

## ***'We will get as many out as possible,' a U.S. general said as troops surged at the Kabul airport.***



By Eric Schmitt

Aug. 18, 2021

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's top two leaders said on Wednesday that the accelerating military operation at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul is committed to evacuating all Americans who want to leave Afghanistan, as well as Afghans who helped the war effort and are cleared to enter the United States.

"We intend to evacuate those who have been supporting us for years, and we are not going to leave them behind," Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters. "And we will get as many out as possible."

At a Pentagon news conference, however, neither General Milley nor Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III would assure safe passage to the airport for Americans, Afghans and other foreigners now outside the airfield's perimeter.

"The forces that we have are focused on the security at the airfield," said Mr. Austin. He said, "I don't have the capability to go out and extend operations currently into Kabul."

The defense secretary said that the military would work with the Taliban to allow Afghans with proper paperwork to pass through.

And General Milley said the State Department was in communication with the Taliban to secure passage for passengers trying to make their way to the airport. There have been reports of Taliban fighters beating and harassing Afghans trying to get the airport, despite the Pentagon's warnings not to interfere with the evacuation.

Neither Mr. Austin nor Gen. Milley would commit to extending the evacuation mission, which so far has carried out 5,000 people since the operation started over the weekend. The White House has set an Aug. 31 deadline for ending the military's mission in the country.

General Milley also pushed back on media reports that there had been warnings of a rapid collapse of the Afghan military.

"I am very familiar with the intelligence," he said, "and in war nothing is ever certain. But I can tell you that there are not reports that I am aware of that predicted a security force of 300,000 would evaporate in 11 days."