

White House press briefing (via ABC News Live)  
August 17, 2021  
1:41 p.m. Eastern

**AYESHA RASCOE: So, I want to ask, the President yesterday said that the buck stops with him. I want to get an understanding of what did he mean by — what is he taking ownership of, not just the decision to leave Afghanistan but is he taking responsibility for the chaos that happened during the evacuations or the decisions not to do evacuations sooner? For all — is he taking responsibility for that and for any bloodshed that may be happening right now. Is he taking responsibility for that?**

JAKE SULLIVAN: He's taking responsibility for every decision the United States government took with respect to Afghanistan because, as he said, the buck stops with him. I am also taking responsibility, and so are my colleagues. The secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the directors of our intelligence agencies, we as a national security team collectively take responsibility for every decision good decision — uh — every decision that doesn't produce perfect outcomes. That is what responsibility is. Now, at the same time, that doesn't change the fact that there are other parties here responsible as well who have taken actions and decisions that helped lead us to where we are. So, from our perspective, what we have to do now is focus on the task at hand, the mission at hand You mentioned chaos at the airport yesterday. At the end of the day. The question is, can we effectively evacuate those people who we intend to evacuate? And that is what we are planning for and executing against beginning today where the airport is secure, the flights are going, the people are coming, and we will continue to do that in the days ahead. Yes.

**UNIDENTIFIED MALE REPORTER #1: Yeah, what — what is President Biden's response to the people of Afghanistan who are now in the hands of the Taliban terrorists and feel abandoned by the United States or those in Taiwan and elsewhere that are fearful that the U.S. will abandon them to the aggression of China? And follow up to that is what is President Biden's response to people in Israel and other countries who might also believe that the U. S. will be abandoning them to terrorists.**

SULLIVAN: So, to the first question, President Biden and all of us, as I said in my opening comments, are heartbroken by the human consequences that have unfolded and could continue to unfold in Afghanistan. We believe passionately in human rights and human dignity, and we want to work with the international community to advance that wherever we can, but President Biden was not prepared to have American men and women continue to fight and die in the civil war of another country in order to achieve that. We will use every other tool at our disposal to achieve that, and we will do so day after day, month after month in the period ahead on behalf of the people of Afghanistan. To your question about allies, we gave 20 years of American blood, treasure, sweat, and tears in Afghanistan. We gave them every capacity in terms of training and equipment to stand up and fight for themselves and at some point, it was the time for the United States to say that the Afghan people had to stand up for themselves. We believe that our commitments to our allies and partners are sacrosanct and always have been. We believe our commitment to Taiwan and to Israel remains as strong as it's ever been. Keep in mind that, with

respect to Afghanistan, we said back in 2011 that we would be out in 2014. We stayed another seven years, far and above and beyond the commitment that we made more than a decade ago. And the last thing that I would say is that President Biden is laser focused on accomplishing the core national security objectives of the United States and when it comes to Afghanistan. That was getting bin Laden and degrading al-Qaeda. We accomplished that, and he believes it was time for our troops to come home. Yes.

**MICHAEL SHEAR: So, um, just now, Jake, you described a kind of choice that the President would — that was in front of the President: Either save the, you know, save the folks, the allies in Afghanistan, folks that helped the United States through the last two decades or sacrifice more Americans young men. I think the question out there on Capitol Hill and around Washington and elsewhere is wasn't there another choice? Wasn't there a way you could have ended you — President Biden could have ended the war in the way that he wanted to end the war, so that Americans don't sacrificed further lives for this war, but at the same time, do a better job of either ignoring Gandhi's, you know, request to not start evacuations or — you know, figuring some way that we wouldn't end up in a situation where there's masses of people crushing through the airport and the execution of the last four, five, six days that has seemed to just about everybody as — as — as not, I mean, is not the way a competent administration, you know — not the result that confident administration, you know, has in the end, so wasn't isn't that false choice And why couldn't you I do both.**

[SULLIVAN]

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #1: Did you believe that the mission could be completed by August 31st as the national security advisor, what do you see the scenario on September 1st? Do you think the Taliban in 2021 different than in 2001. Do you see another situation to Iraq where a new terrorist organization will be born like ISIS out of al-Qaeda in Iraq, for example.

