

WASHINGTON (MEE) – U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen and Jeff Merkley released a report saying that the U.S. is complicit in Israel’s “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine. Van Hollen of Maryland and Merkley of Oregon produced the report after a week-long visit to Israel, the occupied West Bank, the Rafah border with Gaza, Jordan and Egypt at the end of August. The damning 21-page report is titled, “The Netanyahu regime is Implementing a Plan to Ethnically Cleanse Gaza of Palestinians. America is Complicit. The World Must Stop It.”

Allah knows me very well and I also know myself more than you. Please, Lord ! make me better than what they imagine me to be and please excuse those Weaknesses of mine which they are not aware of.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

# West's Apathy to Afghan Quake Spotlights Hypocrisy of Occupation Years

KABUL (Dispatches) -- More than 2,200 people were killed when a magnitude-6.0 earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan on August 31, making it the deadliest in decades. Yet, despite the scale of devastation, the international response—particularly from the U.S. and European nations—has been alarmingly inadequate.

Thousands remain homeless across Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. Remote mountain villages are hard to reach, and humanitarian organizations are stretched thin. “The main needs are temporary shelter, primary healthcare, mental health support, and water and sanitation,” said Laura Chambrier of the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale (PUI). But funding shortfalls are stalling aid operations at a critical time.

The United Nations’ \$139.6 million appeal for emergency assistance remains largely unmet. According to Chambrier, Afghanistan was already facing severe funding cuts before the earthquake. Earlier



Earthquake survivors receive aid distributed by the Aga Khan Development Network in Kunar province on September 5.

this year, a significant reduction in U.S. foreign aid forced PUI to close 60 healthcare facilities and lay off nearly 400 staff members. “Now with the earthquake, we have even more people in need,” she said.

The U.S. and European governments have dramatically scaled back their support since the Taliban took power. This political

stance—refusing to engage with the Taliban—has led to a de facto abandonment of Afghan civilians. “The funding coming in these days is limited compared to a year ago,” said Hans Johansen of Acted. “The earthquake response has attracted just \$10 million, a fraction of what would have come in the past.”

Even what little aid is given is

carefully routed to avoid official cooperation with the Taliban. A Dutch policy note in September highlighted €1 million in EU aid—but made no mention of engagement with the authorities controlling the country. This hands-off approach, rooted in political posturing, is worsening human suffering.

Women, in particular, are being failed. Taliban restrictions bar women from traveling freely or accessing healthcare without a male guardian. NGOs with female staff can reach them—barely. Those without cannot. “Women and girls will again bear the brunt of this disaster,” said Susan Ferguson of UN Women, pointing to high female casualties in past quakes.

The West’s refusal to separate humanitarian needs from political positions is costing lives. Afghans are not the ones who imposed Taliban rule, yet they are paying the price of global indifference. Winter is coming—and without urgent support, so is more tragedy.

## Lebanese Army Pushes With Disarmament Plan Amid Israeli Airstrikes

BEIRUT (Dispatches) — The Lebanese army has initiated the fourth phase of its controversial disarmament campaign targeting Palestinian refugee camps, starting with Beddawi camp in northern Lebanon.

The operation is expected to move next to Ain al-Hilweh, the volatile southern camp that has seen repeated clashes in recent years. Previous phases focused on camps in Beirut and Tyre.

This nationwide disarmament drive comes amid mounting Western pressure—particularly from the U.S. and European allies—on the Lebanese government to assert full state control over all armed groups.

While officially framed as a sovereignty-building effort, the campaign also aligns with longstanding Western demands to disarm Hezbollah, Lebanon’s most powerful military and political force.

Yet Hezbollah remains the only viable Lebanese force capable of responding to near-daily Israeli military aggression. Since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023, Hezbollah has played a central role in defending Lebanese territory, particularly in the south and the Beqaa Valley, where Israeli air and drone strikes have continued despite a ceasefire agreement.

That ceasefire, reached in November 2024 after a year of sustained Israeli attacks, was meant to halt hostilities and facilitate an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon by January 2025. However, Israel has maintained its presence at five military outposts along the border, violating the terms of the truce and continuing aerial strikes into Lebanese territory.

On Friday, one person was killed in an Israeli drone strike targeting the al-Dhuhour area

of Aitaroun, a town in the Bint Jbeil district of southern Lebanon. Lebanon’s Health Ministry confirmed the casualty, referring to the victim as a “martyr,” but did not release further details.

Despite Hezbollah’s critical role in countering Israeli incursions—which displaced tens of thousands of Israeli settlers during the 2023-2024 war—the Lebanese government has pledged to disarm the group near the border within three months. Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib confirmed the timeline earlier this month.

This decision follows the cabinet’s approval of a secretive disarmament roadmap earlier in the year. The plan triggered political backlash, prompting Hezbollah-aligned ministers to walk out in protest. Many in Lebanon see the push as a dangerous concession to Western

powers, one that could destabilize the country further at a time of mounting regional threats.

Public sentiment in many quarters remains supportive of Hezbollah’s role as a resistance force. Critics of the disarmament plan argue that it ignores the asymmetric reality on the ground: while Lebanon is being pressed to disarm non-state actors, Israel continues to violate Lebanese sovereignty with impunity.

The 2023-2024 war killed more than 4,000 people and injured around 17,000 in Lebanon, with much of the destruction concentrated in the south. As the army carries out disarmament operations in the camps, many question whether weakening internal resistance groups will truly serve Lebanon’s stability—or simply make it more vulnerable to external aggression.

