

The Afghan president who fled the country is now in the U.A.E.

The whereabouts Ashraf Ghani, whose departure from Afghanistan last weekend sped the government's collapse, had been a matter of speculation for days.



By Marc Santora, Matthew Rosenberg and Adam Nossiter

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After days of speculation about the whereabouts of President Ashraf Ghani, who fled Afghanistan last weekend as the Taliban surrounded Kabul, the United Arab Emirates said on Wednesday that he had taken refuge in the Gulf nation.

Mr. Ghani has come under withering criticism for his performance during his tenure as Afghanistan's leader and the ignominious way in which he fled, speeding the government's collapse.

It was a spectacular fall for a World Bank-trained technocrat who holds a doctorate from Columbia University. He is the author of a book titled "Fixing Failed States."

Instead of fixing Afghanistan during his nearly seven years in power, Mr. Ghani fled much in the same way he governed: isolated from all but a handful of advisers who are said to have departed with him.

The fallout was swift as what semblance of civil government that was left in Kabul collapsed.

Mr. Ghani, 72, defended his decision to leave in a social media post late on Sunday, writing, "If I had stayed, countless of my countrymen would be martyred and Kabul would face destruction."

For days, rumors swirled about where he might have sought refuge. Some reports suggested that he had gone to neighboring Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, or perhaps Oman. There was talk that Saudi Arabia had agreed to give him asylum, and rumors that he had been accompanied by as many as 200 aides, ministers and members of Parliament.

There were also reports that he had fled with piles of cash, and questions about whether the United States had played any role in his departure.

The U.A.E.'s foreign ministry confirmed in a brief statement that he was in the country.

"The U.A.E. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation can confirm that the U.A.E. has welcomed President Ashraf Ghani and his family into the country on humanitarian grounds," the ministry said.

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