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US pulls last of its troops from Afghanistan after chaotic evacuation

The US withdrew the last of its troops from Afghanistan aboard a C-17 military transport plane just one minute before midnight Kabul time Monday, in advance of the August 31 deadline that Washington had negotiated with the Taliban. The plane's departure consummated the debacle of the 20-year US war, the longest in American history.



Journalists take photos of a destroyed vehicle where rockets were fired from in Kabul, Afghanistan, Monday, Aug. 30, 2021. (AP Photo/Khwaja Tawfiq Sediqi)

Monday's final withdrawal ended a two-week-long evacuation that transported 122,000 people out of the country, including 5,400 American citizens, along with Afghans who had collaborated with the two-decade US occupation and their families. Monday saw the last

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of the “core” US diplomatic staff depart Kabul airport, leaving behind empty what had been one of the largest US embassies in the world, built at the cost of \$800 million.

The chaotic character of the US evacuation included a suicide bomb attack last Thursday, claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K), that killed 13 American military personnel. Some 170 Afghans were killed in the incident, an unknown number of them by US fire in response to the bombing. On Monday, Kabul’s airport came under rocket fire. The humiliating character of the withdrawal under fire, drawing comparisons to the flight from the US embassy’s roof in Saigon in 1975, has sparked bitter recriminations within the US ruling establishment, including accusations against the Biden administration’s gross “mishandling” of the operation.

The conditions for this withdrawal, however, had been created by the entire 20-year imperialist intervention, which failed to create a viable puppet regime and provoked hatred and anger among a population subjected to bombings, drone strikes, night raids, imprisonment and torture.

President Joe Biden approved the withdrawal last April, based on the supposition that the Afghan security forces could stave off the fall of Kabul for six months to a year. US intelligence agencies changed this assessment to a worst-case scenario of one month, just days before Taliban fighters actually took control of the Afghan capital on August 15. In the end, the Afghan national security forces armed, trained and funded by Washington at the cost of over \$80 billion melted away, unwilling to defend a regime that represented nothing but the US occupation and the kleptocracy that it spawned.

After 20 years and the loss of 2,461 US troops and civilians and 1,144 NATO and allied forces, along with the slaughter of over 100,000 Afghans, and the expenditure of at the least \$2 trillion, Washington leaves Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban, the Islamist militia overthrown by its October 2001 intervention.

The final US departure was greeted by celebratory fireworks and gunfire from Kabul. Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, tweeted early Tuesday morning: “Our country has achieved a full independence, thanks to God.”

Gen. Kenneth McKenzie Jr., the head of the US Central Command, acknowledged that there were Americans numbering in the “low hundreds” left behind by the final evacuation, while estimates have put the number of Afghans holding or eligible for US visas who remained in Afghanistan at 100,000 or more.

The bloody legacy of the 20-year US intervention was underscored on the eve of the final evacuation with a “preemptive” drone strike carried out against what the US military had claimed was a car carrying a suicide bomber. It wiped out 10 Afghan civilians, nine of them from the same family. The victims included seven children aged 2 to 12 along with their father and brother—a 19-year-old student—and a neighbor.

Sunday’s attack, conducted as the US staggered to the finish line of its evacuation operation from Kabul international airport, was described by the Pentagon as “a self-defense unmanned over-the-horizon air strike” conducted against Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K), which claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing at the airport last Thursday.

The drone massacre constitutes one more in a countless number of such atrocities carried out in the 20-year neocolonial war and occupation that has ravaged Afghanistan. It will doubtless not be the last, as Washington continues to claim the right to stage attacks at will against what it deems terrorist targets in the country even after the withdrawal of the last US forces.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby acknowledged reports of the drone massacre at a press conference on Monday, saying that the US military was “assessing and investigating” reports that it had killed 10 civilians. “We are not in a position to dispute it,” he said.

As opposed to the vast majority of US drone strikes, which began on the first day of the US invasion of October 2001, Sunday’s attack took place in a crowded neighborhood in the center of Kabul, rather than a remote rural village. This makes it more difficult for the Pentagon to issue one of its routine denials of civilian casualties.

Reports from Kabul paint a picture of horror at the site of the drone strike. Outraged neighbors of the slaughtered Ahmadi family told *Al Jazeera* of “human flesh stuck to the

walls. Bones fallen into bushes. Walls stained with blood.” One neighbor said of one of the youngest children killed, “We only found his legs.”

The children killed in the attack included three two-year-olds and two three-year-olds.

The missile struck just as the children’s father returned from work and they ran out to his car to greet him.

The father, Zemarai, had worked for the aid agency Nutrition and Education International, resulting in the family’s receiving a US Special Immigrant Visa. They had packed their bags and were waiting for a call telling them to go to the Kabul airport. The other adult killed in the strike was a former member of the Afghan National Army.

Ramin Yousufi, a relative of the slaughtered family, told the BBC that the drone strike had brought “hell in our lives.”

“Why did they kill our family, our children?” he asked, sobbing. “Seven children burned up. We can’t identify them from their faces, their bodies.”

As the US military was organizing the last flight out of Kabul, the United Nations Security Council convened in a special session on the Afghan crisis, passing a resolution calling on the Taliban to allow safe passage for all those seeking to leave Afghanistan. The measure did not include a proposal advanced by France and the UK for the creation of a “safe zone” in Kabul for supporters of the ousted US puppet regime, a measure that unquestionably would have been rejected by the Taliban as a gross violation of Afghan sovereignty. The measure was passed with 13 votes in favor, with both China and Russia abstaining.

Even as the US and its allies on the Security Council waxed eloquent about the inviolable rights of Afghans to leave their country, the European Union was preparing to meet on Tuesday to approve emergency measures designed to, in the words of a draft resolution, “prevent the recurrence of uncontrolled large-scale illegal migration movements faced in the past.”

The resolution goes on to state, “The EU should also strengthen the support to the countries in Afghanistan’s immediate neighborhood to ensure that those in need receive

adequate protection primarily in the region.” In other words, the aim is to provide financial aid in return for Afghanistan’s neighboring countries serving as the EU’s border guards in preventing Afghan migrants from making their way to Europe, similar to the reactionary deal reached with Turkey to restrain Syrian migrants in 2015.

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