

At Kabul airport, a sense of calm and resignation as deadline approaches.

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In the final hours of the American military presence in Afghanistan, hope dwindled among the Afghans seeking to escape the country via the international airport in Kabul, the focal point of the U.S. evacuation effort since the Taliban takeover of the city just over two weeks ago.

As the U.S. military races toward a Tuesday deadline to withdraw from America's longest war, sporadic violence has been reported in the Afghan capital, underscoring the perils ahead for a country already buffeted by insecurity, a humanitarian crisis and a terrorist threat.

After days of chaos at the airport as thousands scrambled to leave the country, by Monday evening a sense of calm and resignation had descended.

A few hundred people were waiting outside the airport perimeter, but were kept at a significant distance by Taliban fighters guarding the area. A few planes — mostly C-17s, large military transport aircraft — took off and turned west into the setting sun. Around 1,200 people had been airlifted from Kabul in the previous 24 hours, a White House spokeswoman said early Monday morning.

American fighter jets and drones could be seen circling overhead. Taliban fighters said they were preparing for the possibility that the American troops would be gone by day's end, hours before the deadline.

The U.S. military shot down rockets aimed at the Kabul airport earlier on Monday, a day after it said that one of its drones had struck a vehicle full of explosives. The U.S. has warned that more attacks like the one last week outside the airport, which killed nearly 200 people, are possible before it withdraws.

The Islamic State Khorasan, an ISIS affiliate known as ISIS-K, claimed responsibility for that bombing, which also killed U.S. troops. The group claimed responsibility for Monday's rocket fire, too, according to The Associated Press.

Thousands of Afghans who had hoped for a way out of the country are facing the reality that they are unlikely to find one before the withdrawal ends.

One former interpreter for U.S. Special Forces, who asked to be identified only by his nickname, Mike, had approval for a Special Immigrant Visa but was unable to get into the airport. The visa program was created to offer a quick way to bring Afghan interpreters and contractors to safety in the United States, but many will be unable to fly out as part of the current evacuation.

"I'm still in Kabul, and I don't know what to do," Mike said in a phone interview. "Of course we are disappointed that we're left behind. We have sacrificed a lot."

He described the frustration of knowing that many others had left without the same documentation, and his fear of returning home to a village where everyone knows he worked for the Americans.

"We wake up in the middle of the night and think about what's going to happen to our life and to our children," he said.