

Where Suicide Bombers Struck at the Kabul Airport

By Scott Reinhard, Lauren Leatherby and Larry Buchanan Aug. 26, 2021

This image shows the dense crowds of Afghans and U.S. troops at a gate outside Kabul's airport on Thursday, just hours before two explosions ripped through the crowds and killed dozens of people.



Abbey Gate had been used by U.S. forces in the past week to screen people trying to flee the country before the American evacuation stopped. Early Thursday, U.S. officials issued urgent warnings for Americans to stay away from the entrances to the airport because of security threats.

But the gate remained an extraordinarily vulnerable target on Thursday. Even after the warning, thousands gathered outside, packed into a narrow space outside the airport's walls, some waving paperwork to document American ties. U.S. forces screened possible evacuees.



Akhter Gulfam/EPA, via Shutterstock

At least 13 U.S. troops and dozens of Afghans were killed when a man blew himself up near the gate, American defense officials said, and another explosion went off a few hundred feet away, near the entrance to the Baron Hotel.

Footage from social media showed the dangerously crowded conditions outside the gate in the hours before the attacks.



00:00

0:14



@paimanihamid via Twitter

Many people were forced to cross or stand in a knee-deep canal in the narrow area between the airport exterior wall and surrounding buildings in hopes of making it closer to evacuation. The crowds along the canal stretched hundreds of feet along the length of the airport wall.



Akhter Gulfam/EPA, via Shutterstock

And many photos showed those seeking evacuation wading through barbed wire and trash in what many referred to as a “sewage channel.”



Akhter Gulfam/EPA, via Shutterstock

After the attack, videos posted to social media showed more than a dozen people, some dead and some seriously injured, lying in the canal.

“I saw bodies of women, children and men scattered all around after the blast,” said one Afghan witness, who requested anonymity because he feared for his safety.



Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

Tens of thousands of Afghans are seeking to flee the country, fearful of life under the Taliban and that they may be targeted for retribution. Some estimates suggest hundreds of thousands of interpreters, translators and others with ties to the U.S. military or American organizations may be eligible for expedited visas.

Even the journey to join the crowds outside the airport has proved treacherous for those determined to leave the country. Traveling to the airport often requires passing through Taliban checkpoints, and there is limited food and water in the heat and thick crowds outside the airport walls. Some have been seriously injured or killed on the road to the airport.

Crowds

KABUL INT'L AIRPORT

Gate

Abbey Gate

K A B U L

Crowds gathered
trying to escape city

**Location of
explosions**

Airport Road

U.S. Embassy

FORMER GREEN ZONE

Presidential palace

Kabul

AFGHANISTAN

1 MILE

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