



**Centre for  
Information  
Resilience**

**Afghan Witness**

**Investigating civilian casualties at Ashura  
commemorations in Ghazni province on 28 July 2023**

**July 2024**

**[WARNING: GRAPHIC] This report contains graphic imagery**

## 1. Executive summary

At the end of July 2023, Ashura commemorations were held across Afghanistan. Reports of unrest were documented by Afghan Witness (AW) in several areas of the country, including Kabul. The most high profile incident, however, was in Ghazni on 28 July 2023, where videos and photos emerged showing clashes between the Taliban and crowds, causing injuries and deaths.

Using open-source intelligence (OSINT) techniques, AW mapped the content to the Nawabad area, northwest of the provincial capital, and identified two further locations, also in Nawabad. The imagery appears to show the disproportionate use of force by Taliban members against civilians, including those observing Ashura commemorations.

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## 2. Context

Between 28 and 30 July 2023, Afghan civilians and local news agencies in Ghazni province circulated multiple videos and photographs on social media, purporting to show unrest and violence during Ashura commemorations in Ghazni province, including content showing wounded and killed civilians. Nine videos identified by AW could be geolocated to the Nawabad and Qala-e Shahada areas of Ghazni. These videos show Taliban forces dispersing gathered crowds, including striking crowd members, the use of firearms to threaten the crowd, and the use of water cannons.

AW observed that these crowds included children, and ultimately the violence resulted in child casualties, including the verified death of a male child (Victim 1). AW also captured footage of a second victim (Victim 2), which surfaced on the day and showed the victim among Ashura crowds, with a serious wound – possibly a head wound or arterial wound, based on the volume of dark blood visible in the footage.

While the footage of Victim 2 could not be geolocated, both Victim 1 and Victim 2 could be identified in footage of funerals the following day. There were a further two funerals for young males, although no footage was identified showing the moments they were injured. Given the available evidence, it is likely that at least four individuals were killed in the unrest surrounding the Ashura commemoration ceremonies in Ghazni province – in line with the reporting at the time.

According to the Taliban's explanation of events, the unrest was sparked by violent elements among the crowd who they said, "threw stones at the security forces," and "some evil elements also opened fire [from the crowd]." Some of the imagery captured in the videos showed the throwing of stones towards Taliban forces, however, there is no evidence of gunfire coming from the crowd. Moreover, if there had been an exchange of fire between the Taliban and armed elements among the crowd, it is likely there would be evidence of significantly higher casualties.

The available footage shows a standoff occurred between approximately 10 Taliban members and the large crowd of Ashura participants in the Nawabad market square. A fire engine arrived, and used its hose in an attempt to disperse the crowd. This was not effective. Shortly after, the Taliban began firing, likely aerially, to disperse the crowd, who then fled in multiple directions away from the square. It should be stressed there is no footage showing Taliban forces firing directly at the crowds and, again, we would expect significantly higher casualties if that had been the case.

It is worth noting that Victim 1, the young boy who was recorded lying face down and seriously injured, was located 200 metres southeast of the market where the initial unrest took place. This indicates that Taliban forces continued to disperse crowds away from the market where the initial unrest took place. Pro-Taliban accounts suggested the boy was trampled to death by the crowd, however, his clothes do not show any evidence of trampling and witnesses recorded in the video can be heard saying "he has been shot."

Given the available footage and reporting, AW's assessment is that the Taliban were responsible for the death of two young males – killed by gunfire – and that there were two further deaths whose cause cannot be established from the available footage. It is likely that the two deaths from gunfire

were accidental, as a result of the firing to disperse crowds in the market square and surrounding streets, rather than the result of direct and deliberate fire at the crowds by Taliban forces.

Following the unrest in Ghazni, a delegation was assigned “to comprehensively investigate the incident, identify the perpetrators, and present them to the Justice Department.” On 9 August 2023, a Taliban-appointed delegation, composed of Shia leaders and Taliban officials, reportedly visited Ghazni province to address local concerns. Despite this visit and the pledge of a comprehensive investigation to identify the perpetrators, there has been no subsequent reporting to suggest a full investigation has taken place.

