

News; Domestic

Biden Defends Decision to End America's Longest War; Taliban Declare Victory Following U.S. Withdrawal; 1M+ Without Power, Water, Food and Fuel in Short Supply; Biden Vehemently Defends U.S. Military Withdrawal; Taliban Escorted Americans to Airport in Secret Deal; U.N. Warns of Looming Humanitarian Catastrophe; Afghan YouTube Star Killed in Kabul Airport Bombing; France Making All Efforts to Evacuate Nationals, Allies; Suicide Bombing Survivor's Journey to the Paralympics. Aired 1-2a ET

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JOHN VAUSE, CNN ANCHOR: Hello, I'm John Vause.

Ahead this hour on CNN NEWSROOM:

In a national address, the U.S. president defends the hard exit from Afghanistan and declares America's days of nation-building are over.

New details on the final flight out of Kabul, as well as the secret deal between the U.S. and the Taliban, to get Americans to the airport safely.

And against all odds. She survived a suicide bombing at a very young age. This Paralympian has turned that tragedy into motivation.

(MUSIC)

[01:00:07]

VAUSE: For Joe Biden, the withdrawal from Afghanistan was in his words an extraordinary success. It's hard to see how after two weeks of watching a real time desperation, chaos and death at Kabul's airport. CNN obtained these new images of the U.S. withdrawal, and less than a day after all U.S. troops were out, President Biden declared the era of military operations in support of nation-building was over. It was tacit admission of a massive overreach in the past by the United States.

President Biden also sought to tackle criticism over the frantic exit from Afghanistan.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: Now some say we should started a mass evacuation sooner. And couldn't of this being done in a more orderly manner? I respectfully disagree. Imagine if we had begun evacuations in June or July, bringing in thousands of American troops and evacuating more than 120,000 people in the middle of a civil war? They're still would've been rushed to the airport, I'm breakdown in confidence in control of the government and it still would be very difficult and dangerous mission.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: The Taliban and their supporters of taking to the streets to celebrate the U.S. withdrawal. In the city of Khost, they held a fake funeral with coffins draped in U.S., British, French and NATO flags.

CNN's Phil Mattingly reports now from the White House.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

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BIDEN: My fellow Americans, the war in Afghanistan is now over.

PHIL MATTINGLY, CNN SENIOR WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): President Biden moving to mark an end to the most acute crisis of his administration.

BIDEN: I refused to continue a war that was no longer a service to the vital national interests of our people.

MATTINGLY: As the country after 2 decades, thousands of lives and trillions of dollars seeks to turn the page on America's longest war.

BIDEN: I was not going to extend this forever war, and I was not extending a forever exit.

MATTINGLY: Biden delivered on a campaign pledge that has long been popular for a country fatigued and in many cases apathetic about the war. But still, facing major questions in the wake of the unprecedented of U.S.-led evacuation, more than 122,000 people out of the country, yet left more than 100 American citizens who want to leave Afghanistan still on the ground.

Biden making a point of noting the support he had across the administration and military to leave by the deadline.

BIDEN: Leaving before August 31st is not due to an arbitrary deadline. It was designed to save American lives.

MATTINGLY: Failing to deliver on this explicit pledge just 13 days ago.

BIDEN: If there are American citizens, left-wing to stay until we get them all out.

MATTINGLY: Biden making clear diplomatic efforts will be singularly focused on evacuating those Americans.

BIDEN: For those remaining Americans, there is no deadline. We remain committed to get them out if they want to come out.

MATTINGLY: But with thousands of Afghan allies still stuck in the country, when clear reality, U.S. efforts in the country as far from over, even if it's military is now gone.

BIDEN: I don't think enough people understand how much we've asked of the 1 percent of this country to put the uniform on.

MATTINGLY: Fallout from a chaotic and bloody 16 days is just beginning. Congressional hearings and probes slated for the upcoming weeks on withdrawal that is drawn sharp criticism from both parties. The administration has pledged to launch its own internal review. Biden even facing blow back from some of the families of service members killed by suicide attack during the evacuation efforts.

MARK SCHMITZ, FATHER OF U.S. MARINE KILLED IN KABUL: He talked a little bit more about his own son than he did my son. That didn't sit well with me.

MATTINGLY: The White House declining to respond from critical comments from family members. But Biden, saying the 13 service men and women who died would never be forgotten.

BIDEN: We owe them and their families and then a debt of gratitude that we can never pay, but we should never, ever, ever forget.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MATTINGLY (on camera): And U.S. officials say when it comes to those citizens still on the ground, when it comes to Afghan allies still inside the country, there are now ongoing discussions between allies and international partners and the Taliban and some of their allies in the region to actually try and figure out to different modes of ways out of the country, one by air. They need to open an airport to do that, those discussions are ongoing, at the moment.

But also potentially through land, by potentially moving into neighboring countries. Still those discussions have not entered a final stage and administration officials made clear there is no explicit agreement at this point in time with the Taliban, even though they say the Taliban has given them there were that American citizens and allies will be able to leave.

Bottom line here is there's still a lot to be figured out, a lot to be finalized, and a lot of fluidity in a situation that has not shortage of that over the course of the last final weeks.

