

Transcript of Biden's Speech After Kabul Airport Attack

The president mourned the U.S. service members and others killed and addressed those responsible: "We will hunt you down and make you pay."

Aug. 26, 2021

The following is a transcript of President Biden's remarks on Thursday about an attack at the Kabul, Afghanistan, airport that killed scores of people, including at least 12 U.S. service members.

It's been a tough day. This evening in Kabul, as you all know, terrorists attacked — that we've been talking about, and worried about, that the intelligence community has assessed — has undertaken an attack by a group known as ISIS-K. Took the lives of American service members standing guard at the airport, and wounded several others seriously. They also wounded a number of civilians, and civilians were killed as well.

I've been engaged all day, in constant contact with the military commanders here in Washington and the Pentagon as well as in Afghanistan and Doha. And my commanders here in Washington and in the field have been on this with great detail, and you've had a chance to speak to some so far.

The situation on the ground is still evolving, and I'm constantly being updated. These American service members who gave their lives — it's a overused word but it's totally appropriate here — were heroes, heroes who have been engaged in a dangerous, selfless mission to save the lives of others.

They are part of an airlift and evacuation effort unlike any seen in history, with more than 100,000 American citizens, American partners, Afghans who helped us and others taken to safety in the last 11 days. Just in the last 12 hours or so another 7,000 have gotten out.

They are a part of the bravest, most capable and the most selfless military on the face of the Earth, and they are a part of simply what I call the backbone of America. They are the spine of America. The best the country has to offer.

Jill and I, our hearts ache, like I'm sure all of you do as well, for all those Afghan families who lost loved ones, including small children, who have been wounded in this vicious attack, and we're outraged as well as heartbroken.

Being the father of an Army major who served for a year in Iraq, and before that was in Kosovo as a U.S. attorney for the better part of six months in the middle of a war, when he came home after a year in Iraq, he was diagnosed like many, many coming home with an aggressive and lethal cancer of the brain.

We lost. We have some sense, like many of you do, what the families of these brave heroes are feeling today. You get this feeling like you're being sucked into a black hole in the middle of your chest. There's no way out. My heart aches for you, and I know this: We have a continuing obligation, a sacred obligation to all of you, the families of those heroes. That obligation is not temporary. It lasts forever.

Updates on Afghanistan Sign up for a daily email with the latest news on the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

The lives we lost today were lives given in the service of liberty, the service of security and the service of others. In the service of America. Like their fellow brothers and sisters in arms who have died defending our vision and our values in the struggle against terrorism, of the fallen this day, they are part of a great noble company of American heroes.

To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay. I will defend our interests and our people with every measure at my command.

Over the past few weeks — I know many of you are probably tired of hearing me say it — we've been made aware by our intelligence community that the ISIS-K, an archenemy of the Taliban, people who were freed when both those prisons were opened, has been planning a complex set of attacks on the United States personnel and others. This is why from the outset I've repeatedly said this mission was extraordinarily dangerous and why I've been so determined to limit the duration of this mission.

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.

As Gen. [Kenneth F.] McKenzie said, this is why our mission was designed, this is the way it was designed to operate, operate under severe stress and attack. We've known that from the beginning. And as I've been in constant contact with our senior military leaders — and I mean constant, around the clock — and our commanders on the ground throughout the day, they made it clear that we can and we must complete this mission and we will. And that's what I've ordered them to do.

We will not be deterred by terrorists. We will not let them stop our mission. We will continue the evacuation. I've also ordered my commanders to develop operational plans to strike ISIS-K assets, leadership and facilities. We will respond with force and precision at our time, at the place we choose and the moment of our choosing.

Here's what you need to know: These ISIS terrorists will not win. We will rescue the Americans in there. We will get our Afghan allies out, and our mission will go on. America will not be intimidated, and I have the utmost confidence in our brave service members who continue to execute this mission with courage and honor to save lives, and get Americans, our partners, our Afghan allies out of Afghanistan.

Every day when I've talked to our commanders, I asked them what they need, what more do they need, if anything, to get the job done. As they will tell you, I've granted every request. I reiterated to them today on three occasions that they should take the maximum steps necessary to protect our forces on the ground in Kabul, and I also want to thank the secretary of defense and the military leadership at the Pentagon and all the commanders in the field. There has been complete unanimity from every commander on the objectives of this mission and the best way to achieve those objectives.

Those who have served through the ages and have drawn inspiration from the Book of Isaiah, when the Lord says: "Whom shall I send? Who shall go for us?" The American military has been answering for a long time. "Here I am, Lord. Send me. Here I am, send me." Each one of these women and men of our armed forces are the heirs of that tradition of sacrifice, of volunteering to go into harm's way to risk everything, not for glory, not for profit, but to defend what we love and the people we love.

And I ask that you join me now in a moment of silence for all those in uniform and out of uniform, military and civilian, of giving the last full measure of devotion.

Thank you.

May God bless you all and may God protect the troops and all those standing watch for America. We have so much to do. It's within our capacity to do it. We just have to remain steadfast. Steadfast. We will complete our mission, and we will continue after our troops are withdrawn to find means by which we can find any American who wishes to get out of Afghanistan.

We will find them and we will get them out.