### 3. Taliban violence towards civilians in Nawabad

#### 3.1 Imagery of unrest in Nawabad market

AW identified and geolocated seven videos [WARNING: GRAPHIC] ([Video A](#), [Video B](#), [Video C](#), [Video D](#), [Video E](#), [Video F](#), [Video G](#)) which were recorded by people in the vicinity of Nawabad market.

##### ***Confrontation with the crowd***

The most widely circulated video of the incidents in Ghazni, [Video A](#) (00:26 length), shows a large crowd of several hundred people gathered in the market place and adjacent roads, among whom Shia flags are visible. The video is filmed from a first-floor balcony, and shows in the foreground a group of approximately 10 Taliban members wearing protective clothing and carrying batons, most of whom are in uniform, accompanied by a Land Cruiser vehicle. The Taliban members are armed with rifles; one member, standing on the back of the Land Cruiser, appears to detach a PK machine gun from a mounting on the roof.

At the beginning of the video, a large crowd is seen fleeing north up Nawabad Road, as one Taliban member runs towards them swinging a stick (Figure 1, left image). A second Taliban member is also seen walking to the north as they flee. The crowd appears to be made up largely of men and boys, with no women immediately visible.

The camera then pans back towards the marketplace, where one uniformed Taliban member, wearing protective clothing and carrying a rifle and a baton (referred to as T01), can be seen striking a civilian in the back with the baton, causing him to fall to the ground at the 00:06 mark, where he remains until the end of the recording. It appears the man was among a small group holding a large banner or flag, assessed by AW as likely to be a banner related to Ashura commemorations. A non-uniformed Taliban member (dressed in white with body armour, referred to as T02) is seen wrestling the banner or flag away from another civilian next to him, before T02 makes a gesture of swinging his rifle at the individual and walks away.

As the video progresses, Taliban forces can be seen pointing their weapons directly at the crowd (Figure 1, right). However, no gunfire is heard in Video A. The video shows the man who was hit by T01 being attended to by another crowd member. The dark banner (highlighted in pink) can be seen stretched out towards T02, who is standing a few metres away.



Figure 1: Screenshot from Video A (00:04) of armed Taliban with protective gear moving towards the crowd with a baton (left). Screenshot from Video A (00:14) showing Taliban members pointing their guns to the crowd and a civilian is on the ground after being hit by a Taliban member (left).

The footage also shows crowd members throwing stones in the direction of the Taliban forces. The image below on the left highlights three men who can be seen throwing stones in the direction of T02 (highlighted blue), near the civilian on the ground (highlighted purple). T01 (highlighted in green) can be seen retreating after hitting the man who fell to the ground. The image on the right shows the fourth projectile (circled), thrown seconds after as the crowd disperses.



Figure 2: Crowd members throwing rocks at armed Taliban immediately after their advance on civilians. Three men seen throwing a rock in the direction of the Taliban member (T02) near the civilian on the ground (purple). The Taliban member with protective clothing, a rifle and a baton (green, T01) can be seen retreating after hitting the man who fell to the ground (left). The fourth projectile (circled) is thrown seconds after, as the crowd was retreating (right)

AW assessed that [Video B](#) (00:30 length), [Video C](#) (01:41 length), and [Video D](#) (01:22 length), were filmed concurrently from different angles around the market. Video B is filmed from the same balcony as Video A, possibly by the same individual and at approximately the same time, as the recording quality and features, such as exposure and colour temperature, are very similar. Videos C and D are taken from among the crowd. All document the same moment when a fire engine enters the marketplace and sprays the crowd. The pavement in Videos C and D is visibly wet, suggesting the hose had already been deployed against the crowd by this point.