[01:05:09]

One thing is clear, administrating station officials say priority remains to get those people out, and also a military presence after 20 years is officially out.

Phil Mattingly, CNN, the White House.

VAUSE: Live now to CNN's Anna Coren who has been in Afghanistan for many years. She was recently in Kabul. And this now comes down now to what kind of government the Taliban will actually look like. Will be the soft and fluffy Taliban that we're hearing from these official statements?

So, will there be sort of lack of discipline in the ranks? Will the provinces go their own way? Are they able to form a government? There are so many questions here.

ANNA COREN, CNN CORRESPONDENT: So many questions. You know, I think a lack of discipline within the ranks, that is inevitable. The Taliban, you know, made up of so many different factions. You have the political wing, you know, the military wing run now by a very hard line element of the Taliban. We are already hearing reports, John, of infighting within the ranks as to what sort of governments this is going to be.

Will it include the likes of Dr. Abdullah, who was the head of the high peace council when those supposed talks were talking place? Will it include the former Afghan President Hamad Karzai? Both are hold up in Dr. Abdullah's residence in Kabul. I mean, they're virtually under house arrest, despite what the Taliban is saying. So, really to add to what this government looks like remains to be seen.

We heard from the Pakistani foreign minister yesterday saying that we should see what this government will be in the next few days. Taliban saying it could take weeks. So, you know, I guess it's a matter of a wait and see, but huge challenges await this deeply impoverished country.

According to the United Nations, a third of its population is struggling to survive. Half the country is malnourished and there are concerns that it could run out of food within the next month.

Humanitarian aid desperately needed. How is it going to get there? At the moment, only land borders are the way in. Pakistan, Iran, the Stans, you know, that is the only way into Afghanistan, because as we know Hamad Karzai International Airport has been running those evacuations has been damaged.

When the Taliban went in there yesterday to inspect, they spoke about not only equipment that was left but also the damage that has been done. There are media reports that things have been destroyed, things have been looted. Even the conveyor belt within the terminal of the airport has been destroyed. So they're going to have to fix the before those commercial flights can restart.

You know, as for the residents who want to get out of the country, the Taliban is saying that if you have a visa, if you have a passport, you will be allowed to travel freely. We also understand John, that the Taliban is in talks with the Qatari's as well as the Turkish government as far as whether they will operate the airport.

But this is all up in the air. The Taliban has been fighting for the last 20 years on the battlefield. They have not been governing a country, now they have to govern the 38 million people and provide basic services which are not functioning, like electricity, and water. Simple things like that. Huge challenges, John.

VAUSE: No answers at this point. Anna, thank you. Anna Coren, in Hong Kong. Well, for more on the view from your, CNN European affairs commentator Dominic Thomas is with us now from Los Angeles.

DOMINIC THOMAS, CNN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMENTATOR: Thanks for having me on, John

VAUSE: OK, just two months ago, Joe Biden I should say was in Europe, he was telling anyone who had listened, America is back.

You know, there was palpable relief among European leaders when he was sworn in as president. But we're what, 220 days now after the inauguration and the honeymoon appears over. "The Financial Times" declares Joe Biden and Europe going different ways.

"The Washington Post" says as U.S. leaves Afghanistan, Europe sours on Biden. And then from "Politico": disbelief and betrayal: Euro reacts to Biden's Afghanistan miscalculation.

You know, the unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan is a big factor behind this. But it's not the only issue driving this division, right?

THOMAS: No, I mean, it's not, John. I mean, clearly, the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the way in which this was handled with the United States as allies was a significant wake up call.

But I think it needs to be put in the broader context of the impact that the Trump presidency had on the European Union, on NATO and on the G7. The disruption and the way in which his policy agendas and his own personal agendas, but ultimately aimed at undermining and weakening those organizations.

[01:10:06]

And I think that the trauma is real, and that these entities, countries, organizations, after the storm, we're very much hoping for some calm, and the knock-on effect is real.

You take a country like Germany, where Chancellor Merkel is stepping down at the end of September, this is creating even greater uncertainty for a country that you could argue will be left rudderless.

But the broader reality is that U.S. foreign policy, trade interests and so on are shifting towards China and Asia in a broader context. But there are also smaller kind of impacts that policy has had. And one of them, of course, is over the COVID travel restrictions and the inequities between opening up Europe versus shutting down, and the United States to travelers.

So, all of these are sending very confused and different messages to their former European allies, one could say.

VAUSE: Well, yes, Donald Trump had his own sort of meat axe wielding style of making it known that, you know, the reality of the 21st century is that Europe is no longer the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy. So, I'm wondering if what we're seeing in some of this disappointment, and maybe the anger is there's such high hopes that Biden would return to a more traditional role or a traditional relationship, and now that he hasn't, it's only made things so much worse.

THOMAS: It has, and there were just so many distractions, Brexit being one of them, the way in which the Trump presidency also kind of helped fuel that sort of far-right agenda in Europe as well.

But I think it's not just a 21st century question. I think what we're seeing here is a complete recalibration of essentially, the post-World War II global order, the Cold War, the post 9/11 and also, this sort of strategic ideological move towards a nation building.

