

## ***After one of the deadliest attacks in 20 years of war, many people are still trying to reach the airport.***

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The reported toll of the bombing outside Kabul's airport rose sharply on Friday, with local health officials saying that as many as 170 people were killed and at least 200 were wounded. Yet less than a day after the attack, crowds on Friday sought once again to reach the airport, their desperation to flee the Taliban blending with grief at the enormous scale of the violence.

Health officials' estimate of the number of bombing victims, which did not include the 13 U.S. service members killed and 15 wounded, was supported by interviews with hospital officials. The hospital officials, who requested anonymity because the Taliban had told them not to speak with the media, said some of the dead civilians were Afghan Americans, with U.S. citizenship.

The revised estimates made Thursday's attack one of the deadliest in the nearly two decades since the U.S.-led invasion. American officials believe "another terror attack in Kabul is likely," the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said on Friday afternoon. "The threat is ongoing and it is active. Our troops are still in danger."

At the airport and in the streets, the U.S. military and the Taliban tried to exert what authority they could. Militants with Kalashnikov rifles kept crowds farther away from the airport's entrance gates, guarding checkpoints with trucks and at least one Humvee parked in the roads. The American military resumed evacuation flights, and the White House said early Friday that 12,500 people had been evacuated from Afghanistan in the previous 24 hours, despite the attacks.

The waiting crowds, many standing by buses with bags at their sides, numbered in the hundreds, not the thousands of previous days. An estimated hundreds of thousands remain in the country who are desperate for escape from the Taliban rule of Afghanistan, but very few appeared to be getting to the airport gates on Friday.

The airport itself appeared to be largely, if not entirely, locked down. At the airport's southern and eastern gates, Taliban guards told a reporter that no one was allowed to go near the airport and that all entrance gates were closed. About 5,400 people remained inside waiting evacuation, the Pentagon said Friday.

The grisly scenes on Thursday, when children were among those killed in the crowds, illustrated the intense danger for those braving the high-risk journey to the airport.

On Friday, the U.S. military revised its account of what happened at the airport a day earlier, with Maj. Gen. William Taylor of the Joint Staff saying, "we do not believe that there was a second explosion at or near the Baron Hotel, that it was one suicide bomber." But many witnesses reported hearing two blasts.

With four days remaining until an Aug. 31 deadline for the United States withdrawal, a date that President Biden has said he intends to keep despite domestic and international pressure to extend the evacuation operations, Afghans are scrambling to find a way out of the country.

The task is becoming increasingly difficult.

Mr. Biden vowed retribution against ISIS-K, the Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State, which claimed responsibility for the attacks on behalf of its loyalists in Afghanistan. But there was little information on how the attacks would affect the immediate rescue operations, which had picked up speed in recent days but were still on pace to fall well short of providing an exit for everyone who wants to leave.

### **Understand the Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan**

**Who are the Taliban?** The Taliban arose in 1994 amid the turmoil that came after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. They used brutal public punishments, including floggings, amputations and mass executions, to enforce their rules. Here's more on their origin story and their record as rulers.

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A man who identified himself as Mohammad, from Khost, said that he had hoped to fly out on Friday but that he felt “stuck.” He was unable to get into the airport, and said the Taliban had been looking for former soldiers and media workers.

“I don’t feel safe here anymore,” he said.

General Taylor said some 111,000 people — American citizens, Afghan allies and foreign nationals — have been evacuated from the country since Kabul fell to the Taliban this month.