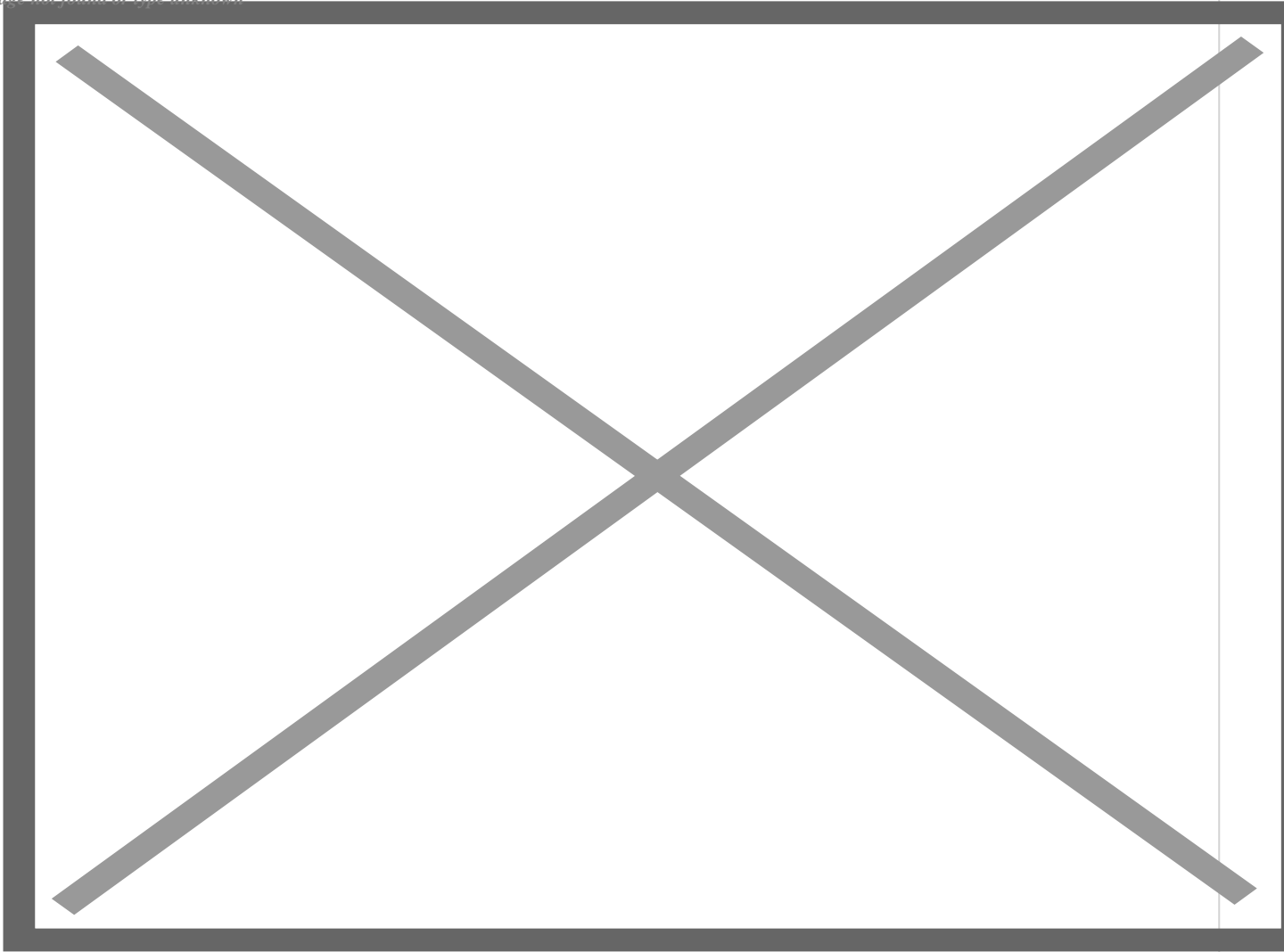


Baby handed to U.S. soldiers in chaos of Afghan airlift missing

Image not found or type unknown



A baby is handed over to American troops over the perimeter wall of the airport for it to be evacuated, in Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 19 [File: Omar Haidari/via Reuters]

El Paso, November 6 (RHC)-- It was a split-second decision. Mirza Ali Ahmadi and his wife Suraya found themselves and their five children on August 19 in a chaotic crowd outside the gates of the Kabul airport in Afghanistan when a U.S. soldier, from over the tall fence, asked if they needed help.

Fearing their two-month-old baby Sohail would get crushed in the melee, they handed him to the soldier, thinking they would soon get to the entrance, which was only about five metres (16 feet) away.

But at that moment, Mirza Ali said, the Taliban – which had swiftly taken over the country as US troops withdrew – began pushing back hundreds of hopeful evacuees. It took the rest of the family more than a half-hour to get to the other side of the airport fence. Once they were inside, Sohail was nowhere to be found.

The U.S. and allies evacuated more than 120,000 people from the Hamid Karzai International Airport in the space of a few weeks in August as the Western-backed government in Kabul fell and the Taliban took control of the city. U.S. forces withdrew from Afghanistan by August 30, bringing an end to 20 years of U.S. military occupation.

Mirza Ali, who said he worked as a security guard at the U.S. embassy for 10 years, began desperately asking every official he encountered about his baby's whereabouts. He said a military commander told him the airport was too dangerous for a baby and that he might have been taken to a special area for children. But when they got there it was empty.

"He walked with me all around the airport to search everywhere," Mirza Ali said in an interview through a translator. He said he never got the commander's name, as he did not speak English and was relying on Afghan colleagues from the embassy to help communicate. Three days went by.

"I spoke to maybe more than 20 people," he said. "Every officer – military or civilian – I came across, I was asking about my baby." He said one of the civilian officials he spoke to told him Sohail might have been evacuated by himself. "They said, 'We don't have resources to keep the baby here.'"

Mirza Ali, 35, Suraya, 32, and their other children, 17, nine, six and three years old, were put on an evacuation flight to Qatar and then to Germany and eventually landed in the United States.

The family is now at Fort Bliss in Texas with other Afghan refugees waiting to be resettled somewhere in the United States. They have no relatives there.

Mirza Ali said he saw other families handing their babies over the Kabul airport fence to soldiers at the same time. One video of a small baby in a diaper being hoisted by her arm over razor wire went viral on social media. She was later reunited with her parents.

Ever since his baby went missing, dates are a blur, Mirza Ali said. Every person he comes across – aid workers, U.S. officials – he tells them about Sohail. "Everyone promises they will do their best, but they are just promises," he said.

An Afghan refugee support group created a "Missing Baby" sign with Sohail's picture on it and are circulating it among their networks in the hopes that someone will recognise him. A U.S. government official familiar with the situation said the case had been flagged for all the agencies involved, including the U.S. bases and overseas locations.

The child was last seen being handed to a U.S. soldier during the chaos at the Kabul airport but "unfortunately, no one can find the child," the official said.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/276274-baby-handed-to-us-soldiers-in-chaos-of-afghan-airlift-missing>



Radio Habana Cuba