[SULLIVAN]

PATSY WIDAKUSWARA [VOA]: Can you tell us what is it exactly — the commitment that you are secured from the Taliban regarding the safe passage of Americans as well as tens of thousands of vulnerable Afghans?

SULLIVAN: The Taliban have informed us that they are prepared to provide the safe passage of civilians to the airport and we intend to hold them to that commitment.

WIDAKUSWARA Do you believe them?

SULLIVAN: Yes.

PETER ALEXANDER: Just for clarity on that, is there some deadline that's been set? Has the Taliban's assurances that this will go till August 31st? Is the deadline before that, or after that?

For clarity on what you just said.

SULLIVAN: Until we — we believe that this can go till the 31st. We're talking to them about what the exact timetable is for how this will all play out, and I don't want to negotiated in public on — on working out the best modality to get the most people out in the most efficient way possible objective.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #2: Yesterday, President Biden said that the United States military cannot sacrifice — sacrifice where there is no national interested. If the same analogies be used to withdraw troops from its allies, including South Korea? What do you [INAUDIBLE]?

SULLIVAN: So, the President, as he has said repeatedly has no intention of drawing down our forces from South Korea or from Europe, where we have sustained troop presences for a very long time, not in the middle of a civil war. But to deal with the potential of an external enemy and to protect our ally against that external enemy, so it is a fundamentally different kind of situation from the one we are presented with. Yes.

STEPHANIE RAMOS: Thank you. The President yesterday said the situation unfolding more quickly than anticipated. You said it yourself just moments ago, but numerous officials have told ABC that there were key intelligence assessments warning the Taliban could overwhelm the country and take the capital within weeks. Did the White House disregard that intelligence and push ahead.

[SULLIVAN]

**WEIJIA JIANG: If the mission is not completely be August 31<sup>st</sup> and there are Americans and Afghan allies who remained there. Will U.S. troops stay until everyone is out or will they leave?**

**SULLIVAN: So I'm not going to comment on hypotheticals. What I'm going to do is stay focused on the task at hand, which is getting as many people out as rapidly as possible. And we will take that day by day.**

**JIANG: You can't commit to —**

**SULLIVAN: Yes.**

**JIANG: — bringing back every American as well?**

UNIDENTIFIED MALE REPORTER #2: There's a large number of this large number of Christian missionaries and aid workers that are particularly vulnerable because they're going to be Christians. Is there any plan to get them to the airport and get them out?

SULLIVAN: We're working with a variety of different types of groups, journalists, aid workers,

NGO workers and so forth to help facilitate their departure from the country. Yes.

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #3: Jake, talk about these contingencies plans. The President of the United States left the White House on Friday. When did your administration know that another 6,000 troops were going to be needed for this withdrawal?**

[SULLIVAN]

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #3: If you had to bring them in, why did he leave the White House? On Thursday, he knew. Why did he leave the White House on Friday?**

SULLIVAN: The President worked throughout the entire weekend. I was intimately familiar with his working habits over the course of the weekend because I was on the phone with him constantly. Secretary Austin was on the phone with him, so he was monitoring developments hour by hour throughout that entire time and has been making a series of decisions about troop deployments, giving us direction and guidance about how to take the shape of this mission and make sure that we're executing it and at every turn, asking our military who is leading this mission and executing this mission with bravery and valor, "what do you need? I will get you anything you need." He asked that question multiple times every single day. So President Biden has been deeply engaged in this Yes.

**AMELIA ADAMS [Australia's Nine News]: Sorry. Um, there's a lot of anger in Australia this morning about the way this has played out. Um, we've got citizens and then, of course, so many Afghan who have helped the Australian forces and helping the U.S. mission over the past 20 years. Um, does the administration accept some responsibility? Or perhaps what would be your response to those people who are trapped and — and some are fearing execution because of the exit strategy, or perhaps lack of competent exit strategy?**

[SULLIVAN]

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #4: Yes Jake, what do you say to the next generation of Afghan women and children, young girls who face fundamentally different human rights moving forward?**

SULLIVAN: I — I say that, truly deeply, my heart goes out to Afghan women and girls in the country today under the Taliban. We've seen what they've done before and that's a very hard thing for any of us to face. But this wasn't a choice just between saving those women and girls and not saving those women and girls. The alternative choice had its own set of human costs and consequences, as I said. And those human costs and consequences would have involved a substantial ramp up of American participation in the civil war with more loss of life and more bloodshed, families here in the United States who would be asking a different form of the question you just asked. These are the choices the President has to make. And it doesn't mean because we don't have forces in that country that we're not going to fight on behalf of women and girls in human rights and human dignity. We are. We do in many other countries where we don't

have active military participation, and we'll do it in Afghanistan too and we will attempt to use every measure of tool and influence we have along with our international allies and partners to alleviate the burden that those women and girls will face in the days ahead. We are absolutely, resolutely committed to that. Yes?