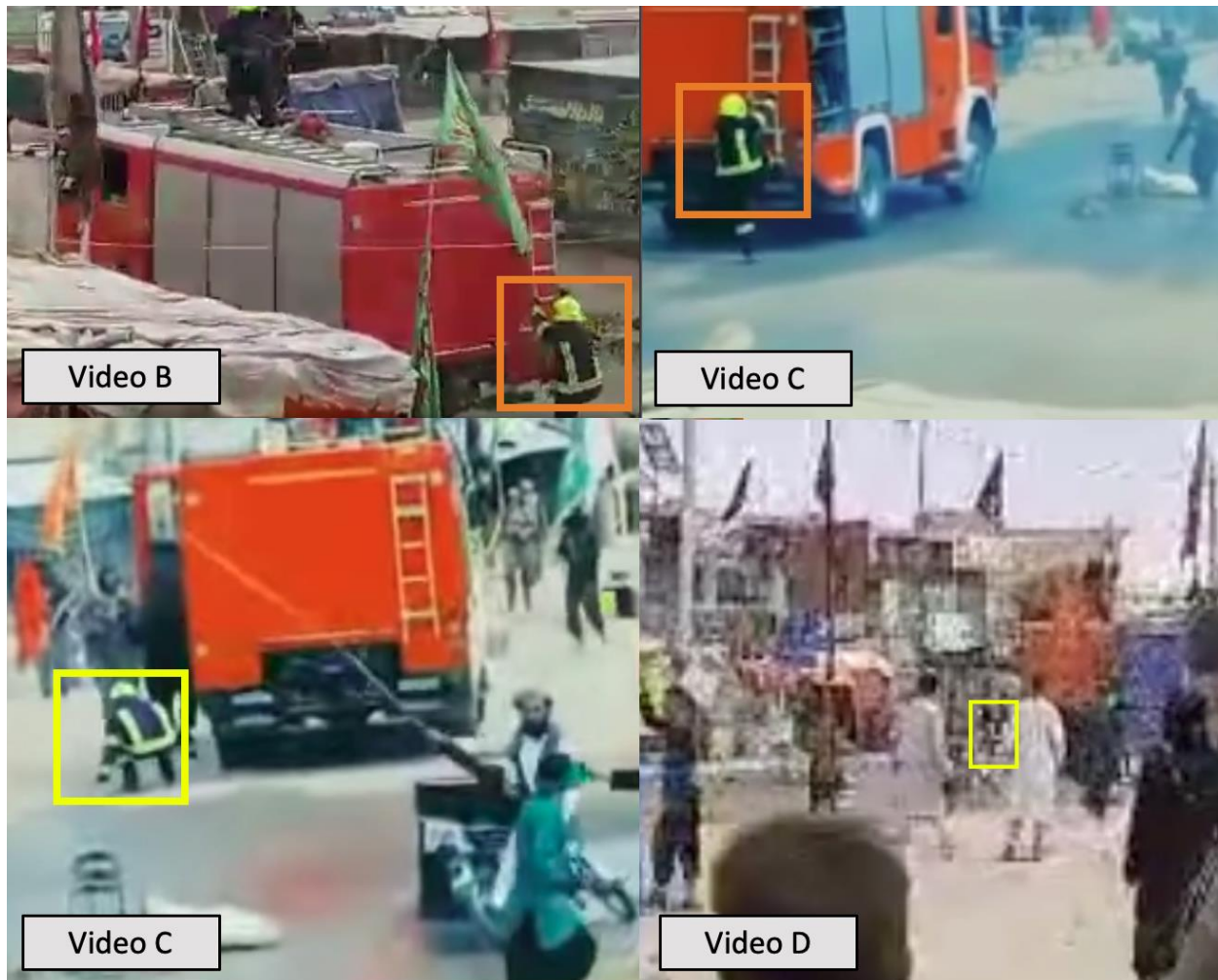


Figure 3: Screenshot (00:29) from Video B showing a firefighter climbing on the fire engine (top left, orange) and a screenshot (01:31) from Video C of the same firefighter climbing on the fire engine (top right, orange). Screenshot (00:36) from Video C shows the firefighter picking up something from the pavement (bottom left, yellow) and a screenshot (00:10) from Video D of the same firefighter picking up something from the pavement (bottom right, yellow), linking Video B, C and D to the same moment during the unrest.

Video B shows crowd members with flags gathered close to the fire engine, and does not appear to show a violent interaction between the crowd and Taliban members. It then shows the start of the fire engine spraying members of the crowd (0:16), with audible gunfire heard towards the end of the footage (0:21).

Video C shows one minute and two seconds prior to the start of Video B. It shows a Taliban member dressed in white (T02) gesturing at unknown individuals (0:04). Then, several other individuals are seen removing obstacles placed on the road (0:14). Some of the men removing the obstacles are dressed in green, a traditional Shia colour, indicating that some were part of the Ashura crowd. T02 then moves towards the obstacles, along with another armed Taliban member, forcing several of the gathered men to move back. Directly following this, T02 uses a flag removed from the obstacles on the road to lunge at a nearby man dressed in green (0:36), and then slaps another man around the

head (0:54). The fire engine is then seen spraying people (1:16). During the spraying, gunfire is audible (1:25).

