



## **White House Will Evacuate Afghans Who Helped US to Third Country for Visa Processing**

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**2nd Lt. Scott Buckmaster talks with his interpreter during a halt of their ground assault convoy in a simulated Afghan village on Jan. 8, 2008, at Camp Atterbury, Joint Maneuver Training Center. (U.S. Army/Sgt. First Class Peter Eustaquio)**

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**Military.com | By Stephen Losey**

**The Biden administration has finalized a plan to evacuate tens of thousands of Afghan interpreters, drivers and other allies and their families to a third country while their visas are processed.**



**An official confirmed that the administration has told lawmakers it has a plan for helping Afghans who have assisted the United States over the last two decades.**

**And a senior administration official told Military.com that the government is planning to relocate Afghans who served as interpreters and translators and are already in the Special Immigrant Visa process out of Afghanistan before the military's drawdown is complete in September.**

**"We've long said we are committed to supporting those who have helped U.S. military and other government personnel perform their duties, often at great personal risk to themselves and their families," the senior administration official said. "We are actively working on every possible contingency to make sure that we can help those who have helped us."**

**These Afghan allies and their families now may be at risk of death or other reprisal from the Taliban once the U.S. finishes its withdrawal, and advocates are concerned that time may be running out.**

**Further information on how the evacuation might work is scarce. The New York Times, which first reported the news, said that the Afghans would be evacuated, but it was not immediately clear what their third-country destination will be.**

**Advocates have grown increasingly vocal in recent weeks about the danger faced by Afghan allies and ratcheted up pressure on the administration as the military's withdrawal gathered steam. The White House set a Sept. 11 deadline by which the military must be out of Afghanistan, but it is likely to be finished much earlier.**

**In a conference call with reporters last week, Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, pitched the idea of temporarily housing Afghans and their families in a territory held by a NATO nation. This, he said, would**



**give them a safe place to stay while their visa applications are worked through.**

**King and other supporters of Afghan allies argue that allowing them to be killed by the Taliban would be a historic national shame -- one that would haunt the United States for generations. The senator said that if the U.S. does not support those who put themselves at risk to help Americans, no one will be willing to help the nation in future conflicts.**

**"I want the White House's hair on fire" over the need to safeguard Afghans, King told reporters June 15. "The time is short and getting shorter all the time."**

**Other advocates have called for temporarily housing Afghans on Guam, a U.S. territory that is also the home of Andersen Air Force Base.**

**There is a backlog of roughly 18,000 Afghan allies still waiting for Special Immigrant Visas, which would allow them to come to the United States. The visa process is notoriously slow, bureaucratic and short-staffed, with applicants often waiting nearly three years to be cleared.**

**In a budget hearing Wednesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told the House Armed Services Committee that the military is ready if called upon to support an evacuation effort by the State Department.**

**"I am confident that we'll begin to evacuate some of those people soon," he said.**

**Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Mark Milley said the military has the capability to assist the Afghans. "I consider it a moral imperative to assist those who have served along our side," he said.**



**In a briefing with reporters Thursday afternoon, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby suggested that non-military charter aircraft might play a role in the evacuation.**

**"Not all such evacuation operations require military aircraft to conduct," he said. "It's not like we haven't done this before using ... commercially leased aircraft or chartered aircraft. ... There are lots of ways to facilitate transportation out of Afghanistan."**

**The State Department is in charge of the interagency planning, Kirby said, and the Defense Department has been taking part. It remains unclear whether all SIV participants will come to the U.S., Kirby said, or whether some will end up in other countries. He said those decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. But he stressed how important the Pentagon views the need to save these Afghans' lives.**

**"We know we have a sacred obligation -- and we don't use those phrases lightly here -- to help those who have helped us," Kirby said. "We're taking this extremely seriously."**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Ronald Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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