

Australian citizen is beaten by Taliban while trying to reach evacuation flight as Islamists IGNORE US

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Bloodied and beaten by the Taliban - this was the fate of one man claiming to be an Australian citizen as he tried to reach Kabul airport today as the Islamists defied Joe Biden's demand to let evacuation flights continue unimpeded with just hours left to get civilians out of the country.

Fears are growing that crowds could try to storm the airport once civilian mercy flights stop, or that opportunistic terrorists could attack the densely-packed crowd

The man, whose identity is unknown, was attacked after the Taliban vowed to stop people reaching the airport despite Biden demanding that they 'allow access to the airport for those who are transporting out and no disruptions to our operations' in return for US troops withdrawing from the country by August 31.

Video shows the man at what appears to be a Taliban checkpoint with blood running down his face and dripping on to his pink polo shirt, saying in accented English: 'They hit me... I am an Australian citizen.'

He then talks about trying to reach the airport, though his words are partially obscured by the sound of Taliban guards cocking and firing an AK47 rifle over his head - before the footage cuts out.

But even those who are lucky enough to make it past the Taliban must still navigate a crowd of evacuees around the airport, where hope is fast turning to panic and anger as the final planes depart. Some are wading across an open sewer underneath walls where western troops stand guard, waving papers in the hopes of being picked up.

Lord David Richards, former chief of UK defence staff, said he is 'pretty certain' that British flights will have to stop on Friday to allow enough time for 1,000 troops to fully withdraw by August 31, the date Joe Biden committed to yesterday under threats from the Taliban.

France says it is 'very probable' that its flights will stop tomorrow, while Poland said it has already stopped flights due to the 'security situation' at the airport. Hungary will also stop flights soon.

Fears are now growing that civilians could rush the runway and trigger a deadly stampede in a repeat of the horror scenes from last week, or else opportunistic terror groups such as ISIS could attack packed crowds - fears that will only grow as troop numbers dwindle.

British foreign secretary Dominic Raab admitted this morning that the mercy missions are now into their final hours with some 4,000 people - 1,250 western citizens and 2,500 Afghans - still left to rescue, though he did not say exactly when the final flight will leave or how many people may be left behind.

Mr Raab was also forced to admit that the coming days will present 'maximum danger' for British troops, fearing both a 'Saigon' moment with crowds rushing planes and threats of a 'spectacular' terrorist attack.

A man claiming to be an Australian citizen was beaten bloody by Taliban guards at a checkpoint in Kabul today, after the Taliban vowed to block any more people from going to the airport

Desperate Afghans waded through a sewage ditch on the outskirts of Kabul airport this morning while pleading with soldiers guarding the opposite bank to put them on a plane out of the country as time runs out to flee Taliban rule

Troops force back a desperate Afghan man trying to enter the airport (left) while hundreds of others stand up to their knees in a filthy drainage ditch as they plead to be allowed to board flights out of the country

Biden has committed the US to withdraw by August 31, a decision that western allies warn will mean thousands of Afghans who were promised sanctuary being left behind

A US marine comforts a child at Kabul airport as the evacuation operation nears its end, with US allies saying flights could stop within the next 24 hours

A US marine carries a child towards an evacuation aircraft at Kabul airport as the final mercy flights depart the country

But, Mr Raab insisted, Britain will keep flying planes out of the country until the last possible moment in the hopes of getting as many people out as possible.

In a separate incident, a British citizen who gave his name as Shafiullah and said he runs a business in Bromley, south London, told The Times that Taliban guards had beaten him on the way to the airport before UK soldiers told him to 'f*** off' when he finally reached the gate.

'We are desperate here,' he said, adding: 'We know the clock is counting down to the last flights. There's too little time left to evacuate us all.'

One British soldier, speaking anonymously to the Daily Telegraph, said his 'biggest fear' is a stampede at the airport and that 'the civilians might try and get in any way they can and potentially put us all at risk.'

'Unfortunately the quantity of civilians arriving is something we cannot control, with the majority of them not being eligible to be evacuated,' he said, adding: 'I and many others have seen a few mentally disturbing scenes. I think there will be more of that.'

Outlining rough plans for the British withdrawal, defence sources said the first move will be for troops to leave the Baron hotel where they have been processing paperwork of those wishing to leave the country.

Next, soldiers will hand over control of Abbey gate - located on the south east side of the airport - to US forces.

But exactly how and when they will leave the airport entirely is being kept a closely-guarded secret, amid fears that the news of a full exit could spark a rush of desperate people at the gates.

Underlining the risks, one defence source told The Telegraph: 'It could be the airfield gets compromised by a massive incursion. It could be that the Taliban have an element that wants to put up a fight in the last days. It could be that ISIS wants to do a 'spectacular'.'