And so, this recalibration was evident in the Afghanistan situation. But I think what was so compelling about this is that we saw in absolutely unambiguous terms, the ways in which the optics and public opinion and the historical low of tolerance in the United States for engagement in foreign policy abroad and in conflict motivated the administration to make decisions that were -- that were geared around, essentially domestic policies, and not foreign policy.

In other words, not listening to their allies. And that in and of itself is a fairly significant shift.

VAUSE: And Biden really spelled that out in that national address. He basically said, you know, this is where U.S. foreign policy is now heading, here he is.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: We must stay clearly focused on the fundamental national security interest of the United States of America.

We saw a mission of counterterrorism in Afghanistan. Getting the terrorists and stopping attacks. Morph into a counterinsurgency, nation building. Trying to create a democratic, cohesive, and united Afghanistan.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: It was a sort of an admission of overreach by the United States for decades, and what it seems is that for the next few years at least, the Europe can expect to see the United States now taking very much a backseat role.

THOMAS: Yes, and I think it -- that could be also, you know, be interesting to see how that, of course, plays out. It's clear, as I have said, the center of gravity has shifted.

Now, this is not the same as the far-right agenda of the Trump presidency in which he consistently argued for USA First, America First and so on. This is not an isolationist protectionist move, but it is nevertheless a change in terms of the expectations that Europe and that broader region can have. And it has an impact on security in the Baltics, you know, the Ukraine, the relationship with Russia, and so on, and the security of NATO. But I think ultimately, this is an opportunity for the European Union and for Europe in a broader context to kind of rethink and redefine its role and to see whether in the aftermath of Brexit, and in the shifting relationship with the United States, whether or not they can take this opportunity, and ultimately emerge from

this as a -- as a stronger, more independent, more autonomous entity, bearing in mind the global economic importance that they continue to have in the world today.

So, it's going to be interesting to see how they go down that roll, that particular road.

VAUSE: But when they -- there's chatter, once again, of your strategic autonomy among Europeans, that they're basically, you know, making their own path away from the United States. That just seems to ring hollow, though, when you really think about everything that they still gain from this relationship with the United States.

THOMAS: Yes, you know, they absolutely do. And some have anticipated this, some perhaps less so. But there have been moves in Europe and Emmanuel Macron is one, for example and who also, of course, is up for election and in spring 2022 has been arguing for the development of stronger kind of military power and force in Europe, which would allow it to respond and then react to things in a way that he would not have to automatically rely on the United States.

I mean, this relationship is not over. It's as I keep saying, it's being recalibrated. It's being rethought. And I think the United States faces some real challenges when it comes to -- just like I said, the optics of engagement abroad versus this sort of, you know, the legacy of the Trump administration and of rethinking politics within and the context itself.

[01:15:12]

But I think that the relationship is certainly not over, they remain important and trading partners. And I think that when Biden visited the G7, E.U. and so on, underscoring their shared values remains still to this day, a really important component as to what brings them together rather than sets them apart.

VAUSE: Dominic, we appreciate the analysis and the insight. Dominic Thomas for us in Los Angeles, thank you.

THOMAS: Thank you.

VAUSE: The U.N. secretary general is warning of a looming catastrophe in Afghanistan, with half the population in need of aid. According to an earlier report from UNICEF, at the beginning of this, year more than 18 million Afghans who are in need of humanitarian assistance, including almost 10 million children.

And since the end of May, the number has more than doubled to more than 560,000 people, more than half of those of children.

On the Afghanistan, Pakistan border the flag of the Afghan national government has been taken down, and replaced with the Taliban flag. And in fears of lock of refugees, Pakistani officials have effectively closed the doors to those fleeing the Taliban, arguing the country just doesn't have the resources to take anyone else in.

CNN's Clarissa Ward is at the Pakistan-Afghan borders with details.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

CLARISSA WARD, CNN CHIEF INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT: We are here at the border crossing that separates Pakistan from Afghanistan, and you can see behind me a lot of Taliban fighters, they're standing here under the white Taliban flag. That is the official flag at this border crossing.

Now, what you're not seeing a lot of, if you come over here with me, are people getting into Pakistan this is the line of Afghans who are waiting to get into Pakistan. But only people who have Pakistani documents, or residency, are being allowed in at this stage. And that has been a rule that's been in place for a few months now, partly because of COVID regulations, partly because Pakistan says it can't cope with Afghan refugees.

Now, if you look over here, Jeff, you can see this group of people who are very sick. I want to draw your attention to a particular serious looking woman with a young boy. He has some kind of bandages with blood on them on his lap. And these people are basically appealing to Pakistan for immediate medical attention. Some people have been allowed through to go to hospitals.

But basically, what's Pakistan is saying now, is we have more than 1 million Afghan refugees, and we simply can't cope with anymore.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE: Orders to evacuate along the California-Nevada state border as a massive wildfire continues to threaten the mountain resort town of Lake Tahoe. More details in a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAUSE: Also, I'm survived Hurricane Ida described the tariffs she went through as the storm hit her home.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[01:20:14]

VAUSE: With crystal clear waters and usually lush green mountains, Lake Tahoe and California should be a major tourist draw right now. Instead, more than 55,000 people have been told to evacuate because of the massive Caldor Fire which continues to threaten lives and homes along the Nevada-California state border. More than 55,000 people are under evacuation orders, about 80,000 hectares of burned.