STEVE HOLLAND: Do you recognize the Taliban as the legitimate governing power in Afghanistan now?

SULLIVAN: Right now, there is a chaotic situation in Kabul where we don't even have the establishment of a governing authority, so it would be really premature to address that question. Ultimately it's going to be up to the Taliban to show the rest of the world who they are and how they intend to proceed. The track record has not been good, but it's premature to address that question at this point. Yes.

**CATHERINE LUCEY: Jake, you said that the Taliban is committed to safe passage to the airport. But our reporting is that they've set up checkpoints outside the airport. People are being beaten and whips when they try and cross these checkpoints and that some of the evacuation place are leaving nearly empty as a result. What assurances you have specifically about these checkpoints and when do you expect them to stop to doing those?**

[SULLIVAN]

JOSH BOAK: Jake, thanks so much. You talked about your confidence in the contingency planning. And I'm wondering if, in hindsight, looking at the planning and execution, what this administration would have done differently, knowing what it is now?

SULLIVAN: It's a good question, and it's one that we will conduct an extensive hot wash, as we say. We will take a look at every aspect of this from top to bottom, but sitting here today, I'm spending every hour I have focused on how we execute the mission we have before us, which is getting all of these people out. Yes.

**KAITLAN COLLINS: Jake, two questions for you. One, has the President spoken to any other world leaders since Kabul fell to the Taliban?**

SULLIVAN: Sorry, I was looking at the wrong person. He has not yet spoken with any other world leaders. Myself, Secretary Blinken, several other senior members of the team have been engaged on a regular basis with foreign counterparts and we intend to do so in the coming days. Right now, the main issue is an operational issue. It's about how we coordinate with them to help them get their people out and we are operating through logistical channels and policy channels to try to make that happen.

COLLINS: And Jake, just to follow up on that, you just said that you will expect a review of what went wrong here on the U.S.'s response. I know you said there are other additional factors, like what happened on the ground in Afghanistan that led to this. Will you publicly disclosed what went wrong and who misjudged the intelligence here for how quickly the Taliban could

take over?

SULLIVAN: So, first, I didn't describe that we were doing a "what went wrong" review. What I said is we'll do a hot wash. We'll look at everything that happened in this entire operation from start to finish in the areas of improvement where we can do better, where — where we can find holes or weaknesses and plug them as we go forward and, of course, we intend — after we've had the opportunity to run that analysis to share that with people. Yes.

PHILLIP WEGMANN: Thank you, sir. Um, **you noted that you had encouraged Americans on the ground there to leave, and that Many chose not to. I just wanted to follow up on Weijia's question. Will the U.S. government commit to ensuring that any Americans that are currently on the ground in Afghanistan get out.**

SULLIVAN: That's what we're doing right now. We have asked them all to come to the airport to get on flights and take them home. That's what we intend to do.

SHANNON PETTYPIECE: Former — former officials from multiple administrations — Obama administration, the Bush administration, have said they are certain Afghanistan will become a safe haven for terrorists. I know you and the President have disputed that. What do you think those officials are getting wrong? And can you ensure that Americans are safer today because of your actions then we were several months ago?

[SULLIVAN]

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #5: Just wondering, can you shed light on the decision to leave behind blackhawks and other equipment. How that fits in with the contingency planning the U.S. had —

SULLIVAN: Leave behind?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #5: — blackhawks and other equipment. Why give the Taliban access to state of art equipment that they could either use to bolster their own defenses or sell off to other countries.

[SULLIVAN]

UNIDENTIFIED MALE REPORTER #3: The President has not been shy about undoing many of the previous President's policies. Many of them. Why not undo this one, particularly since the Taliban have abdicated already what they agreed to — that — in Doha with — with President Trump?

