Council unanimously agreed to a one year extension of the Bab al Hawa crossing. As part of the [agreement](#), the UN Secretary General needs to report regularly on what is happening with the aid going into the Al Qaeda dominated zone. Evidently Russia and China thought the time was not right to insist on principle. The problems outlined in this article remain true.

There are important facts which western media stories typically leave out or distort. Here are some reasons why the Bab al Hawa border crossing should NOT be renewed.

- The aid is supporting Syria’s version of Al Qaeda, Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS). They control the region on the Syrian side of the crossing. They are the foreigners and hard-core extremists who invaded Idlib from Turkey in 2015 plus those who left Aleppo and other cities when the militants were defeated by the Syrian army. Even if the United Nations inspects all the trucks going into Idlib province in northern Syria, the truck deliveries are ultimately controlled by HTS (formerly called Jabhat al Nusra).
- The aid is effectively supporting the partition of Syria. Idlib province, and the

militants which govern there, seek to separate permanently from Syria. They are attempting to [Turkify the region](#) through sectarian education, promoting the Turkish language and even using Turkish currency.

- The aid violates the [United Nations Charter](#) which says all member countries shall refrain from threatening the territorial integrity of another member state. Turkey and the USA are the major violators, since they have military troops illegally occupying Syrian lands. But it is a shame for the United Nations to be complicit through the authorization of aid to the breakaway Al Qaeda dominated region.
- The aid to northwest Syria is prolonging the conflict instead of helping end it. It is evident that after failing to militarily overthrow the Syrian government, western powers are now using other means to attack Damascus. They continue to interfere in Syria's domestic affairs. Led by the USA, they have economically attacked Syria while pouring support into the breakaway northwest region.
- Western aid to the Al Qaeda dominated region distracts from the pain, damage, and destruction which US and European sanctions have wreaked on most Syrians. [The Caesar sanctions](#), imposed by the USA amid the Covid19 pandemic, have had a horrendous impact. By outlawing the Syrian Central Bank and making it nearly impossible to trade with Syria, US sanctions have undermined the Syrian currency. Many goods have increased in price by 4 and 5 and even 10 times. Like a modern-day gangster, the US has been openly stealing the oil and wheat from eastern Syria. The US has attacked the electrical grid by prohibiting parts, engineering, or construction to repair or rebuild power plants. "Caesar" sanctions prohibit support for anything government related including schools and hospitals.

According to a December 2020 United Nations General Assembly [resolution](#), Unilateral Coercive Measures such as the "Caesar" law are illegal and a violation of the UN Charter, international law, and international human rights law. Yet because of US global economic dominance, it is still in force and the US claims the right to prohibit any country, company, or individual from supporting or trading with Syria. This is what makes US claims to humanitarian concern so ironic and cynical.

- The western aid to Syrians through Bab al Hawa is discriminatory and serves to divide the country. Before the conflict Idlib province had a total population of 1.5 million persons and the number is LESS today. Much of the population left when the province was over-run by extremists. Some fled into Turkey; others fled to Latakia province to the west. Some opposition militants and their supporters chose to go to Idlib rather than reconcile with the government. For example, when East Aleppo was taken back by government soldiers, there were about [thousands of militants and their families transferred](#) – but not hundreds of thousands as was incorrectly predicted in the wave of propaganda before East Aleppo was recaptured. So, in contrast with some estimates, there are one million or fewer persons in Idlib.

The civilians in north west Syria are being effectively bribed to live there through [cash payments](#) and vastly greater relief. One thousand trucks per month are taking aid into northwest Syria. As noted in in [OCHA document](#), people are "incentivized by access to services and livelihoods." This is understandable but the divisive effect is also clear.

In contrast, there are between 14 and 17 million Syrians living elsewhere in Syria. They are receiving little if any of the aid. Instead, they are bearing the brunt of vicious US unilateral coercive measures.

- Aid to civilians in Syria should be distributed fairly and proportionally. This can be done with monitoring or supervision by a respected international agency such as the Red Crescent / Red Cross. In keeping with the UN Charter, western countries should respect the political independence of the Syrian government and stop their continuing interference and efforts at “regime change”.

Weaponizing “Humanitarian Aid”

There are many western NGOs crying out about Bab al Hawa. For example, the International Rescue Committee has raised many millions of dollars which should have gone to help all Syrians but has not. Their literature should be carefully considered however because – according to their 2019 tax returns – western governments are their main funders at \$440M in 2019. The CEO, David Miliband, is well compensated at over \$1 million per year. We can be sure they keep on message with the US State Department.

Humanitarian aid is big business and has been politically weaponized. While there are many well-meaning people working hard, there political agendas at work.

If Russia and other nations in the UN Security Council veto the extension of the Bab al Hawa crossing, there are good reasons why.

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Featured image: Bab El Hawa boarder crossing from Turkey to Syria in March 2006. (CC BY 3.0)

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