Video D shows the majority of the crowd, appearing cautious and moving back as the fire engine approaches. One man in the crowd is seen picking up a rock (0:12), which is followed by a teenage boy hurling a rock in the direction of the Taliban members (0:17). Another teenage boy is shown picking up rocks from the ground, possibly with the same intention (0:24). However, an adult male intervenes, taking the rocks from his hands and dropping them to the ground. No other form of aggression is seen from the crowd towards the Taliban.



Figure 4: Screenshot (00:09) from Video A showing a Taliban member dressed in white (T02) taking a banner from a crowd member with force (left, orange). Screenshot (00:04) from Video C shows T02 gesturing at unknown individuals (centre left). Screenshot (0:36) from Video C shows T02 lunging at a man dressed in green (centre right, orange). Screenshot (00:54) from Video C shows T02 slapping a man around the head (right).

[Video E](#) (00:32 length) is an edited clip showing two different timeframes. The first 16 seconds show the fire engine before it relocated closer to the crowd, and a crowd member throwing a rock in its direction (0:04), prolonged audible gunfire can be heard at the same time (0:04). The second clip in the video shows the crowd being hosed down by the fire engine, which is now located closer to the group; similarly, audible gunfire can still be heard (0:17). Immediately after the start of the second clip, the camera pans, showing crowd members moving and running away from the fire engine.

### **People fleeing and gunfire in vicinity of the marketplace**

[Video F](#) (00:24 length) shows a crowd of men and boys running away from the market place up a smaller road to the northwest, while audible gunfire is heard (0:07). AW investigators note that the six or more shots of gunfire audible in this video (0:16 onwards) sound different from the previously heard aerial firing at the market (Videos A, B, C, D).

The shots heard in Video F are consistent with a bullet travelling at close proximity to the camera. The gunfire, audible after 0:16, indicates that a gun was fired in the general direction of the running men, rather than the aerial firing heard at the market square (in Videos A, B, C and D). In Video F, the sounds of the gunfire indicate the bullets were fired from a distance, but do however pass towards the general direction of the camera. This could also be due to overhead firing, and it cannot be assessed as certain whether the crowd was directly targeted. At the end of the video, the crowd turns east into an alleyway (0:20), as the gunfire continues.



[Video G](#) (00:34 length), published by Afghanistan International, shows further evidence of the use of gunfire in the proximity of the population, some of whom appear to be young children. The video, which was filmed from a location on the edge of the market square, shows a large group of civilians running away from the gunfire. Whilst at the beginning of the video, people standing nearby appear to be watching the situation unfold, they soon start walking and running away from the market. The person filming appears to travel, attempting to hide [from the gunfire] (0:19). The video ends showing a clip of the person filming fleeing the scene (0:24).

### ***Locations of videos with imagery of unrest in Nawabad market***

The different videos (Video A, B, C, D, E, F, G) provided varying perspectives on the urban surroundings of the market and main square where the confrontation between crowd members and the Taliban occurred. AW geolocated the unrest to the Nawabad area, northwest of the provincial capital.



Figure 5: Geolocation of Videos A, B [33.584767, 68.400300] and F [33.584868, 68.399248] In Nawabad, Ghazni city, Ghazni province.

Video F, recorded as the population ran from gunfire, was geolocated to the northeast of the market by AW investigators. This footage was filmed further away than the other videos, as a large blue building can be in the distance. Despite the distance (200 metres) from the market, where the unrest was verified in Videos A, B, C, D and E, civilians can be seen running, and gunfire is heard nearby. It is therefore likely that armed Taliban members moved toward the crowd as they travelled down the alleyway to the northeast of the market. The figure below shows the blue building seen at the back of the market square where armed Taliban members hit a member of the crowd (Video A, left); the building is also shown as the person filming Video G ran holding their phone through the market square (middle); and in the distance as the crowd continues running amidst gunfire (Video F, right).



Figure 6: Blue building seen at the back of the market square where armed Taliban members dispersed the crowd (Video A, left), the same building visible as a person filming ran holding their phone (Video G, middle), and in the distance as the crowd keeps running amidst gunfire (Video F, right).