[SULLIVAN]

**KAREN TRAVERS: The President said yesterday that he urged Afghan leaders engage in diplomacy and see the political settlement with the Taliban, but "this advice was flatly**

**refused.” Does the President feel he had a willing partner in President Ghani?**

SULLIVAN: Look, I would just say the President was reporting the facts as they unfolded. I'm not going to characterize anything about President Ghani at this point who is no longer a factor in Afghanistan, and I don't think there's much merit in me weighing in more deeply on him. Yes.

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #6 [Sky News]: Sorry to belabor the point here, but we're speaking to Afghan citizens who supported the American mission in Afghanistan who are now terrified for their lives. Can you confirm that when it gets to August 31<sup>st</sup> and your troops leave, will you abandon them or will you stay and save them?**

SULLIVAN: Our plan is to Safely evacuate the people who worked with the United States, who are eligible for special immigrant visas, which is a generous program set up on a bipartisan basis by our Congress. We have identified those individuals and families. We are making provision to have them come to the airport and get on evacuation flights out of the country. That is what we are going to do between now and the end of the month. Yes.

JOHN GIZZI: Thank you, Jake. Um, one question. Going back to President Ghani, have any top officials of the Afghani government, the former Afghani government made requests for asylum in the United States and would President Ghani and Vice President Abullah, among others, be welcome in the U.S.?

SULLIVAN: I'm not familiar with any such requests, and I'm not gonna get into hypotheticals. Yes.

JENNIFER SUTHERLAND: Thanks, Jake. With the President at Camp David, can we, the American people, expect to hear from him in the coming days as the operation to give people out continues?

SULLIVAN: I'll leave it to Jen to answer that. But yes, you will hear from him in the coming days. Yes.

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #7: Thanks for taking my question. President Biden was expected to incur the damage caused by the previous administration with NATO. The way the withdrawal was carried out added new strength to the alliance. How severe is this damage and what you would tell your allies?**

[SULLIVAN]

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #7: I think your previous answers are not enough to assure U.S. allies and partners because, first, the Korean War broke as a civil war. If the U.S. — the United States only committed to places that — without civil war, can you assure allies that the United States will defend them in the crisis that can be described as a civil war? For example, if the People's Republic of China attacks Taiwan, the Chinese can argue that it is a civil war among the Chinese and how can you just — how can you justify that**

**U.S. involvement in Taiwan and South Korea? And I also understand the United States did not want to make this sacrifice. But, at the same time, leadership requires sacrifice, then how can you just claim to be a global leader without making sacrifices?**

[SULLIVAN]

(...)

2:13 p.m. Eastern

**ALEX THOMPSON: Back in the spring, you and several administration officials committed that civilian and humanitarian aid would continue into Afghanistan. Now that the Taliban has taken over the government, does that just completely stop? Is there a possibility that would restart at some point?**

SULLIVAN: We will have to take a hard look at how we proceed on any basis at all and as I said to one of your colleagues earlier, it's premature to answer those questions. That's something we will have to take a look at after we get through the immediate task of this mission.

(...)

2:14 p.m. Eastern

**UNIDENTIFIED MALE REPORTER #4: Follow up question about Taliban saying they'll respect the rights of Afghan women. What tools does the United States have to hold them to this pledge? And if not, what does the U.S. plan to do?**

SULLIVAN: So standing here today, I am not going to go into the full panoply of things that we can do, but there are obviously issues related to sanctions, to marshaling international condemnation and isolation, and other steps as well. But the reason I don't want to go into great detail on it is I want to be able to have our team communicate directly to the Taliban, both what the costs and disincentives are for certain types of action and what our expectations are. That is a conversation that we will intend to have, and I think many other countries, including like-minded allies and partners, will be having that as well.

(...)

2:17 p.m. Eastern

**UNIDENTIFIED MALE REPORTER #5: How are you going to ensure that Americans and other people, the refugees perhaps, have safe passage to the airport? I know you talked about securing the airport, but how are you going to ensure that they can actually get there?**

SULLIVAN: So, as I said before, we have been working, engaging, coordinating with Taliban



elements on the ground to ensure safe passage. We will continue to work that issue day by day until we've completed our mission.

(...)

