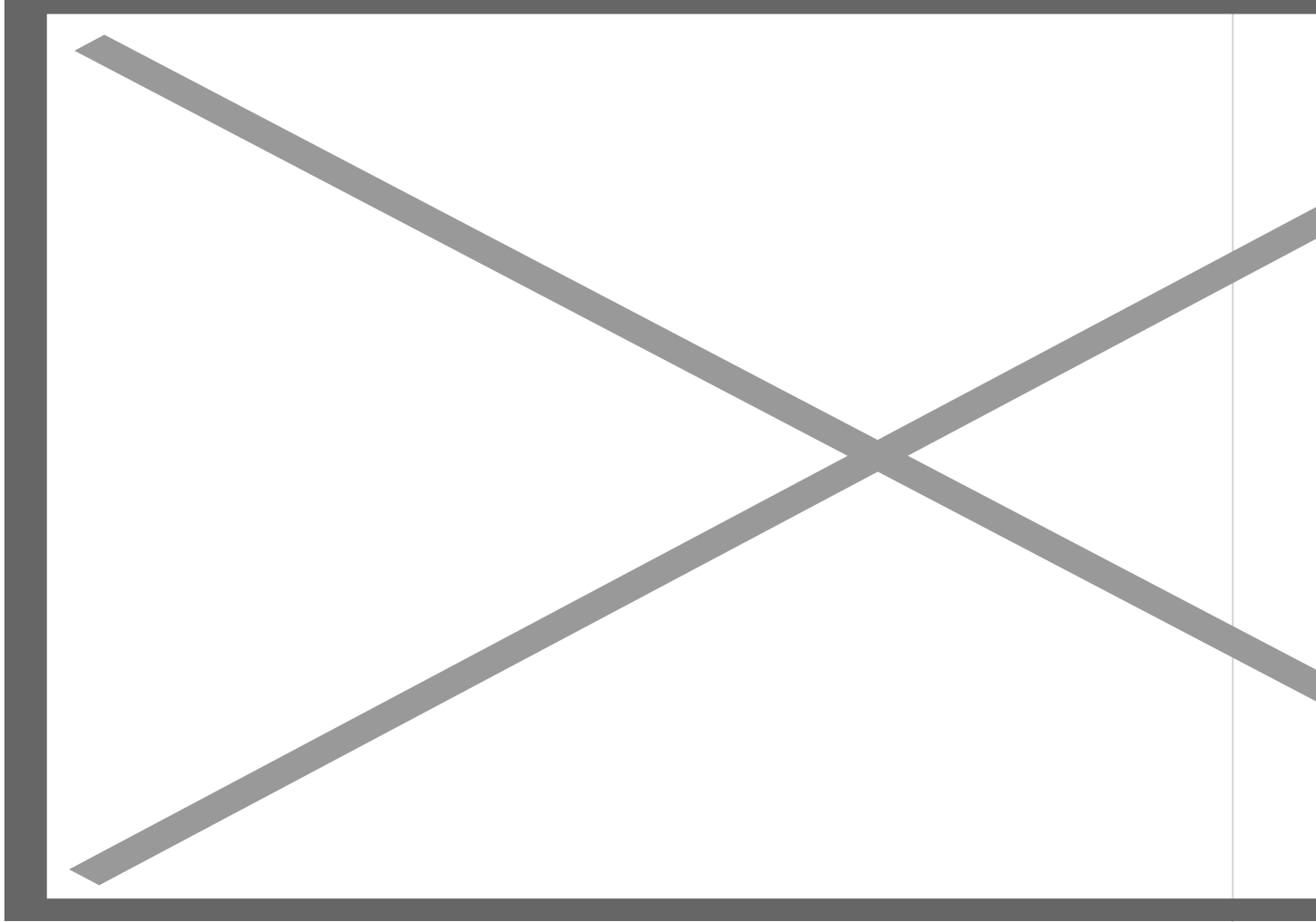


U.S. completes Afghanistan withdrawal as final flight leaves Kabul

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Kabul, August 30 (RHC)-- The final U.S. military flight has left the Afghan capital, the Pentagon announced on Monday, officially ending the United States' 20-year war in Afghanistan after a chaotic

evacuation effort.

General Frank McKenzie, commander of U.S. Central Command, said the U.S. evacuated 79,000 people, including 6,000 American citizens, from Kabul since August 14, shortly before the Taliban took control of the city. "I'm here to announce the completion of our withdrawal from Afghanistan," McKenzie told reporters during a news briefing at the Pentagon.

The final U.S. evacuation flight left the Kabul airport although the U.S. failed to gather hundreds of Americans left behind on the Afghan soil. "I believe that we're going to get those people out, I think we're also going to negotiate very hard and very aggressively to get our other Afghan partners out," Gen. McKenzie said. "Our desire to bring these people out remains as intense as it was before."

The U.S. and its allies have reportedly evacuated over 123,000 people since the end of July. The Pentagon instructed senior U.S. military leaders to make preparations for an imminent "mass casualty event" just 24 hours before the bombing at the Kabul airport.

"There's a lot of heartbreak associated with this departure. We did not get everybody out that we wanted to get out, but I think if we stayed another ten days ... we wouldn't have gotten everybody out that we wanted to get out and there still would have been people who would have been disappointed with that," McKenzie said. "We maintained the ability to bring them in up until immediately before departure but we were not able to bring any Americans out... None of them made it to the airport and were able to be accommodated."

The last C-17 left the Hamid Karzai International Airport at 3:29 pm ET and cleared Afghanistan's airspace.

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