

Earthquake near Iran-Iraq border kills hundreds and injures thousands

By Trévon Austin
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On Sunday night, an earthquake centered near the border between Iran and Iraq killed at least 452 people and injured over 7,000. The 7.3 magnitude earthquake sent aftershocks across the region, being felt as far away as Pakistan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Turkey, news agencies in those countries reported.

The disaster has been acknowledged as the deadliest earthquake this year, surpassing September's 7.1 magnitude earthquake in Mexico that killed over 200 people.

The epicenter of the quake was near Ezgeleh, Iran, about 135 miles northeast of Baghdad. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the quake was at a depth of 23 km (just over 14 miles), which is considered shallow.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard was sent to affected areas to help with rescue efforts, according to Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency.

Mansoureh Bagheri, a spokeswoman for the Iranian Red Crescent Society in Tehran, reported that the relief agency was performing rescue efforts in the more hard-hit areas. The organization has reportedly sent sniffer dogs, debris-removal teams, and is offering emergency shelter and treatment.

Aid agencies in Iran have reported at least 70,000 people are in need of shelter. Running water and electricity are unavailable in some cities. After buildings collapsed, tens of thousands were forced to spend hours outdoors in cold temperatures. On the second night of recovery efforts, thousands are still expected to sleep outside.

Landslides have made efforts to reach those affected in rural areas more difficult. In Northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, four people were killed when a landslide caused rocks to damage a nearby dam. Cracks have been reported in the dam, and

nearby residents have been reportedly told to evacuate from the area.

According to the semiofficial Iranian Students News Agency (INSA), most of the casualties originate from Pol-e Zahab, a city in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah. At least 216 people have died in the city, which has a population of about 30,000, and its main hospital is not fully functioning.

Images provided by the INSA show the levels of carnage caused by the quake. A particular set of photographs show the near destruction of an apartment block recently built for low-income families.

The collapse of infrastructure has rendered drinking water in some areas unsafe. According to the BBC, many buildings and homes in the predominantly Kurdish mountainous region are made of mud and are particularly vulnerable to earthquakes.

According to the *New York Times*, Iran's president from 2005 to 2013, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, introduced a government program to build low-income housing in poorer areas of Iran, including Pol-e Zahab. Following the quake, his political opponents claim that many of the buildings were poorly constructed, but others say the buildings were on a fault line, and that nothing could have been done.

Officials in Iraq and Iran have released statements calling for a swift response.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani planned to travel to Kermanshah to oversee rescue work on Tuesday, Iranian state TV reported. Officials from the Health Ministry and the commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Brig. Gen. Mohammed Ali Jafari, traveled to the area as well.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi tweeted Monday that he had "instructed civil defense teams and health and aid agencies to do all that they can to

provide assistance” to those affected by the quake.

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei sent messages of condolences and urged military and civilian help to be dispatched to quake victims.

Amid relief efforts, many claim that rescue operation forces are not adequately equipped. Images on social media have shown rescue workers searching through the rubble without flashlights, forced to use their cellphones for light.

The Iranian government newspaper tweeted a video in which a resident of Pol-e Zahab complained that no help had come.

“There has been no help yet, neither food nor water, no clothing, no tents, there is nothing,” he said. Collapsed buildings can be seen in the background. “There are no facilities yet. We’ve slept outside since last night. This is the condition of our homes. Our electricity, water, gas, phone lines are out, everything is completely out, the whole city has been destroyed, it is wrecked.”

Iranian citizens have faced lackluster rescue efforts before. In 2012, a double earthquake in the northern region of Iran killed over 300 people. Lacking a proper response of the government, many Iranian youth and others launched a charity effort to gather money and goods, and many traveled to rural areas that they charged had been ignored by the government.

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