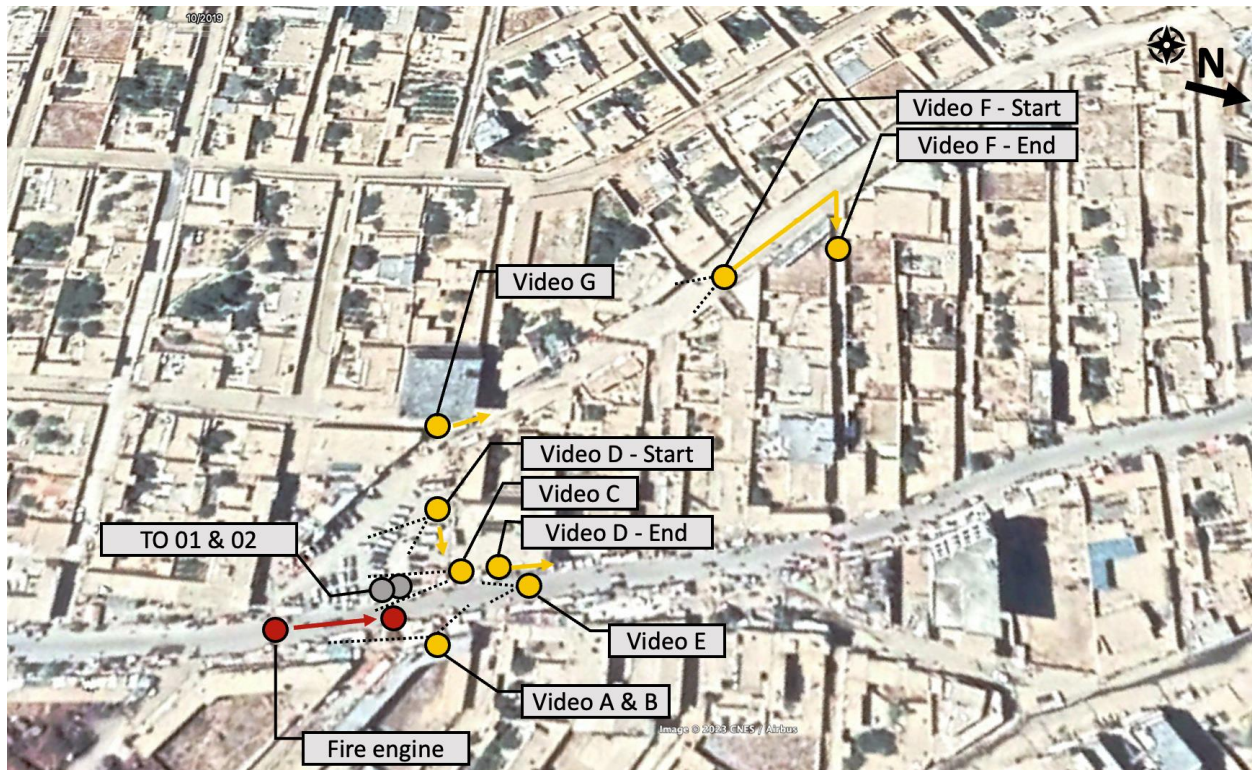


Figure 7: Overview of videos geolocated by AW in Nawabad, Ghazni city, Ghazni province. Filming locations of videos and angles (yellow), locations of Taliban forces (grey), fire engine used to hose down crowd members (red) and the direction of movement by the crowd (yellow line) [35.338321, 69.697990]

### 3.2 Imagery of child casualty in Nawabad

**[WARNING: GRAPHIC] This section contains highly graphic imagery**

[WARNING: GRAPHIC] [Video H](#) (00:48 length), which was published on Facebook<sup>1</sup>, starts with audible gunfire; civilians, including children, can be seen running (0:01). The filmer then switches the camera view from selfie mode to front-facing (0:03), showing more fleeing civilians, as more audible gunfire is heard. One armed Taliban member dressed in camouflage clothing is visible at the intersection (0:04), suggesting that Taliban members from the marketplace advanced up the road, following the fleeing crowd.