2:19 p.m. Eastern

**JOSH WINGROVE: You said it's too early to say whether the U.S. will recognize Taliban as the government of Afghanistan. Are there any steps you're taking in the meantime around sanctions or foreign currencies or anything? Is there a chance that if they do take power to maybe able to tap into quite a fair bit of money that the U.S. might want to head off the possibility of? Are there any steps you're taking in that regard and sort of preventatively, I suppose.**

SULLIVAN: We're working on those options right now. I don't want to get ahead of the President's decision making on them and I'll leave it at that.

**WINGROVE: If you are working on those options, doesn't then that speak to a doubt that you might ever recognize them? If you don't ever recognize them, how can you be — how can you ensure that the President's promise of aid continuing to be Afghan people will be enacted?**

SULLIVAN: Well, so I don't want to get into hypotheticals, but I would point out that there are a range of different diplomatic relationships the United States has with countries around the world, including some very difficult or non-existent relationships with governments where we still provide forms of aid to people. And I will leave it at that because we're not at a point yet where we can speak directly to how things will play out in Afghanistan, but that's at least a partial answer to your question.

(...)

2:25 p.m. Eastern

JIANG: You mentioned at the top that about 700 people have been evacuated in the past 24 hours. Pentagon officials, including Press Secretary John Kirby expect that number to increase —

PSAKI: Yeah.

JIANG: — to 5,000 to 9,000 a day. Can you talk about what needs to happen between now and then to ramp the number up and when you expect to hit it?

JEN PSAKI: Sure, Weijia. It's a good question. I think what I had been referring to just a few minutes ago was the fact that our focus has been on securing, not just the perimeter of the airport, but also operational capacity at the airport, which of course is a Department of Defense operation they're overseeing in coordination with the State Department. And so because we've had success

in that regard, we are hopeful and expect to expedite additional flights out. So that was not the place where we were at this time yesterday. And given we've made progress in this regard, we are hopeful to increase the number of people, American citizens, SIV applicants, and others that we can get out of the country.

**JIANG: And it's our understanding that Americans have been called to the airport, but it's up to them to travel there at their own risk. Why isn't the U.S. providing any support, any transportation for them to get to Kabul?**

PSAKI: Well, I would just go back to what our national security advisor discussed as it relates to the Taliban and discussions with them about safe passage for people who are coming to the airport. We've also seen, I don't have an exact number for you. I'm sure the Department of Defense and State Department can provide that, but a large number of American citizens and others making their way successfully to the airport over the course of the last 24 hours.

**JIANG: Just one more. I know we all tried to ask Jake this question, but can you offer any guarantee to the Americans and Afghan allies that if they remain there past the end of the month, U.S. troops will help them evacuate past the end of the month?**

PSAKI: Weijia, our — our focus right now is on doing the work at hand and on the task at hand. And that is day by day, getting as many American citizens, as many SIV applicants, as many members of a vulnerable population who are eligible to be evacuated to the airport and out on planes. And we're going to do that in an expeditious fashion. That is the focus of the President, of our secretary of defense, of our secretary of state, and everybody on our national security team. So that is where we will keep our efforts. Go ahead.

COLLINS: Thank you. There's been some criticism from Democratic lawmakers on Capitol Hill, Mark Warner, Bob Menendez saying — Menendez saying, "I'm disappointed that the Biden administration clearly did not accurately assess the implications of a rapid withdrawal." What is the White House's response to those lawmakers?

PSAKI: Well, I would first say that we did assess early on when the President asked for clear eyed assessment that there would be impacts and there would be consequences of making the choice he made. He also acknowledged yesterday, and I would just reiterate, that this did happen more rapidly than we anticipated here, than anyone anticipated. I think that accounts for members of Congress and people who are on the ground in Afghanistan. And what our effort is now is focused on moving as many people out as we can from the country, but I would also note and reiterate to any anyone who's a critic that any President has to make difficult choices as commander in chief, as Jake Sullivan just said, and the President made the choice that he was not going to ask U.S. men and women, service men and women to fight a war that the Afghans were not willing to fight for themselves. It does not mean there aren't going to be impacts that are gut-wrenching, that are heart wrenching, that we're all watching transpire over the last couple of days, but these are the difficult choices you have to make as commander and chief and that's the choice he made.

COLLINS: And does he still have confidence in his intelligence teams?

PSAKI: He certainly does. He works in lockstep and he's been briefed on a regular basis, as Jake just outlined, multiple times a day sometimes by members of his national security team. And we're working in close coordination to get the job done each day. Go ahead.

