

Biden says U.S. troops may stay longer if needed for evacuations.



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WASHINGTON — President Biden said on Wednesday that the United States was committed to evacuating every American out of Afghanistan, even if that may mean extending the military mission beyond his Aug. 31 deadline for a total withdrawal.

“If there’s American citizens left, we’re going to stay to get them all out,” Mr. Biden said during an interview on ABC News.

“So Americans should understand that troops might have to be there beyond Aug. 31?” asked the interviewer, George Stephanopoulos.

“No,” Mr. Biden replied. “Americans should understand that we’re going to try to get it done before Aug. 31.” But he then said, “If we don’t, we’ll determine at the time who’s left.”

Mr. Biden, as he did earlier in the week, offered a strong defense of his administration’s handling of the military withdrawal, which has plunged Afghanistan into chaos.

“The idea that somehow there’s a way to have gotten out without chaos ensuing — I don’t know how that happens,” he said, according to a transcript provided by the network.

Mr. Stephanopoulos asked Mr. Biden whether in making the decision to withdraw forces from America’s 20-year war in Afghanistan he had “priced in” the risk that United States citizens and Afghan allies would struggle to evacuate the country, putting them in danger from Taliban forces who might try to exact revenge.

The president initially answered “yes,” and then added: “Now exactly what happened, I’ve not priced in.”

In the days since Kabul fell to the Taliban on Sunday, thousands of Americans and Afghans have surged toward the airport, seeking flights out of the country. Taliban forces outside the airport have been brutally stopping many people at checkpoints. Many others have made it to the airport perimeter only to be turned away.

Mr. Biden insisted in the interview that the Taliban had agreed to let U.S. citizens get through to the airport.

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“Look, one of the things we didn’t know is what the Taliban would do in terms of trying to keep people from getting out,” he said. “What they would do. What are they doing now? They’re cooperating, letting American citizens get out, American personnel get out, embassies get out, et cetera.”

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.

That was not the case, he acknowledged, for the thousands of Afghans who helped U.S. and NATO forces over the years and now have a target on their back.

“They’re having — we’re having some more difficulty having those who helped us when we were in there,” the president said.

The president insisted that the administration had acted swiftly to evacuate the American Embassy in Kabul without losing any lives.

And though the world has looked on in horror, he appeared dismissive of the images of United States military planes taking off with Afghans clinging to their sides. Some plunged to their deaths.

“That was four days ago, five days ago!” Mr. Biden said.

Mr. Stephanopoulos asked whether what happened was a “failure of intelligence, planning, execution or judgment,” deflected to the broader issue of his decision to end the war.

“Look, it was a simple choice, George,” Mr. Biden said. “When you had the government of Afghanistan, the leader of that government, get in a plane and taking off and going to another country, when you saw the significant collapse of the Afghan troops we had trained, up to 300,000 of them, just leaving their equipment and taking off — that was, you know, I’m not, that’s what happened.”