

UK left hundreds of Afghans behind as last civilian flight departed from Kabul

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Afghans queue at the main entrance gate of the Kabul airport on August 28, 2021. (Photo by AFP)

London, August 29 (RHC)-- Britain admits it has left behind hundreds of desperate people trying to leave the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, as the UK civilian evacuation effort came to an end in the capital Kabul.

The head of the armed forces, Sir Nick Carter, said the last evacuation flights left Kabul and that further flights will transport UK diplomatic and military personnel on board. "We're reaching the end of the evacuation, which will take place during the course of today," he told BBC Radio 4 on Saturday.

"We have some civilian flights to take out but it's very few now," he said, after which "it will be necessary to bring our troops out on the remaining aircraft." Carter said it was "heartbreaking" they had not been able to "bring everybody out."

He estimated the number of eligible Afghans, who had not been evacuated to be "in the high hundreds," saying that they will be welcome in the UK if they manage to leave Afghanistan. His remarks echoed those of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who said Friday that the UK would "shift heaven and earth" to help the Afghans.

The British defense secretary, Ben Wallace, also publicly accepted on Friday that there would be up to 1,100 Afghan nationals left behind, including Afghan translators and others who worked with British forces. Carter also warned about the situation in Afghanistan, saying the last few days will be "a very demanding operation," as the threat from the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group "has not gone away." "I think our American allies who will effectively be the rearguard as this happens, are going to be very challenged."

The U.S. and its NATO allies have been evacuating their citizens from Afghanistan in recent weeks, as the Taliban took over Kabul earlier this month. But the slow evacuation efforts have brought a daily mayhem at the Kabul airport, with tens of thousands of Afghans trying to flee the country on board US military aircraft.

On Thursday, two bomb attacks were carried out near the airport as scores of people crowded around one of the airport's main access gates.

The attacks, claimed by Daesh, killed as many as 170 people, around the airport which has been running by the United States. The U.S. military said on Saturday its forces have been forced into closer security cooperation with the Taliban to prevent any repeat of such bombings.

A day after the attacks, several NATO members said they ended their evacuation efforts from Afghanistan. France said on Saturday the airlift had to be stopped because "the security conditions were no longer being met at the airport."

Spain said it ended its evacuations effort after taking more than 2,200 people out of Afghanistan. Australia and Norway also announced the end of their evacuation operations.

Providing security at the Kabul airport has become an issue since the US started to pull out its forces from the country in early May. Turkey has been negotiating with the Taliban about providing technical help to operate the airport after the August 31 deadline for foreign troops to leave Afghanistan.

The Taliban said on Thursday their guards will provide security outside the airport, reiterating that Western forces must stick to a deadline of completing evacuations from Afghanistan.

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