

Afghanistan Hit by Massive Earthquake Magnifying Existing Crisis

Humanitarian challenges to worsen as western states hold back assistance needed

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In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

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During the early morning hours of June 22, a 5.9 earthquake struck the southeastern region of Afghanistan reportedly killing in excess of 1,000 people.

This natural disaster will only compound the existing problems inside the Central Asian nation in the aftermath of a 20-year occupation by the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The earthquake saw the worst damage in Paktika and Khost provinces where lack of infrastructure, substandard housing and buildings contributed to the large numbers of deaths and injuries. Reports indicate that this was the most devastating earthquake in Afghanistan in 20 years.

Of the more than 1,000 killed it is estimated that 121 are children. However, there will undoubtedly be more casualties as the relief efforts continue. Thousands have been left homeless lacking the resources to relocate to other areas and rebuild their homes.

Aid agencies from Pakistan, Qatar, China, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and India have already pledged assistance to the country. Damage to the water systems has raised the possibility of a large cholera outbreak. Residents of the impacted provinces are desperate for food, water, shelter, blankets and medicines.

Neighboring Pakistan announced that the government in Islamabad has opened up the borders in the northwest in order to facilitate transportation of injured Afghans seeking medical treatment in hospitals. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan telephoned the acting Afghan Prime Minister Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund, to pledge continuing support for their people amid this humanitarian crisis.

Even prior to the recent earthquake, the country was facing acute shortages of food and

other essentials. The withdrawal of Pentagon military forces during August 2021, was accompanied by the freezing of Afghanistan assets being held in U.S. banks.

Afghanistan's Taliban-dominated government has not been recognized by the United Nations and other regional blocs. No country has established diplomatic relations since the rapid departure of the Pentagon, State Department and their surrogates employed during the occupation.



World Food Program trucks delivering aid to Afghanistan (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

Immediately after the earthquake, the United Nations [World Food Program \(WFP\)](#) sent 18 trucks with supplies to address the dire situation. According to a statement made by the Deputy Country Director of the WFP Gordon Craig:

“The Afghan people are already facing an unprecedented crisis following decades of conflict, severe drought and an economic downturn. The earthquake will only add to the already massive humanitarian needs they endure daily, including for the nearly 19 million people across the country who face acute hunger and require assistance. Our teams rapidly mobilized and will continue to provide support to help affected families get through this latest tragedy.”

Other media reports illustrate the damage done by the earthquake and the lack of capacity on the part of the Kabul government to address the situation. Outside of Paktika and Khost provinces the overall well-being of the people cannot be considered much better. The WFP has categorized Afghanistan as one of the most urgent emergencies internationally. There are famine-like situations being reported among 20,000 people in Ghor province, while at the same time, nearly 50% of the estimated country population of 40 million people do not have enough to eat. Economic distress fueled by successive seasons of drought, sharp rises in global food prices and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic contributes to the suffering of millions of people.

[Al Jazeera noted](#) in a report on the earthquake that:

“Shabir Ahmad Osmani, director of Khost’s information and culture directorate, said the Islamic Emirate is grateful for the help coming in from both inside and outside Afghanistan, but that all efforts should focus on providing victims with what they need to return to their normal lives. ‘Whether the aid is big or small, what matters the most, is that support should be coming into rebuild these people’s homes,’ he told Al Jazeera outside the Khost Airport, where international assistance is starting to be flown in. Nadima Noor, an Afghan-Canadian influencer and aid worker, spent the last few days travelling around Urgan and Gaiyan in Paktika province. She said the destruction she witnessed was unfathomable.”

Role of the U.S. Government in the Underdevelopment of Afghanistan

Sanctions imposed on Afghanistan are preventing Kabul’s re-entry into the world financial system. Shortages have become commonplace while the Taliban government, which seized control of Kabul after the announced departure of the occupation troops by President Joe Biden, has continued to request the return of at least \$7 billion in currency being held up by the U.S. administration.

The continuing humanitarian crisis compounded by the earthquake, cannot be properly analyzed without assessing the policy of Washington. President Biden says nothing in regard to the famine-like situation in Afghanistan. While the international community has begun to call for the release of the frozen assets along with increased food and medical relief.

Business Insider in a recent report uses a figure of \$9.5 billion in Afghan assets which are under the control of the Biden administration. The president says that \$7 billion has already been unfrozen to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan while declaring that half of this amount would be given to the families of victims killed in terrorist acts involving people in the U.S. This would theoretically leave \$2.5 billion owed to the Taliban government.

Nonetheless, [Business Insider](#) says that Afghan officials are persistent in demanding that the U.S. release the funds which belong to the new government in Kabul. This article emphasizes:

“The UN’s deputy special representative and resident humanitarian co-ordinator in Kabul, Ramiz Alakbarov, said Wednesday (June 22) that Afghanistan immediately needed \$15 million to respond to the crisis. The U.S. embassy in Kabul tweeted Wednesday that the U.S. was ‘already responding to the Afghan earthquake working with partners to deploy medical teams to provide immediate care to people affected.’ In a tweet Wednesday the aid agency Afghans for a Better Tomorrow called on Biden to release the frozen funds, saying ‘aid organizations have long cited the frozen assets as well as the sanctions regime as insurmountable barriers to ensuring Afghans receiving basic needs and emergency aid.’”

Obviously, the Biden administration does not want the Afghan government to succeed in effectively addressing the food, water and health crises now gripping the country. Moreover, the reemergence of Afghanistan as a viable state, will be seriously hampered as the blockade of the country continues at the aegis of Washington. The State Department issued a press release in the hours following the earthquake saying it stood with the people of Afghanistan in their efforts to address the humanitarian disaster and to rebuild. Despite these pronouncements, the character of U.S. policy towards Kabul represents the continuation of the war of occupation by economic and diplomatic means.

In response, the People's Republic of China rebuked the Biden administration over its statement issued after the earthquake. In the same above-mentioned article cited from Al Jazeera, it says: "Hua Chunying, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry tweeted on Friday (June 24): 'Saw U.S. officials claim that the U.S. 'stands with the people of Afghanistan'. Then why not give the \$7 billion back to the Afghans? Beijing will provide humanitarian aid worth \$7.5m (50 million yuan) to Afghanistan. The aid will include tents, towels, beds and other materials, the foreign ministry said in a statement on its website on Saturday (June 25).

Contrastingly from Afghanistan, much attention is being paid to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine where the Biden administration is funding and coordinating a war against the Russian Federation and its allies inside the country. The social situation in Afghanistan is rarely shown on mainstream U.S.-based media networks. Without other sources of information, the assumption would be that the most important geopolitical conflict in the world today is taking place in Ukraine.

As the U.S. has failed both militarily and diplomatically in Afghanistan, a similar situation is rapidly developing in regard to the status of the Russian Federation internationally. After imposing unprecedented sanctions against Moscow by the U.S. and the European Union (EU), the government of President Vladimir Putin has not collapsed politically or economically. In fact, the Russian government has been strengthened in many areas due to the country's production and distribution of key energy and agricultural resources.

The working and oppressed peoples of the U.S. have been plunged into an inflationary spiral witnessing the largest price increases for petroleum, food, rents and other commodities in over four decades. People will have to view these domestic issues in relation to the Pentagon budget and the constant thirst of sanctions and war.

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Featured image: Afghanistan damage from the earthquake (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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