All told, there are 13 live wildfires burning currently in Florida. It has closed all national forests in the state. Meteorologist Pedram Javaheri joins us now with more on the fire conditions, and what we can expect in the coming days -- Pedram.

PEDRAM JAVAHERI, AMS METEOROLOGIST: John, when you look at the numbers here, in the past 13 months, six of the state's seven largest fire in its recorded history have all taken place, and, of course, the Caldor Fire here among one of them is rapidly expanding.

Seventeen days and counting. You notice the thermal signature of the fires scattered about this region and the perspective here is that we got consume to almost 300,000 acres of land across this region of California, 18 percent containment so very little ground has been made, because the weather has been a condition for fire development and fire growth. It stays very dry, it has been absolutely gusty. Winds at times, 40 to 50 kilometers per hour, and 2020 alone, across the state of California, upwards of 7,000 fires from last week, puts 1500 -- 1.5 million acres of land to about half 1 million acres more than this time last year, and 3 times where it should be logically for this time of year.

So the consumption inland here has really exponentially grown in the past couple of years, and we're seeing that with a very, very dry spell, and of course the gusty winds certainly don't help. I know John you spent some time across this region in northern California. The elevated terrain, all of that is spectacular. But it is really a favorable spot for fires to extend rapidly.

I use that analogy. Use a match, light it, watch it burn towards your finger. But give it a little bit of a slope and it rapidly burns towards your hands, and that is exactly what the firefighters have to deal with on these hilltops. As fires are rising up the slopes very quickly and extending rather rapidly, that is the concern that we see fire weather here over the last several years really expand.

And here we go, across Lake Tahoe, it remains widespread haze into the forecast. Temps generally going to stay into the middle 20s, get down into the Sacramento Valley, temperature is climbing into the thirties there. Again, winds in South Lake Tahoe it's gusting to 50 kilometers per hour. So, very challenging set of weather for the next few weeks.

VAUSE: Thank you, Pedram. We like you to stay around. We'll talk about Hurricane Ida and climate change was played in all of this.

Death toll has risen to five now after Hurricane Ida in the Gulf Coast and swept across Louisiana and Mississippi. Hundreds are being rescued on search and rescue efforts are continuing.

Right now, more than 1 million homes and businesses are without power, mostly in Louisiana. And it could be weeks before electricity is restored in some parts. For those with a generator, that challenge now is to find fuel. There are long lines of gas station across Louisiana, some quickly running out of supplies, all these as homeowners are just beginning to assess the damage.

CNN's Ed Lavandera reports.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ED LAVANDERA, CNN SENIOR NATIONAL CORRESPONDENT: The water got up just above the floor board.

DOMINIQUE THOMAS, LAPLACE, LOUISIANA RESIDENT: Yeah, just above the floor board.

LAVANDERA (voice-over): The day after Hurricane Ida wrecked Dominique Thomas's home, she's cleaning up the disaster. She says she's lived through many storms before but this was different.

THOMAS: You can still just hear everything ripping and flying and banging and people's roofs were coming off and we just -- we prayed that we would all live.

LAVANDERA: And the emotions of experiencing Hurricane Ida's fury have caught up to the 32-year-old mother.

THOMAS: The most scariest thing we ever did, it really was. We were there for so long not knowing how high the water would get. I don't think I'll ever stay again.

LAVANDERA: The day after hurricane Ida ripped through southeast Louisiana, officials are warning residents across the region it will take considerable time to get life back to normal. There are more than a million customers without electricity, and for many, it could take weeks to get the power restored.

Water systems are down, as well and cell phone communication is spotty. The coming days and weeks will be long and hot.

JACLYN HOTARD, ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH PRESIDENT: We are resilient group of people. This is going to be very difficult, worst disaster that we've all seen in St. John Parish. And it's going to take a long time.

LAVANDERA: In LaPlace, residents say they were stunned by the intensity of the storm's winds and the structural damage it caused.

DEBBIE GRECO, LAPLACE, LOUISIANA RESIDENT: It was horrible. It was -- the wind, I never had wind shake the house the way it did.

LAVANDERA: Debbie and Ronnie Greco say after 4 feet of water poured into their home, the roof started to collapse.

[01:25:06]

GRECO: The ceiling started caving and I got scared. It was like my God, is the roof going to blow off and we're going to be out exposed?

LAVANDERA: Some of the hardest hit areas of southeast Louisiana are still nearly impossible to reach. This is what Grand Isle looks like. This video was captured by one of several dozen people who didn't evacuate and are now stuck on the barrier island.

THOMAS: Seeping in from all the doors, all the closets.

LAVANDERA: Dominique Thomas is bracing for weeks of recovery but can't stop thinking about the eight brutal hours her family endured through the storm.

