

# Death toll in Afghanistan earthquake exceeds 1,400

**Kevin Reed****2 September 2025**

A devastating earthquake struck Afghanistan late Sunday unleashing destruction and a death toll surpassing 1,400 and climbing as emergency operations work against obstacles to provide search and rescue services and aid to the isolated population.

The quake is among the country's deadliest natural disasters, with a 6.0-magnitude that struck at approximately 11:47 p.m. local time. The epicenter was located near the border of Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, roughly 27 kilometers (almost 17 miles) from Jalalabad, Afghanistan's fifth largest city.

The earthquake's depth was a shallow 8 kilometers (5 miles), making it particularly destructive, and its tremors were felt hundreds of kilometers away, including in the capital city of Kabul and across the Pakistani border. In neighboring Kunar province, as well as adjacent Laghman and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, mud-and-timber homes offered little resistance to the ground's movement.

According to Taliban authorities, over 1,400 are confirmed dead, more than 3,100 are injured and at least 5,400 homes have been destroyed. Entire villages in Kunar province are reported to have been flattened, with countless people remaining trapped beneath the debris.

Rescue operations are hampered by rough terrain and landslides, which blocked roads into the worst-hit districts and prompted authorities to deploy commando units and helicopters for evacuation. The destruction is overwhelming, with food scarce, medical supplies insufficient, and the transportation of the wounded and survivors possible only on foot or by makeshift stretchers.

Eyewitness reports have revealed the depth of the catastrophe. Residents in Dara Noor, near Jalalabad, described frantic searches for loved ones beneath the wreckage, using shovels, their bare hands and whatever tools they could find to reach the trapped. "I lost my wife and two sons. I am half-buried and try to get others out," one survivor told CNN.

Ahmadzai, a doctor with Kabul Asia Hospital dispatched to the area, told CBS News:

"The destruction is overwhelming. Entire villages have been flattened, and people are still trapped under the rubble of collapsed homes. Roads are blocked, making it nearly impossible to move supplies or evacuate the wounded. The situation is desperate. Food is scarce, medical help is insufficient, and the only effective way to deliver assistance is by helicopter. Without air support, reaching these communities is nearly impossible."

Rescue efforts are being carried out with only basic tools, and this has meant that bodies and survivors alike are being recovered at a very slow pace. Many people were asleep when the earthquake struck, further adding to the casualty toll as mud-brick and timber homes collapsed upon them. "These are life-and-death decisions while we race against time to reach people," said UN Resident Coordinator Indrika Ratwatte.

Aid groups such as World Vision, CARE and UNICEF have reported that mud and timber structures in several villages, especially in Chawki and Nurgal in Kunar, simply collapsed, burying entire families. Many who survived the quake later died while waiting for rescue teams, as both terrain and weather—including flash floods just days before—conspired to block humanitarian efforts.

A report by BBC revealed the extraordinary difficulties in getting information from the quake zone. Landslides have blocked access roads, while infrastructure devastation, including the collapse of communications systems, has left much of the area cut off. The BBC report said:

"It's as difficult to reach those places as it is to get information out. In previous Afghan earthquakes, casualty figures have differed as the days have gone by, but it's possible that we'll never truly know the full scale of this disaster."

Earthquakes are frequent in Afghanistan because the

country sits atop a series of active fault lines created by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates. This collision causes intense crustal deformation, resulting in numerous major faults, such as the Chaman Fault system, which runs through eastern Afghanistan and produces large, shallow and destructive earthquakes.

Afghanistan's northeastern and eastern regions have experienced powerful, shallow quakes in recent decades. The nation had deadly earthquakes in 1998 (4,000 dead in Takhar Province), 2002 (over 1,000 dead in Nahrin), 2015 (over 400 dead), and most recently the 2022 Paktika quake (over 1,000 dead).

However, Afghanistan's vulnerability to devastating quakes has not only a geological but a social and political source. The overwhelming majority of homes are from materials that offer no protection against seismic shocks. The lack of basic infrastructure, roads, medical facilities and engineering expertise, itself a legacy of decades of destruction and underinvestment, intensifies the impact of moderate disasters.

The country's exposure to repeated disasters is inseparable from four decades of war and occupation led by the US and its allies. US imperialism invaded the country in 2001, launched a 20-year occupation and unleashed a campaign of bombing, night raids and assassinations that not only killed tens of thousands of civilians but destroyed basic infrastructure, healthcare and agriculture.

The withdrawal of US and NATO troops in August 2021 has precipitated an economic crisis amid an intensification of sanctions, isolation and asset seizures.

On September 1, 2025—four years to the day after the final US withdrawal—the Trump administration announced a halt to all remaining US humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, deepening the already catastrophic situation. Notably, Afghanistan depends on foreign aid for 80 percent of its budget for schools, hospitals and food distribution.

Making matters worse, the US seized over \$7 billion in Afghanistan central bank assets after the Taliban resumed power, freezing the country out of the global financial system and triggering mass unemployment, hunger and the collapse of public health. The World Food Programme and humanitarian organizations have repeatedly warned of starvation on a vast scale, compounded by each new disaster.

The international response to the earthquake on Sunday exposes the deadly consequences of US imperialist policy. Afghans searching for survivors in Nurgal, Kunar,

Nangarhar and Laghman face both the physical destruction wrought by the quake but also the deliberate devastation brought by decades of war, occupation and economic strangulation.

Efforts to provide emergency assistance—with Taliban authorities, aid groups, and desperate families pleading for international help—are prevented by the broader framework of sanctions and political control imposed by the imperialist powers.

As of this writing, the US government has not issued a formal statement pledging aid or support to Afghanistan following the earthquake. The US State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs instead expressed "heartfelt condolences to the Afghan people" via a post on X (formerly Twitter).

Meanwhile, Britain has offered a paltry emergency funding package of £1 million (approximately \$1.3 million) for earthquake aid, with funds split between the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Other European countries, coordinated through the European Commission, have pledged about €1 million (approximately \$1.16 million) in humanitarian emergency funding, in addition to tents, clothing, medical supplies and other essential aid to the affected areas.

The earthquake in eastern Afghanistan is both a natural disaster of immense scale and an indictment of imperialism's criminal legacy in the country. As the death toll rises and rescue workers struggle to reach the devastated villages of Nangarhar, Kunar and beyond, the roots of the catastrophe lie fundamentally in the long-term effects of imperialist war, occupation, plunder and the deliberate isolation of the people of Afghanistan to face the devastation alone.



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