

Afghan President Ghani leaves country as Taliban reach Kabul

Insurgents say they will soon declare an 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'

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KABUL

President Ashraf Ghani left Afghanistan on Sunday, joining his fellow citizens and foreigners in fleeing the advancing Taliban and signalling the end of a 20-year Western experiment aimed at remaking the country.

The Taliban entered the capital Kabul earlier in the day, and an official with the militant group said **it would soon announce the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from the presidential palace – a return rich in symbolism to the name of the country under the Taliban government ousted by the U.S.-led forces after the 9/11 attacks.**

The insurgents pushed through a city gripped by panic, where helicopters raced overhead throughout the day to evacuate personnel from the U.S. Embassy. Smoke rose near the compound as the staff destroyed important documents. Several other Western missions also prepared to pull their people out. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken rejected comparisons to the U.S. pull-out from Vietnam, as many watched in disbelief at the sight of helicopters landing in the Embassy to evacuate diplomats.

Afghans fearing that the



Safe passage: A U.S. helicopter flying over Kabul after evacuating American nationals. ■ AP

Taliban could reimpose the kind of brutal rule that all but eliminated women's rights rushed to leave the country, lining up at cash machines to withdraw their life savings. Commercial flights were later suspended after sporadic gunfire erupted at Kabul International Airport, two U.S. military officials said. Evacuations continued on military flights.

"The former President left Afghanistan, leaving the country in this difficult situation," said Abdullah Abdullah, the head of the Afghan National Reconciliation Council. "God should hold him accountable."