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Inside Kabul airport, the last American soldier leaves, and the first Taliban fighters arrive.



By Azi Paybarah

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The last moments of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan were captured in two images that were a reversal of the American invasion nearly 20 years ago: A U.S. soldier leaving as Taliban fighters took control.

U.S. Central Command identified the final soldier to leave as Maj. Gen. Chris Donahue, the commanding general of the 82nd Airborne. He was boarding the last flight out of Kabul's airport. Shortly after, the Los Angeles Times posted a video of its Middle East bureau chief, Nabih Bulos, entering the airport with Taliban fighters.

The image of Maj. Donahue, a firearm in his right hand, boarding a C-17 plane Monday night, is shrouded in the green tint suggestive of night vision goggles.



Department of Defense  
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The last American soldier to leave Afghanistan: Maj. Gen. Chris Donahue, commanding general of the [@82ndABNDiv](#), [@18airbornecorps](#) boards an [@usairforce](#) C-17 on August 30th, 2021, ending the U.S. mission in Kabul.

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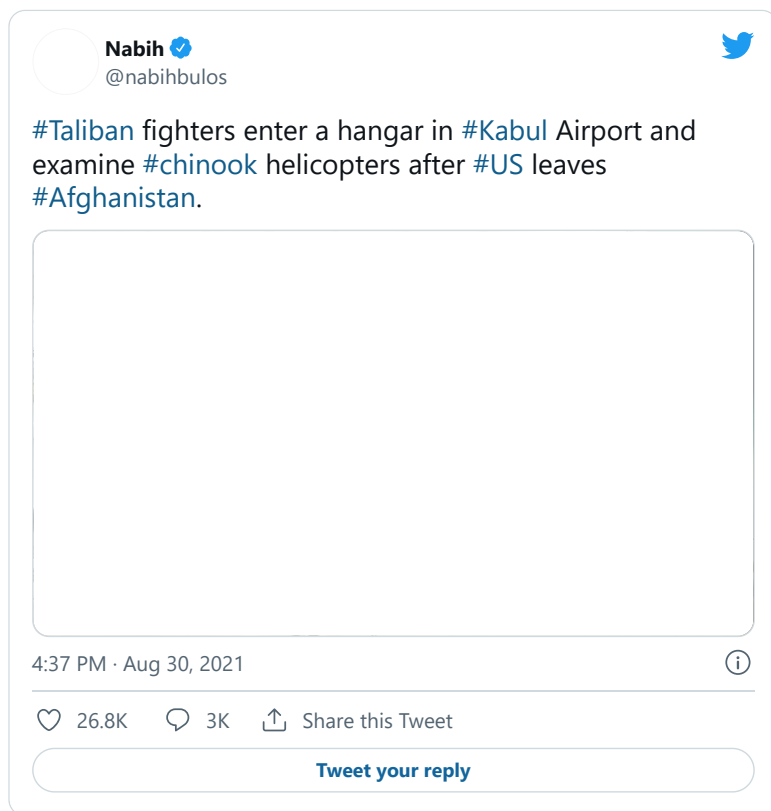


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Nearby, and shortly after, a handful of Taliban fighters were recorded casually walking into an airport hangar. The moment was captured in a 30-second video, viewed nearly two million times on Twitter, by Mr. Bulos.

The overhang is brightly lit. Fighters walk by an empty swivel chair and toward one side of the hangar, where several helicopters sit unoccupied.



The fighters, according to Mr. Bulos, were entering “what was only minutes ago” an American patrolled portion of the airport. In another video posted by Mr. Bulos, Taliban fighters shoot celebratory gunfire into the air.

The two images capture the unlikely transfer of power between the United States, which invaded the country in 2001, and the Taliban, which has waged a bloody campaign to return to power ever since.

Azi Paybarah is a reporter covering breaking news, based in New York. Before joining The Times in 2018 he covered politics for WNYC and The New York Observer. He helped launch the website that later became Politico New York and co-founded the FAQ NYC podcast. He is a lifelong New Yorker and graduate of the University at Albany. @Azi • Facebook

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