Later, the video shows young men and boys wearing green clothes, suggesting they were Ashura commemoration participants, looking at a young boy on the ground (0:42). A man can be heard saying: “he has been shot” (0:46). The child (Victim 1) was face down, and the blood visible on his left hand indicates heavy bleeding. There is no clear sign of a bullet entry or exit point, or blood on the child’s back. In the last frame of the video (0:48), the boy can be seen moving momentarily, possibly convulsing.

At least 17 gunshots are audible in the video after the camera has panned towards the intersection (0:04 - 0:41), however, no Taliban member is seen discharging their weapon.

<sup>1</sup> The original video published on Facebook has since been deleted, but it was archived by AW.



Figure 8: Screenshot from Video H (0:04) shows an armed Taliban member at an intersection (orange, left); and a screenshot from Video H (0:42), shows a boy on the ground with blood visible on his left hand (right).

After Video H was shared on social media, various accounts claimed that the video was misleading. Users on X [stated](#) that the child was killed as a result of the crowd “trampling over kids who fell down” as Taliban forces “broke up the fight.” AW investigators found no evidence to suggest the minor had been trampled. His clothes were not obviously dusty or trodden, as would be expected if he had been trampled by a crowd.

A commemoration post was later [shared](#) on Facebook for a nine-year-old boy named Ibrahim, who attended the Ashura ceremony. These details appear to match the boy visible in Video H.

### ***Location of video with imagery of child casualty***

Using imagery from a Ghazni Media YouTube [video](#), AW verified that Video H, showing the young boy on the ground with blood on his left hand, was filmed in Nawabad, Ghazni province.

AW matched the first part of Video H (0:00 - 0:41) with a frame from the Ghazni Media video (0:37). The last part of Video H, showing the young boy on the ground with blood on his left hand (0:42 - 0:48), was then matched to a frame from a [video](#) shared on YouTube by a channel known as ‘Ghazni Show’ (33:48) in Nawabad, Ghazni province.



Figure 9: Comparison of the first part of Video H, with 17 audible gunshots and an armed Taliban member at the intersection (0:00 - 0:41), with a frame from the 'Ghazni Media' video shared on YouTube (0:37) in Nawabad, Ghazni province. [33.585821, 68.399689]



Figure 10: Comparison of a panorama view of the last part of Video H, showing a young boy on the ground with blood on his left hand (0:42 - 0:48), with a frame from the 'Ghazni Show' video shared on YouTube (33:48), in Nawabad, Ghazni province. [33.586018, 68.399712]

Video H was then geolocated using both 'Ghazni Media' and 'Ghazni Show' YouTube videos as reference to the Nawabad area in Ghazni province. The young boy on the ground was geolocated approximately 200 metres southwest of the market, where the confrontation between crowd

members and the Taliban occurred. The first scene of the video, with 17 audible gunshots and an armed Taliban member at the intersection (0:04 - 0:41), was geolocated approximately 30 metres away, at the entrance of the street where the boy was geolocated.



Figure 11: Geolocation of both scenes of Video H, using 'Ghazni Show' (top) and 'Ghazni Media' (bottom) YouTube videos. Both scenes of Video H took place approximately 30 metres apart on the same street in Nawabad, Ghazni province. [33.586018, 68.399712]

AW's verification of the location of the boy, in an alleyway 200 metres southeast (Video H) of the market where the initial unrest took place, along with the geolocation of the running men and boys in the alleyway northeast of the market (Video F), show that Taliban members followed crowds away from the market where the initial unrest took place. The movements of the Taliban members indicate an attempt to disperse the gathered crowd beyond the market and main square area.

