

Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan >

A baby passed over a wall in Kabul is reunited with his family, the military says.



By Katie Rogers

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Outside Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul on Thursday, a frenzied crowd of Afghans gathered on the Taliban-controlled side of a concrete wall topped with razor wire to beg a group of Marines to give them access to freedom.

Suddenly, the mass of outstretched hands produced a baby, no more than a few months old, and held the child up for the soldiers to see. As if handling a piece of luggage, a Marine plucked the infant by a single arm, passing the child behind him before turning back to the crowd.

The scene is harrowing to watch, which is precisely why a video of it was quickly transmitted around the world, fueling anger at a haphazard evacuation process. By Friday, the U.S. military was eager to share that the infant had been safely reunited with a family member.

“The baby seen in the video was taken to a medical treatment facility on site and cared for by medical professionals,” Maj. James Stenger, a spokesman for the Marines, wrote in an email. “I can confirm the baby was reunited with their father and is safe at the airport.”

Major Stenger did not provide additional details, including how many children had been taken to similar treatment facilities in recent days. But he sent a series of photos showing Marines playing with children at military checkpoints and giving children water.

“This is a true example of the professionalism of the Marines on site, who are making quick decisions in a dynamic situation in support of evacuation operations,” he said.

For two decades, Americans have understood the human cost of the war in Afghanistan primarily through the deaths of thousands of American and Afghan soldiers. But this week, images of babies and young children hoisted into the arms of U.S. commandos highlighted what the toll has been to the innocent, prompting emotional reactions from people around the globe.

The quick resolution to a heart-wrenching and viral photo belied a chaotic and rapidly unfolding scene in which multiple children were placed into the care of American troops in last-ditch attempts to get them to freedom.

Seeking to restore calm in the face of what he called “heartbreaking” images, President Biden said on Friday that about 6,000 U.S. troops were working to restore order. He said he was committed to the evacuation of Afghans as well as Americans, before adding that rescuing U.S. citizens would come first.

“We have seen gut-wrenching images of panicked people acting out of sheer desperation,” Mr. Biden said. “It is completely understandable. They are frightened. They are sad. I don’t think anyone of us can see these pictures and not feel that pain on a human level.”

Responding to a question about why he had not authorized the military to expand the perimeter around the airport so that more people could reach flights out, Mr. Biden said he didn’t want to open the floodgates.

The military cannot expand the perimeter without authorization from the president.

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