THOMAS: The doors were rocking back and forth. The windows were shaking. It was just a matter of time before you felt like everything would go right off.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

LAVANDERA (on camera): The cleanup process and some of the smaller communities surrounding New Orleans, some of which were the hardest hit by hurricane Ida, it's still in its early stages. Crews are still trying to clear roadways, of downed power lines and large trees. In fact, local officials are urging people who evacuated not to come back, for as long as they can, so that crews can get as much that work done as fast as possible.

Ed Lavandera, CNN, Laplace, Louisiana.

VAUSE: Back now to Pedram Javaheri.

So, you know, these storms are -- you know, climate change didn't create the hurricane. It makes it a lot worse, and what we're seeing now is that the extreme could very likely be a commonplace in a decade from now.

JAVAHERI: Absolutely, well said. And when you look at the data to, as you said, it's not the number of storms, it is that the storms, this steers the environment has slowed down. The oceanic has increased.

And, of course, we see excessive rainfall then. About that 10 days ago and now what is left of Ida here as it moves its way across portions of the Tennessee Valley, eventually onto the Northeast over the next 24 hours, believe it or not, and southern Pennsylvania, there is the forecast here for 100-year flood event potentially for the amount of rainfall the storm is going to bring down.

Notice, 200 to 300 millimeters approaching some of those major metro cities. I have to talk about concrete and urban environments makes this rainfall a lot more destructive because all of it comes one off because there's so much asphalt and concrete on the ground for the storm to work with.

But when you look at how did we get here? How could such rainfall and such incredible amounts of water in the atmosphere? Well, the data certainly supports that one-degree warming that we've seen globally speaking since the preindustrial times are moisturizing the atmosphere by roughly 7 percent. For every degree it gets warmer, it's an increase in 7 percent.

Of course, the clouds ability to retain moisture is much more likely. It supports this across the eastern U.S. You're looking from 1958 to 2016 showing the eastern United States most prone for heavy precipitation events. You've got 55 percent increase since the 19 fifties, and our ocean retains the vast majority of the carbon heat that has been created. In fact, the oceanic heat translates the energy for these storms, but 90 percent of the excess heat on our planet is actually retained in our oceans, not in the air.

And you notice this, since the 19 eighties, you're looking at how storms have differed, and very remarkable but persistent of the storms.

About 80 storms, tropical systems, form every around the globe. But in that time since the 1980s, we've seen about a 30 percent increase in category fours and category fives, so all of this again kind of plays into the cycle of climate change and how one after another you see heavy rain events stronger storms, and, of course, massive damage across populated areas as well.

VAUSE: We can stop this. We just have to stop the carbon emissions. We'll see what can happen.

Pedram, thank you. Pedram Javaheri, appreciate that.

In and of itself, the evacuation from Kabul was not only a triumph of logistics but also a feat of diplomacy. The U.S. has made a seal with Taliban. Details in a moment.

Also, stepping out to help fellow refugees. When official channels failed, this man made it his missions to help complete strangers from away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[01:31:47]

JOHN VAUSE, CNN ANCHOR: Welcome back, everyone. I'm John Vause. You're watching CNN NEWSROOM.

During a national address, U.S. President Joe Biden stood by his decision to withdraw U.S. military from Afghanistan, as well as the chaotic airlift from Kabul.

This new video shows some of the last American troops boarding planes out of Kabul.

Biden described the operation as an extraordinary success and said 20 years in Afghanistan was long enough. He did not want to extend a forever war or create a forever exit.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: By the time I came to office, the Taliban was in its strongest military position since 2001, controlling or contesting nearly half of the country.

The previous administration's agreement said that if we stuck to the May 1st deadline they had signed on to leave by, the Taliban would not attack any American forces, but if we stayed all bets are off. So we were left with a simple decision. Either follow-through on the commitment made by the last administration on leave Afghanistan, or say we weren't leaving and commit another tens of thousands more troops going back to war.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: More details are now emerging. All the complicated moving parts involving airlifting more than 120,000 people out of Kabul. And that includes a secret arrangement with the Taliban to escort groups of Americans to the gates of the airport.

CNN's Oren Liebermann has the details.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

OREN LIEBERMANN, CNN PENTAGON CORRESPONDENT: The Taliban has been a part of this process, the U.S. evacuation and withdrawal pretty much since the very beginning. And they only became a bigger, more critical part as the U.S. evacuation and withdrawal neared its conclusion.

Daily communication, constant communication on the ground between U.S. forces that were there, the commanders there and the Taliban.

We have now learned just how deep that was. A secret arrangement according to two Defense officials, where the U.S. would tell American citizens to go to a gathering point or a muster point and then the Taliban would bring them from that point to the airport.

It could only be revealed now because of how sensitive this is. First, if the Taliban had to respond in some way. And second if ISIS-K, the threat we saw new about this, they would have another chance to target Americans on their way to the airport. And that's why this was kept secret until now.

But there was another part to the evacuation and the secret attempts to get Americans out of the country. Special Operations Forces that were operating on the ground there had a secret door to the airport that they would use to guide Americans to that door and bring them onto airport grounds.

Now it is unclear to what extent the Taliban allowed all of the Americans through to the airport. There are reports of them not letting all Americans through and if some were stopped and turned back -- that remains part of the question.