SHEAR: Sort of follow up on Caitlin's questions about criticism from people who are your allies or your friends. David Axelrod has called you the best press secretary in his lifetime, I think.

PSAKI: My mom will like that.

SHEAR: Okay. But he's also said that the events of the last weekend are — paraphrasing here, but indefensible, I think he said. You can't defend them. And he has basically said that you guys should acknowledge that it was a failure and be willing to say that the events of the last several days were a failure, even as you maybe, you know, defend the — the broader question of the draw down in Afghanistan. What do you say to David Axelrod, who is such a fan of yours?

PSAKI: Mutual. There are a few people I respect as much as David Axelrod in the world of politics. He's brilliant. He's also a great human being, but he would be the first to say that there is a difference between being on the outside and speaking on television and being on the inside, and the difficult choices that you have to make and as I've noted, and as Jake noted, even as we're watching over the last couple of days, heart-wrenching, gut-wrenching footage, photos, you've referred to some of them, Mike, the President stands by his decision because he knows it's in the interest of the United States, our national security, and the American people. And he is going not going to ask mothers and fathers to send their children to fight a war the Afghans won't fight for themselves. And that does not mean that there aren't chaotic moments. There are. That does not mean there aren't moments that we may look back and, you know, take a look at approaches and how to address things moving forward. Of course, that's a part of how you assess governing and how you assess operations moving forward. But right now, and he would be the first — he — he's spent, as you will know an important role, a vital role advising President Obama to acknowledge that when you're in government, you're faced with difficult choices. The President is faced with difficult choices. So are members of his team and what you have to always make the decisions based on is what's in the interest of the American people.

(...)

2:33 p.m. Eastern

MATT VISER: The President has been quite clear that he does not have any trust in the Taliban and so I guess — Jake kind of went about this in a couple of different ways, but do you guys have any assurances that the Taliban is clearing the safe passage to the airports and what are the consequences to them if they do not?

PSAKI: Well, the consequences are the full weight and force of the United States military. And I think we've made that clear. But right now, and we're not trusting, we're not taking their word

for it. We are watching closely. We are in close contact and we are certainly assessing whether they are going to abide by their commitments and by their actions. Go ahead.

**JACQUI HEINRICH: Jen, how many Americans are in Afghanistan, both inside Kabul and outside Kabul, and should they get priority on evacuation flights? John Kirby said that it's going to be a mix of SIV applicants and Americans, but should those remaining American citizens get priority? And how many are there in the country right now?**

PSAKI: Well, we are prioritizing a number of groups. American citizens, embassy employees, and their families, our locally employed, staff, SIV holders and applicants, Afghans who would be eligible for P1, P2 refugee programs, which includes by the way, translators who may have assisted media organizations and others. How the process works I should tell you is that there are individuals who will self-identify as American citizens, that number's around 11,000. Beyond that around the country — beyond that though, there are individuals who may not have self identified, who may come and request assistance and come to the airport. We're going work to assist, of course, American citizens. But we also have our responsibility and obligation to help the men and women who served by our sides. Many of your — many of the sides of your colleagues as translators and as interpreters and our locally employed staff and others.

**HEINRICH: So, just to confirm, 11,000 in the entire country, not just in Kabul?**

PSAKI: Well, I would just say there — that's the self identified number, right? So — but we will continue to provide assistance and we are prioritizing American citizens. We are also working to get additional officials out who have played an important role.

**HEINRICH: Just to follow up on — on this. Obviously, getting them through and getting them to the airport is the challenge as everyone else here has noted, but the administration's left to negotiate with the Taliban, including one of the commandos who was released from Guantanamo Bay as part of the Bowe Bergdahl prisoner of swap when President Biden was Vice President — How does he feel about that? Does he have any regrets and how's he digesting that?**

PSAKI: Well, first I would note that one, I'd point you to the Department of the Intelligence Community to assess the identity of the individual. I know there's been reporting on it, but that's not my position to do from here. I would also note that in prior negotiations and commitments made during the Trump administration, there were thousands of individuals who were released, so our focus right now is on, again, not taking the Taliban's word for it. We are assessing, we are closely watching, and we are being very clear about the capacities and the capabilities we have at hand, should they be needed. Of course, that's not our objective.

