

Scenes of chaos after blasts rock area around Kabul airport.

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For more than a week, the roadways outside the Kabul airport had been a scene of desperation and chaos, but in a single instant Thursday, unspeakably bad somehow found a way to become even worse.

At least two blasts tore through crowds of people trying to flee Afghanistan, killing dozens and wounding well over a hundred others, including U.S. service members.

The explosions happened at Abbey Gate, one of Hamid Karzai International Airport's main entries, and the Baron Hotel, which boasts "the most secured lodging arrangement in Kabul" on its website.

After the explosion at Abbey Gate, sounds of gunfire and sirens could be heard.

Taliban fighters, wearing a medley of uniforms, brandished lengths of pipe and cables in an attempt to clear the crowds that had gathered earlier to try to enter the airport.

"There was an explosion against the Americans, a bunch of people were killed, civilians and military," said one Taliban fighter at the gate, who declined to give his name. "The situation is out of control. There's a lot of dead people on the ground there."

The Taliban condemned the attack, and U.S. officials said they believed the organization was not behind it, given its desire to maintain an orderly evacuation. Officials this week warned about potential attacks by a Taliban rival, the Islamic State Khorasan, or ISIS-K, the terrorist group's affiliate in Afghanistan.

A number of U.S. service members were among the dead, and others were being treated for wounds, the Pentagon press secretary John F. Kirby said in a statement. They appeared to be the first American service members killed in Afghanistan since February 2020.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to the loved ones and teammates" of those killed, Mr. Kirby said.

Estimates of the number of casualties varied. But video posted on Twitter after the explosions appeared to show bloodied bodies piled on a sidewalk and floating in a canal near the entrance to the airport.

At one emergency hospital, ambulance after ambulance could be seen arriving under the glare of floodlights and the eyes of an anxious crowd, some of them children.

A journalist and former government worker wept as she described how she had received a call from a taxi driver, informing her that her husband was among the wounded.

"I begged him not to go, but he went this morning with his government I.D. card to try to show the foreigners," she said. "We have four children. What will happen to us now?"

Seth Eden, a former U.S. Agency for International Development contractor who worked for years in Afghanistan, said he had been helping an Afghan friend, a former deputy minister, try to get out of the country. His friend was told to go to the Abbey Gate to get into the airport.

But when the former minister arrived with his family on Thursday, the gate was closed.

Mr. Eden got on the phone with the Marines guarding it, who had been warned of a possible attack, and persuaded them to let his friend in. Two minutes after the former minister and his family were let through, a bomb went off.

"It is a really, really bad situation right now," said Mr. Eden, who has worked over the last two weeks to get some 100 former colleagues and family members through the American bureaucracy and on the airport.

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