We do know that General Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command acknowledged how much Special Operations Forces did in the final days there.

That's because he said on Monday when he spoke at a press briefing at the Pentagon that Special Operation Forces brought in more than a thousand American citizens and 2,000 Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants.

[01:34:59] LIEBERMANN: So now we are getting a clearer sense of the level of the operations used to bring in Americans and the connections around that.

Oren Liebermann, CNN -- at the Pentagon.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE: The United Nations is warning of a looming humanitarian crisis with food shortages facing a third of the population. That's just one of a laundry list of challenges facing the Taliban as they look to establish a functioning government.

Terror groups like ISIS-K and regional factions all present security issues especially at Kabul airport. The U.N. says about 3.5 million people have been displaced by the violence, more than half a million this year alone. The country is suffering from a severe drought. It has a history of harsh winters that will threaten food supply lines. And the World Bank says the economy is fragile and dependent on foreign aid. Government salaries have to be paid. Electricity, water, the Internet all have to be maintained.

And the Taliban are desperate for legitimacy in dealing with Afghanistan's neighbors and world powers.

Joining me now from Oslo in Norway, Ashley Jackson is the author of "Negotiating Survival: Civilian-Insurgent Relations in Afghanistan". Thank you for getting up early and being with us. It's appreciated.

ASHLEY JACKSON, AUTHOR: Thank you.

VAUSE: Before we get to what sort of government the Taliban might impose on Afghanistan, I guess there's a question mark over the ability to actually form a working government, capable of governing the entire country. Is that the place where we should be starting this conversation?

JACKSON: Yes. I mean we focused on how the Taliban's advance has taken everyone in the international community by surprise. But I think it also took the Taliban by surprise.

And they have been slow to move into government to really assume control. They haven't even formed a government yet. They have been undertaking consultations. They have been moving their senior leaders to Kabul. They weren't in position I think because they didn't again expect Kabul to fall so quickly.

We have seen that there are negotiations with the Ghani government for some sort of interim or ceasefire arrangement that fell apart when Ghani fled.

So I think like everyone else, the Taliban has been scrambling to transition from this insurgency to now ruling the entire country. And I think that is absolutely where we should start because it explains a lot of their behavior and a lot of the challenges they'll face. VAUSE: Yes. And let's assume there was kind of government put in place. When a Taliban leader in Kabul, you know, puts his hand on heart and swears on the Koran that women's rights will be respected, is there an expectation it will be followed to the letter in every province by every Taliban fighter around the country?

JACKSON: Absolutely not. Afghanistan is an incredibly diverse country. And one of the ways in which diversity manifest's is attitudes towards women's role in public life. You know, norms around their behavior and that (INAUDIBLE) movement, you know, whether or not they go to school. And that has been true for the past 20 years, frankly.

That won't change with the Taliban. Certainly it didn't change under a more forward leaning democracy that embraced women's rights.

So the Taliban are making overtures. They are saying that they do support Islamic women's rights, without specifying what that really means.

Now, we have seen some of that become a little bit clearer, for example, they have said that universities that classes must be gender segregated. Of course, classes are already gender segregated at secondary and primary schools in Afghanistan.

But, you know, that raise alarm bells because of course there are fewer female professors, so if you set women side then, you know, they have a lower quality of education. They have less access to education.

Already, we see, you know, the creeping kinds of restrictions. And one city it's where these restrictions might manifest

VAUSE: Back in 2001, in the days after the violent attacks and the U.S. began air strikes on Afghanistan, the U.S. Defense Secretary at the time, Donald Rumsfeld complained about a lack of targets so he made the comment about bombing Afghanistan up to the stone age. That was 20 years ago.

Afghanistan's a very different place now. It's more complicated. It's more sophisticated. There's services there like cellphones which were never there before.

Do they have the capability, do they have the talent, to govern this country which is so different to what it was 20 years ago or the 25 years ago when they first took power?

JACKSON: That's a very good point. I think what we have seen in the past few weeks is that what has been built in Afghanistan over the past 20 years, there've been enormous gains and I don't want to undermine that, but much of it is a house built on sand and that sand is international aid.

Aid is 80 percent of the national budget. Closing borders, restricting access to the reserves -- all of the measures that have been taken in the past few weeks since the Taliban took control by the international community has really thrown the economy into a spiral.

[01:39:51]

JACKSON: You mentioned the drought this year. Already before all of this happened, Afghanistan was facing a huge issue in terms of food shortages.

And now with the borders closed, the lack of cash, lack of liquidity, with the World Bank essentially shutting down teachers' salaries, shutting down the health system, because the Taliban has taken control.

You know, the situation is that Afghanistan is on life support. And those gains, that complexity, that vibrant economy that you just mentioned is slowly being suffocated. So the question is not only can the Taliban maintain that, is the international community going to support them to do that? Is the international community going to continue aid? Is it going to allow them access to reserves?

Because all that is essential to Afghans continuing to survive, to feed themselves, to hopefully thrive. And that's even before we get to the question of whether or not the Taliban can manage it.