**HEINRICH: And then the last question, what are we doing to counter message with what's happening right now with China in Taiwan? The President said yesterday that China and Russia would love nothing more than to have the U.S. sink billions of dollars and stay here forever. But it seems to be that they're celebrating this. They were touting U.S. humiliation in Afghanistan and the warning to Taiwan and other allies of the U.S. won't come for help**

**if war breaks out. China's embassy's functioning as normal. So what are we doing to counter their propaganda? And how does the administration view Russia and China's engagement with the Taliban?**

PSAKI: Well, first, we, of course, are in touch with the Chinese and the Russians as we — as we work to bring men and women out of Afghanistan and including our SIV applicants and others. Our message is very clear. We stand by as is outlined in the Taiwan relations agreement by our — our — by individuals in Taiwan. We stand by partners around the world who are subject to this kind of propaganda that Russia and China are projecting and we're going to continue to deliver on those words with actions. Our objective in Afghanistan is to deliver also on what the President promised, which is to not put the men and women who have served our country bravely over the past 20 years in harm's way again. And that's what we'll also be projecting to them as well.

(...)

2:39 p.m. Eastern

**LUCEY: You said just a little bit ago that, you know, if the Taliban does not agree that safe passage agreements or conversations that the consequence would be the full force and weight of the military. What exactly does that mean? Does that mean there's a scenario where we go back in?**

PSAKI: That means that we have been clear and I think my colleagues at the Defense Department have also conveyed this, that we have our own capacity, military capacity from here. Obviously, we have worked with them to ensure safe passage. That's where our objective is. I'm not going to outline or detail it further.

LUCEY: And one more. The administration said that the evacuation efforts were stalled in part because some Afghans did not want to leave earlier. They wanted to stay. Do you have any specifics on this population? Exactly how many Afghan allies are we talking about who were eligible to leave, but chose to remain?

PSAKI: It's a good question. I can see if I can give you a greater assessment of that. What I can tell you is that of the initial numbers of SIV applicants that were granted visas, there was a good chunk of that number who did not take advantage of those visas and depart. Now, that does not change our commitment, that does not change our obligation, but it's just an important component of the story of the last six months. Go ahead.

WINGROVE: Of those 11,000 you mentioned, just for clarity, those are 11,000 self-identified people in the country who want to leave? Do you have any indication of how many Americans are still trying to get out of Afghanistan?

PSAKI: I can see if there's a greater assessment. I would point you to the State Department on that though. They'd have the most up to date numbers.

WINGROVE: Do you have a total number of people overall, including third country nationals and Afghan nationals who want to get over the coming days?

PSAKI: Again, there are a number of prioritized programs. I think we've given out some numbers in terms of, if you look at SIV applicants, we have about 22,000 spots at military bases here and an additional 8,000 in third countries. Obviously, we're going to work to assess and make sure we get, and we work to get as people out as possible, who are eligible for those programs as well as of course separately, American citizens, but I don't have a number or an update for you on the total.

(...)

2:41 p.m. Eastern

**UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #1: The national security advisor said when a civil war comes to an end with an opposing force marching on the ground, there's going to be scenes of chaos. There's going to be lots of people leaving the country. But my question is why didn't you have a better plan to secure the airport? How could you not anticipate crowds of people rushing to the tarmac and overwhelming limited security if there was a contingency plan in place?**

PSAKI: Well, first I'd note something that Jake Sullivan said, and John Kirby said, which is, and I'll probably butcher their iteration of it, but basically the best laid plans require adjustment when you get on the ground and see what the situation on the ground is. We have secured the airport in a short period of time. There were initial scenes of chaos, but that has been a priority. And we have accomplished that task. Now our focus is on getting planes in and getting American citizens, SIV applicants, our locally employed staff, some of your colleagues out of the country, but we did effectively do that thanks to the hard work of the men and women on the ground from the State Department and the Defense Department over the last 24 to 48 hours.

(...)

2:42 p.m. Eastern

RASCOE: Jake said that the President had not spoken to any other world leaders yet. Why is that?

PSAKI: Jake also said that our focus right now has been on operational efforts, which includes coordination at a lower level than leaders and heads of state and that is our focus on working with third countries to help get their citizens out, or, of course, working with others on the ground to get vulnerable populations out. That's where the focus is at hand right now and if there is a benefit in the President picking up the phone and calling world leader, he will certainly do that and I expect he'll do that in the coming days.