## Turkey Detains Mayor of Istanbul District, 47 Other Officials

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish authorities on Saturday detained the mayor of an Istanbul district, along with 47 other officials, over allegations of corruption, as part of a widening crackdown on the country’s main opposition party.

The state-run Anadolu Agency said the Istanbul chief prosecutor’s office ordered the detentions in connection with an investigation into alleged extortion, bribery, fraud and bid rigging by the Istanbul’s Bayrampasa municipality.

Bayrampasa’s mayor, Hasan Mutlu, denied the allegations in a statement on X.

“What is happening consists of political operations and baseless slander. Be assured that, together with you, the valued residents of Bayrampasa, we will overcome these slanders and these acts of dishonesty,” Mutlu said.

More than a dozen mayors from the main opposition Republican People’s Party, or CHP, and hundreds of municipal officials have been arrested in recent months for alleged corruption, including Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu. The arrest of Imamoglu, viewed as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s

main challenger in the next presidential elections, led to widespread protests.

The CHP says the arrests and allegations are part of a government offensive to weaken the opposition and clear the way for another five years in office for Erdogan. The government denies the claims and says Turkey’s courts are independent.

In a key case due to be heard Monday, a court is expected to rule on whether to annul the CHP’s 2023 Congress, a decision that could change the party’s leadership and leave the party in disarray.

## Latest Israeli Strike on Yemeni Capital Kills At Least 25 Journalists

SANA’A (Dispatches) -- The latest Israeli airstrikes on Yemeni government buildings and newspaper offices have resulted in the deadliest massacre of journalists and media workers in years.

Among the 46 who were killed in the latest attack on the Yemeni capital were at least 25 journalists, according to local reports.

Search and rescue operations remain ongoing. The Yemeni Health Ministry has said that the death toll is expected to rise. At least 165 others were injured in the strikes. Women and children were also among the victims.

The Yemeni Journalists Union said in a statement that it “strongly condemns the heinous war crime committed by the brutal Israeli aggression on Wednesday, through its direct targeting of the offices of 26 September newspaper and Al-Yemen newspaper in the capital.”

The largest massacre of journalists to date was the Ampatuan massacre in the Philippines in 2009. Fifty-eight people were killed, including 32 media professionals.

Since the genocidal Israeli war in Gaza began, Tel Aviv has escalated its persecution of journalists, killing hundreds since October 7, 2023.

Over a dozen Palestinians, including five journalists, were killed

on August 25 in an Israeli attack on the Nasser Medical Complex in Gaza’s southern city of Khan Yunis. Ten days earlier, Prominent Al Jazeera journalist Anas al-Sharif and five others were assassinated in an Israeli airstrike on a media tent at Gaza City’s Al-Shifa Hospital.

Israeli investigative journalist Yuval Abraham reported last month that Israel’s military intelligence created a special unit aimed specifically at justifying attacks in Gaza, including the killing of journalists.

“Intelligence personnel searched for information to provide ‘legitimization’ for the army’s actions in Gaza, failed Hamas launches, use of human shields, and exploitation of the civilian population. A primary mission ... was to find Gazan journalists who could be portrayed in the media as Hamas operatives in disguise,” the Israeli journalist said.

The Israeli army is responsible for nearly 70 percent of all journalists killed in 2024, the deadliest year for journalists globally, according to a report released in February this year by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Two months ago, CPJ warned Israel’s siege on Gaza was “starving journalists into silence.”

## CENTCOM Head Meets Jolani in Damascus for Cooperation Talks

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- Self-appointed Syrian president Abu Muhammad al-Jolani met with the head of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), Admiral Charles Bradley Cooper, on Friday to discuss regional security and cooperation, his office announced.

U.S. Special Envoy to Syria Tom Barrack also attended the meeting with Jolani in the People’s Palace in Damascus.

“The meeting discussed prospects for cooperation in the political and military fields, in a way that serves common interests and consolidates the foundations of security and stability in Syria and the region,” the Syrian presidency said in a statement.

The meeting between top U.S. officials and Jolani, a former Al-Qaeda and Daesh in Iraq commander, occurred one day after the 24th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington.

The U.S. government claims Al-Qaeda carried out the attacks that toppled the World Trade Center buildings and damaged the Pentagon, killing over 3,000 people.

“The meeting reflected the positive atmosphere and shared commitment to strengthening the strategic partnership and expanding channels of communication between Damascus and Washington at various levels,” the statement issued by Jolani’s office said.

U.S. President Donald Trump met with Jolani on May 13 in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

During the meeting, Trump an-

nounced the lifting of sanctions on Syria, praised Jolani, and informed him of the need to take several measures, most notably normalizing relations with Israel.

Jolani became known in Iraq for dispatching suicide bombers to kill U.S. troops and Shia civilians after the 2003 U.S. invasion.

After his detention at the U.S.-run Bucca Prison in Basra, Jolani was released by U.S. officials and became the leader of Daesh in Mosul.

In 2011, he traveled to Syria under the direct orders of Daesh founder Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and established the Nusra Front, which became the official Al-Qaeda affiliate in the country.

U.S., Israeli, and UK intelligence supported Jolani and the Nusra Front for over a decade as part of the operation to topple the government of former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, starting in 2011.

The CIA spent \$1 billion per year on the operation to topple Assad, known as Timber Sycamore, which involved flooding Syria with weapons to arm the Nusra Front and other extremist Salafist armed groups.

Nusra, which later rebranded as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), took power in Damascus in December 2024.

Syrian forces loyal to Jolani carried out the massacre of Alawite civilians in the coastal region of the country in March, followed by the massacre of Druze civilians in Sweida governorate in July.