They've shown that they want to, they want to try and keep competent people in these roles. But the next few weeks and months are critical.

VAUSE: Very quickly just gets us to this question of recognizing the Taliban government when it's formed. The international community what -- they need to hold their nose as repugnant as the Taliban can be in their treatment of women and girls and just recognize the government and be practical about it for the sake of the Afghan people?

JACKSON: Well, I think the international community has not much leverage left, not as much as they had months or years ago with the Taliban, but recognition is one lever that is left. And I think we have to use that very wisely.

There are a number of priorities that are right now. There is counter- terrorism, there is safe passage of the remaining people in Afghanistan who want to get out including U.S. and other citizens but also others.

There is the humanitarian crisis and ensuring you're working with the Taliban government to ensure that food delivery and assistance can get to people. There are all these priorities.

I think what we really have to see emerge is a strategy. We need to see the international community come together with a roadmap as to how they're going to use what leverage they have left to exact some sort of cooperation on these (INAUDIBLE) and that's where recognition comes in.

VAUSE: And we will see what happens. There doesn't appear to be a roadmap right now. But maybe there will be.

Ashley Jackson thank you so much. Appreciate the early start.

JACKSON: Thank you. VAUSE: Well, despite promises from the Taliban, life is radically already changed for women in Afghanistan.

One Afghan YouTube star detailed how scared she was to leave her home before being killed in the terror attack at Kabul's international airport.

CNN's Jomana Karadsheh has our report.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

NAJMA SADEQI, AFGHAN YOUTUBE STAR KILLED IN KABUL AIRPORT BOMBING (through translator): Since we are not allowed to work and go out of our homes, we all had to record a new video for you. And through this video to say goodbye to you all and ask you to keep us in your prayers.

JOMANAH KARADSHE, CNN CORRESPONDENT: This Najma Sadeqi's goodbye video to thousands of her followers. A goodbye to the only way of life this 20-year-old Afghan YouTube star has ever known.

For Najma's generation of Afghan women, life under the Taliban was a story of the past. Just days before the fall of her city, she was out on the streets of Kabul.

You could easily think this trio of YouTube reporters in their bright, fashionable clothes were out on the streets of another modern city like Dubai or Doha.

Smiling, giggling, just having fun. Najma was doing what she loved the most, reporting on daily life in her beloved city.

Four days after the fall of Kabul, she recorded this video.

SADEQI: Life in Kabul has become very difficult, especially for those who used to be free and happy. We are all inside our homes and we do not have the ability and courage to go outside, to go back to work, to go back to our universities.

We are no longer able to record programs and study. Despite what they are saying that they don't have any problems with girls, that girls can seek education, go to university and go to work, but we have heard about their past.

We can no longer trust them to go back to university or work with the kind of courage we used to have.

KARADSHEH: Najma was studying to become a journalist in her final year at Kabul Journalism Institute, she joined the Afghan Insider YouTube channel, a job she clearly loved. But it was more than just that.

SADEQI: Most of the families in the city are just waiting for one meal a day to survive now. I was working to make enough to pay for my daily expenses and for my education.

[01:44:49] SADEQI: Like me, there were other girls who are the breadwinners of their entire families. They were the ones who didn't have an older brother or father to provide for them. But now they are at home waiting for the situation to get better.

Dear friend, I don't have the ability to talk any longer and I can't say anymore. Just pray for us. Pray for us that we don't go too far away from our hopes and dreams, and we can become the girls we were before, that we can be happy again, wear the clothes we loved again.

KARADSHEH: But as her world collapsed, she'd have to get out before it was too late. In desperation, Najma, her brother, and cousin joined thousands of others at the Kabul Airport trying to escape a life without much hope.

They never made it out. The three were among the more than 170 lives lost in Thursday's murderous attack. The haunting words in her goodbye video now more than just a farewell to freedom.

SADEQI: I wish it is a bad dream. I wish we can wake up one day or someone wakes up saying, drink a glass of water, you had a bad dream. But I know that it is not possible. And it is a reality that we are finished.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAUSE: We have this, just in to CNN.

In Texas, a controversial ban on abortion after the 6th week of pregnancy, that's before most women even realize they're pregnant is now law. The U.S. Supreme Court and Federal Appeals Court refused to rule on emergency challenges to one of its strictest abortion laws in the United States.

The Supreme Court is set to rule next month on a similar Mississippi law which bans abortion at 15 weeks.

France says all efforts are being made to evacuate the remaining French nationals and local allies from Afghanistan. The military said on Tuesday, about a few dozen remain in country. Afghans desperate to flee the Taliban are turning to strangers for help.

CNN's Melissa Bell follows one refugee in Paris who spent sleepless nights helping evacuate his fellow Afghans from afar.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MELISSA BELL, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice over): The very last French evacuation out of Kabul. It left without incident, but for those on board, Afghans the NATO had promised to help, it had been a frantic fight to find someone who could get them into the airport. An angel who might well be on the other side of the world.

Reza Jafari (ph) has barely slept since Kabul fell. It's 6:00 a.m. in the little corner of Afghanistan that he's created in northern Paris. From here, he normally helps Afghan asylum seekers arriving in France. But he tells me that the chaos of Kabul led him to jump into a new role as an unofficial crisis coordinator.