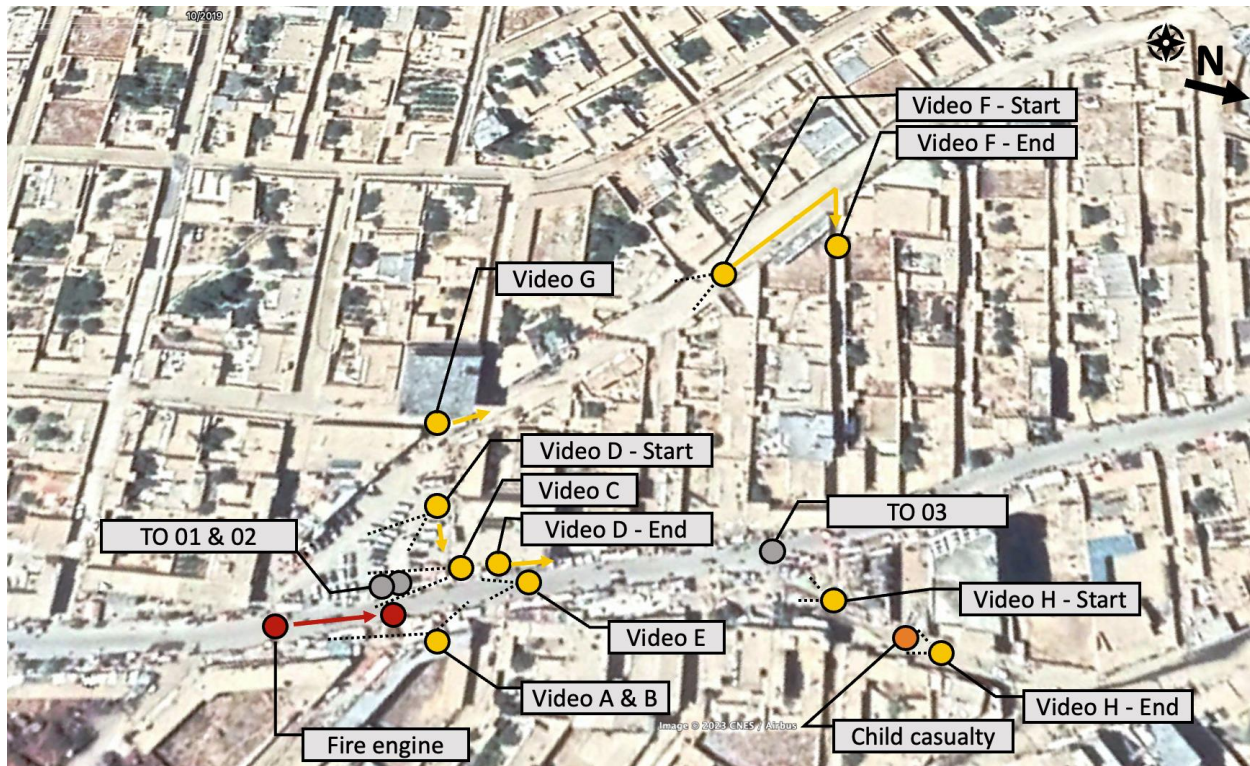


Figure 12: Overview of videos geolocated by AW In Nawabad, Ghazni city, Ghazni province. Filming locations and angles (yellow), Taliban (grey), the fire engine used to hose down crowd members (red), the direction of movement by the crowd (yellow line) and boy with blood on the ground (orange) [35.338321, 69.697990]

### 3.3 Other reports of violence and casualties

The boy visible in Video H (Victim 1) was one of the casualties [reported](#) in media coverage, named as 'Ibrahim'. A second case that was not possible to fully verify involved an older boy. A [video](#) shared on Facebook (Video I) showed him lying on the ground seriously wounded, possibly already deceased, and a large pool of blood – possibly from a head or arterial wound, assessed based on the volume and dark colour of the blood. Members of the crowd can be seen trying to move the boy onto a large dark blanket to transport him. The video briefly pans showing the victim is among a large crowd of Ashura mourners, but there are no features that enable geolocation. It is highly likely the footage is from among the crowd in the Nawabad market area, but this cannot be independently verified.

A second video (unfortunately deleted before it was successfully archived), showed the same victim after he had been moved, laying on the dark blanket. There is no sign of life in the footage.



*Figure 13: Screenshot (00:03) from a Video I shared on Facebook, showing Victim 2 laying on the ground with a significant wound*

Due to the camera angles, it was not possible to identify the location of either video. However, given that the footage shows other Ashura mourners and first surfaced around the same time, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the footage, or that it is from Ghazni.

A funeral for the victim was held the following day. The victim's clothes can be matched between the [funeral imagery](#) and the footage of him on the ground.

In addition to the two fatalities (Victim 1 and 2), AW also collected images showing the wounds of another child. The boy appeared to have a [hole](#) in his clothing, surrounded by blood. The area of [injury](#) was significantly bruised. It is unclear if the wound had resulted from an impact caused by violence or a bullet.