Biden also admitted to the danger facing troops on Tuesday as he announced his decision on the deadline, saying: 'The sooner we can finish, the better... each day of operations brings added risk to our troops.'

Even as the evacuation enters its final stages, Afghanistan's new Islamist rulers are just beginning to grapple with the challenges facing the country which is facing economic collapse in addition to food shortages and a near-total lack of services, particularly in remote regions.

The Taliban has urged male bureaucrats and bankers back to their desks in the hopes of restarting an economy which stalled as the group swept to power in a lightning-fast military offensive.

ATMs remain empty after US flights bringing banknotes into the country were stopped, while government staff are refusing to return to their offices for fear of reprisal attacks.

The US has frozen some \$9.5billion belonging to the Afghan national bank, while the World Bank announced today that it has frozen \$5.3billion in development aid amid fears of human rights abuses by the Taliban.

Taliban leaders have also been barred from accessing some \$450million in emergency reserves that is being stored with the International Monetary Fund.

That has left Afghans with no access to their own money - meaning business owners cannot pay staff and ordinary citizens are struggling to buy basic goods.

Just yesterday, the World Food Programme warned that food supplies could start running out as soon as next month unless emergency shipments are allowed into the country.

Afghan families are pictured boarding a military evacuation flight at Hamid Karzai Airport as the US prepares to withdraw from the country, with other western nations set to follow

An Afghan woman accompanied by a young child walks towards a US evacuation plane sitting on the runway at Kabul airport

Taliban Badri units are seen in Kabul after leaders warned of 'consequences' if western forces overstay the August 31 deadline

Many Afghans fear a repeat of the brutal five-year Taliban regime that was toppled in 2001, and violent retribution for working with foreign militaries, Western missions and the previous US-backed government.

Washington and its allies have been flying out thousands of such Afghans every day on hulking military transports, but it has become an increasingly difficult and desperate task.

The Afghan capital's airport has been gripped by chaos as US-led troops try to maintain a secure perimeter for evacuation flights, surrounded by desperate Afghans.

Some have foreign passports, visas or eligibility to travel, but most do not. At least eight people have died in the chaos.

'Does anyone ... ANYONE ... have a contact inside the airport,' pleaded one American on a WhatsApp group set up to share information on how people can access the airport.

'My guy worked for us 2010-15 and needs to get out with 5 of his family. This is real bad.'

The Taliban have also been accused of blocking or slowing access for many trying to reach the airport, although they denied the charge again late Tuesday.

Biden said the Taliban were taking steps to assist, but there was also an 'acute and growing risk' of an attack by the regional chapter of the Islamic State jihadist group.

CIA Director William Burns flew to Kabul for a secret meeting with top Taliban leader Abdul Ghani Baradar, US media reported Tuesday, the highest-level meeting so far between the US government and the new rulers of Afghanistan.

The New York Times said the spy chief was not there to negotiate an extension to the pullout deadline, but for general talks on 'evacuation operations and terrorist threats'.

People disembark a military plane after being evacuated from Afghanistan as it arrives at Melsbroek Military Airport, Belgium

A bus with a Netherlands' flag on the side waits at Belgium's Melsbroek Military Airport to receive Afghan evacuees

An Afghan girl carrying a Mickey Mouse doll walks to a bus that will take them to a refugee processing center at Dulles International Airport, Virginia

Afghan families walk to a bus that will take them to a refugee processing center at Dulles International Airport

Despite the harrowing scenes at Kabul airport, the Taliban have ruled out any extension to next Tuesday's deadline to pull out foreign troops, describing it as 'a red line'.

'They have planes, they have the airport, they should get their citizens and contractors out of here,' Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Tuesday.

European nations have said they would not be able to airlift all at-risk Afghans before August 31.

'Even if (the evacuation) goes on... a few days longer, it will not be enough,' German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told Bild TV.

A hard withdrawal deadline presents a further complication that may reduce the number of daily evacuations.

The United States deployed fresh troops for evacuations.

That 6,000-plus contingent, as well as hundreds of US officials, 600 Afghan troops and the equipment, will have to be flown out.

To do that by August 31, the Pentagon said operations would have to start winding down days in advance.

Following their lightning victory that stunned the world, the Taliban have so far been content to allow the US-led operation to continue, focusing instead on consolidating control and forming a government.

They have vowed a softer, more inclusive regime this time around, offering amnesty to opponents and assurances of rights to women.

But many Afghans remain fearful and sceptical.

In an attempt to assuage fears, the Taliban spokesman on Tuesday urged skilled Afghans to not flee, saying the country needed 'expert' Afghans such as doctors and engineers.

But Zabihullah Mujahid added that women who work for the Afghan government should stay home until the security situation improves.

The Taliban have said women will be able to get an education and work, but within what they consider Islamic bounds.

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