[01:49:53]

BELL: Through WhatsApp groups, a map of Kabul airport and pin locations, Reza Jafari connected from Paris those eligible for evacuation who sent him pictures of themselves and their locations to help connect him with French officials on the other side of the fence.

French diplomatic sources have confirmed his crucial role in helping people like Zara Hussein (ph) who spent three days outside the airport.

Reza explains that she wasn't well, she'd sent this photo saying that she might die if she didn't get help.

Group WhatsApp messages upon which life and death hangs. CNN has changed the names for security reasons.

"My parents are out," asks one desperate woman, "please help them."

In another, "Abdul has disappeared," says one person stuck outside, "We are alone at the canal." "Abdul is inside," replies a French official.

The canal marks the spot where the meetings happened, near Abbey Gate, the site of Thursday's suicide attack. Those who reached the other side says Reza are saved.

By Monday afternoon, Zara Hussein's group crossed the canal, met their contacts and reached safety.

Reza's journey has brought him to this door. He knows all too well the heartache and hope of finding refuge. It's his connection to those he's helped.

"Thank God that you all escaped hell," he says, "but there are other friends who are still stuck."

Zara Hussein says she can't believe that she knew war as a young girl and still now as an old woman. She says she is happy to be released from the pressure of the Taliban but so sad to have left her homeland, her children, her friends and her beloved Afghanistan.

Mixed emotions that are shared by the evacuees and the man who helped bring a group of strangers to safety. With the images on their phones still etched indelibly on their minds.

Melissa Bell, CNN -- Paris.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE: With that we'll take a short break. We'll be back in a moment here. You're watching CNN NEWSROOM. (COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAUSE: It's Day 8 at the Tokyo Paralympics and China leads the medal count with more than 130 so far with the U.K. a distant second.

15 medals are up for grabs in swimming and we have there the world champion Carlos Sereno (ph) defending his 2016 Rio Paralympic title in the 100 meter breaststroke SB 7. That's in the coming hours.

We'll also see the men's 100 meter 253 wheelchair race with Canadian world record holder Brent Lakatos leading the pack.

One of the U.S. athletes competing has already triumphed over a horrific childhood tragedy. When Haven Shepherd was 14 months old her father detonated a suicide bomb intended to kill the entire family. Shepherd survived and with the support of her adoptive parents began a remarkable journey to the Paralympics.

And she spoke with CNN's Selina Wang.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

SELINA WANG, CNN CORRESPONDENT: How does it feel to be here in Tokyo representing Team USA for the first time?

HAVEN SHEPHERD, PARALYMPIAN: I mean it's such an honor. I'm so proud of our country especially, you know, having just such a hard year, this is so special.

[01:54:50]

SHEPHERD: Having motivation to, you know, work towards something is hard, but working towards something I didn't even know that that was going to happen was even harder.

WANG: You were born in Vietnam. What happened when you were a baby?

SHEPHERD: I was born in Vietnam to parents that had an affair and had me. And in Vietnam, women can't divorce husbands and so for their circumstance they thought the best -- the thing that would be best for their family was to commit a family suicide.

And they strapped bombs onto themselves and they held me and I was thrown 40 feet away from the accident, and all the damage was done to my legs.

I just think it's such a miracle that, you know, I survived. And that happened when I was 14 months old. And then I was adopted later when I was 20 months old.

WANG: But the knowledge of such a traumatic incident happening when you wear a baby does that weigh on you?

SHEPHERD: My mom was always really honest about what happened to me, and it's definitely made me the person that I am now. I think of my biological mom's sacrifice. I look at her sacrifice of her life for me, you know, and I got to live this amazing life.

I'm here at the Paralympics, you know. I got to have an amazing childhood. And I just think about how epic my story has, you know, changed so many people.

WANG: Was it difficult growing up with a disability and how did you become so confident and secure with yourself?

SHEPHERD: My confidence just comes from choosing my day-to-day life of how am I going to see the world? You know, I could wake up every single morning and just be so offended that, you know, somebody looked at me at the store. And oh, this person looked at me funny because I have my handicap sticker in the parking lot, and my legs are covered.

I definitely take those moments and I have to choose what I'm going pick. Am I going to choose to be offended of them not knowing any better? But I can also choose that oh, wow, they are staring at me because my legs are really cool and I usually choose that point of like well, they looking at me cause I'm so cool.

WANG: You also serve as an ambassador for other amputees. You've been a role model for so many. What advice do you give them?

SHEPHERD: Going through like an amputation or just growing up without limbs in general makes you grow up really fast, because you need to choose what the world is going to do to you.

Is it going to be somewhere where it's not safe and you never leave your house or you don't want people to look at you. Or do you want the world to know that hey, we exist, you know.

I think it's so special too to be a learning tool for people, of educating them. And the Paralympics and the disabled community and, you know, my life and how fulfilled it is by not having legs.

So I think that's one of the greatest gifts I've ever had in my life.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE: The world is how you choose to see it.

I'm John Vause. I'll see you tomorrow.

[01:57:52]

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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