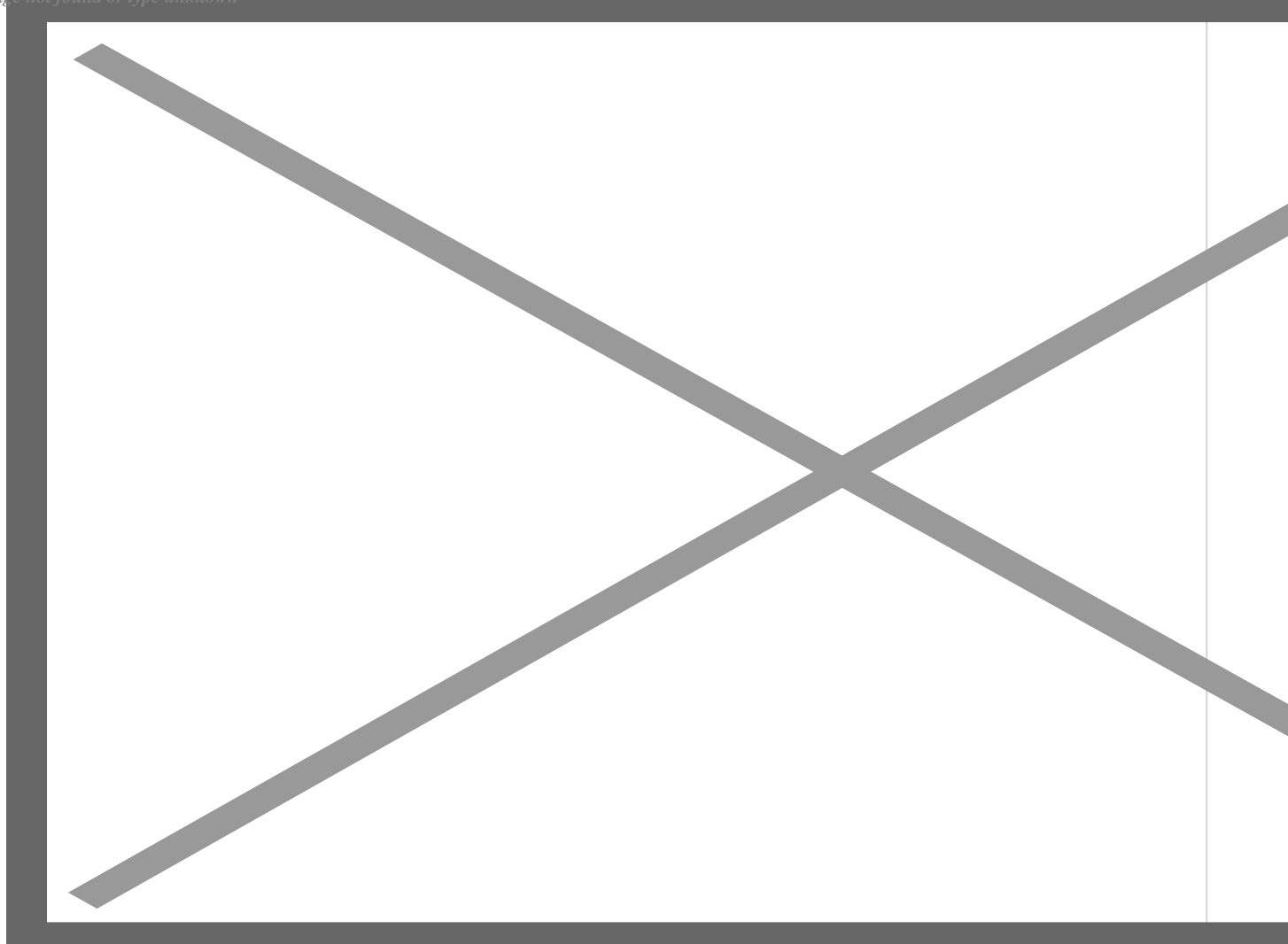


Taliban hold mock funeral for NATO and show off loot at Kabul airport after U.S. retreat

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Crowd carries makeshift coffins draped in NATO, US and UK flags during a pretend funeral on a street in Khost, Afghanistan August 31, 2021. © Reuters / ZHMAN TV

Kabul, September 1 (RHC)-- After nearly 20 years of fighting against the U.S. in Afghanistan, the victorious Taliban posed with captured American gear at the Kabul airport, held a mock funeral for NATO in Khost, and flew a Black Hawk helicopter over Kandahar.

The last U.S. troops left the Hamid Karzai International Airport on Monday, just before the clock struck midnight local time. On Tuesday morning, Taliban fighters strolled through the airport they now controlled, littered with debris, posing for photos with the captured vehicles, aircraft and equipment.

Taliban leaders reviewed a “special forces” unit, equipped with weapons and gear captured from the U.S.-trained Afghan army, on the Kabul runway. “It is a historical day and a historic moment... we liberated our country from a great power,” said Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, adding that the past two decades should serve as “a big lesson for other invaders, a lesson for the world.”

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby acknowledged on Tuesday that a lot of US equipment with “a lethality component to it” has fallen into Taliban hands, but said it doesn’t pose a threat to the U.S. or neighboring countries. “These are not the kinds of things that the Taliban can make great strategic use out of,” Kirby told reporters.

The Taliban thought otherwise, however, showing off at least one newly acquired Black Hawk helicopter in the skies over Kandahar in several videos.

A clip showing someone dangling from one of the Taliban-operated helicopters sparked claims on social media that Afghanistan’s new rulers were carrying out executions via airborne hangings. But a Twitter account calling itself the “Talib Times” denied the allegation, and shared a video that appeared to show a Taliban fighter joyriding in a rescue harness. The account was suspended but other Twitter users shared similar photos and footage that seemingly debunked the “execution” rumors.

Meanwhile, in the southeastern city of Khost, a crowd of Taliban supporters held a mock “funeral” for the ousted occupiers, carrying coffins draped with U.S., NATO, British and French flags, as well as some banners of the defeated Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – now replaced by the white flag of the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate.

The U.S. withdrawal turned into a mad scramble to evacuate just over 6,000 U.S. citizens – along with tens of thousands of Afghan civilians – on August 14, when the Taliban took over Kabul without a fight and the Washington-backed government collapsed. It also turned tragic last week, when up to 200 Afghans and 13 US troops died at the entrance to the airport, in a suicide bombing claimed by the terrorist group ISIS-K.

The Pentagon has acknowledged that some U.S. citizens could not reach the airport and were left behind. The State Department was tasked with negotiating their safe passage out of Afghanistan.

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