

One Marine's Battle for an Afghan Orphan

Major Joshua Mast's story, laid bare in a riveting Feb. 21, 2025, episode of the "Shawn Ryan Show," isn't just a tale of one man's fight—it's a mirror held up to our society's soul.

A U.S. Marine Corps officer, Mast stumbled upon a baby girl orphaned on an Afghan battlefield in 2019. What he did next—launching a relentless campaign to adopt her—should have been a straightforward act of humanity.

Instead, it spiraled into a bruising clash with the U.S. Department of Justice, the State Department and even his own military's code of conduct. Five hours and 16 minutes of podcast airtime later, we're left wrestling with a question: When did doing the right thing become so wrong?

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A Virginia appellate court ruled in July 2024 that Mast's adoption should never have been granted and voided the custody order that had allowed the Masts to raise the child for nearly three years.

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The court found significant procedural errors, noting that Mast failed to inform judges of key facts—such as the Afghan government's (under the control of the Taliban) continued claim on the child and prior federal rulings against halting that process.

Although Mast and his wife insist they acted admirably in a desperate situation, the decision has left the child's fate in limbo and stirred concerns with far-reaching international

ramifications. Justice Department lawyers and government officials maintain that Mast never had any claim to the child and warn that allowing her to remain with him could jeopardize U.S. foreign policy and security efforts.

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If the Masts ultimately lose their case, the child could be returned to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan—a prospect that condemns her to a life under harsh, oppressive control. Such an outcome raises profound concerns about her future, as being sent back to an environment where the Taliban rules could subject her to severe limitations on her freedom and safety.

At 41, living in Hampstead, North Carolina, with his wife Stephanie, Mast is no stranger to duty. But this mission was personal. He saw an abandoned child and decided she deserved a family—his family. The bureaucracy didn't see it that way. Legal hurdles piled up, and in October 2024, a military board slapped him with a misconduct charge, calling his efforts “unbecoming an officer.” They didn't kick him out, but the stain lingers.

Yet Mast presses on, unwavering, because for him, this isn't about rules—it's about a life.

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