AW also collected evidence of several funerals following the incident in Ghazni. On 29 July 2023, a funeral was held for one of the young adults allegedly killed in the unrest. A pamphlet announcing the funeral of two additional young adults was shared on social media on 31 July 2023 (the content has since been deleted from social media, archived by AW). Although AW was unable to verify the specific incidents leading to these casualties, it is likely that they resulted from the unrest witnessed during the Ashura commemorations in Ghazni.

## 4. Taliban violence towards civilians in Qala-e-Shahada

### 4.1 Unrest in Qala-e-Shahada

In addition to the incidents in and around the Nawabad Market, there were also reports of incidents in the nearby Qala-e-Shahada area, situated to the north of the Nawabad market area.

Reports from [8am Media](#) and [Afghanistan International](#) cited local sources claiming that at least one teenager (later described as a 12-year-old) “was killed by direct fire from the Taliban in Shahadeh Fort area of Ghazni,” adding that his body had been taken to Imam Qaim Mosque. 8am reported that the incident had occurred “when the Taliban opened fire on a gathering of Shiites who were moving from the Shahadeh Fort to Nawabad.” Both outlets suggested others had been wounded, including four children, with hospital sources cited saying they had received victims with wounds to their heads and abdominal areas. [Reporting](#) the next day cited sources in Ghazni saying that four people had died and ten were injured as a result of the clashes. Given the proximity of the two areas, the description of the incidents, and the casualty numbers, it is very possible these reports all describe the same incident in the Nawabad market area in sections 2.2 and 2.3.

### 4.2 Imagery of unrest in Qala-e Shahada

[Video J](#) (01:49 length) posted to Facebook at 15:11 local time on 30 July 2023, shows what appears to be a firefighting SUV, with at least two firefighters, one on top of a vehicle, manning a mounted hose, and the other beside the vehicle. There appear to be at least three uniformed and armed Taliban members accompanying the vehicle, which appears stationary at the start of the clip, in an area with stalls at the side of a wide road. While civilians are visible in the footage, there do not appear to be any large groups or visible protests.

Audible gunfire is heard from the outset of the video. It was not possible to identify who fired the shots, but people in the footage do not appear to be panicked. It is likely that Taliban members fired into the air, in an attempt to disperse crowds, with limited effect.

People are seen walking away from the direction of the firefighting SUV, but a group of approximately six men, who appear to be civilians, remain near the stationary vehicle and appear to be interacting with the Taliban members accompanying the vehicle.

A man dressed in black appears to be attempting to calm the situation, ushering people away from the vehicle. Another man, who appears older and is carrying a shepherd’s crook, is initially moved away by the man in black, but then runs towards the group of men and two Taliban members, and

appears to swing at one of the Taliban members (referred to as T03), knocking a hat off his head (0:17).

The man in black then positions himself between T03 and the group, and appears to grapple with T03; after a struggle, the man in black seems to defuse the situation, and the group of individuals moves away.

At the same time, perhaps in response to the perceived escalation, one firefighter starts the hose and briefly appears to spray the man in black and towards the direction of the group (0:26). As the man in black walks away, T03 walks after him and appears to try to hit him with his rifle butt, although he does not appear to make significant contact (0:36). The camera then pans in a different direction and shows people continuing to walk away from the area.



Figure 14: Screenshot from Video J (00:26), showing a firefighting vehicle using a fire hose (yellow), T03 (black), and the man in black who was attempting to defuse the situation (orange) (left); screenshot from Video J (00:36), showing T03 (black) attempting to hit the man dressed in black (orange) (right).

### **Locations of video with imagery of unrest in Qala-e Shahada**

AW geolocated the video to a large open road which runs through the Qala-e Shahada area, named on some maps as Dehkadah Road to Qala Shohada (Qala-e-Shahada). A [video](#) posted to YouTube from April 2022 provides a drive-through of the area, which can be compared with the incident footage to situate the video and identify the location.



Figure 15: Magnified screenshot from Video J (01:33) (left), compared with screenshot (02:13) of the YouTube video from the Qala-Shahada area (right).



Figure 16: Screenshot from Video J (01:14) (left), compared with screenshot of the YouTube video from the Qala-Shahada area (02:38), showing the same row of shops from where the clip was filmed (right).

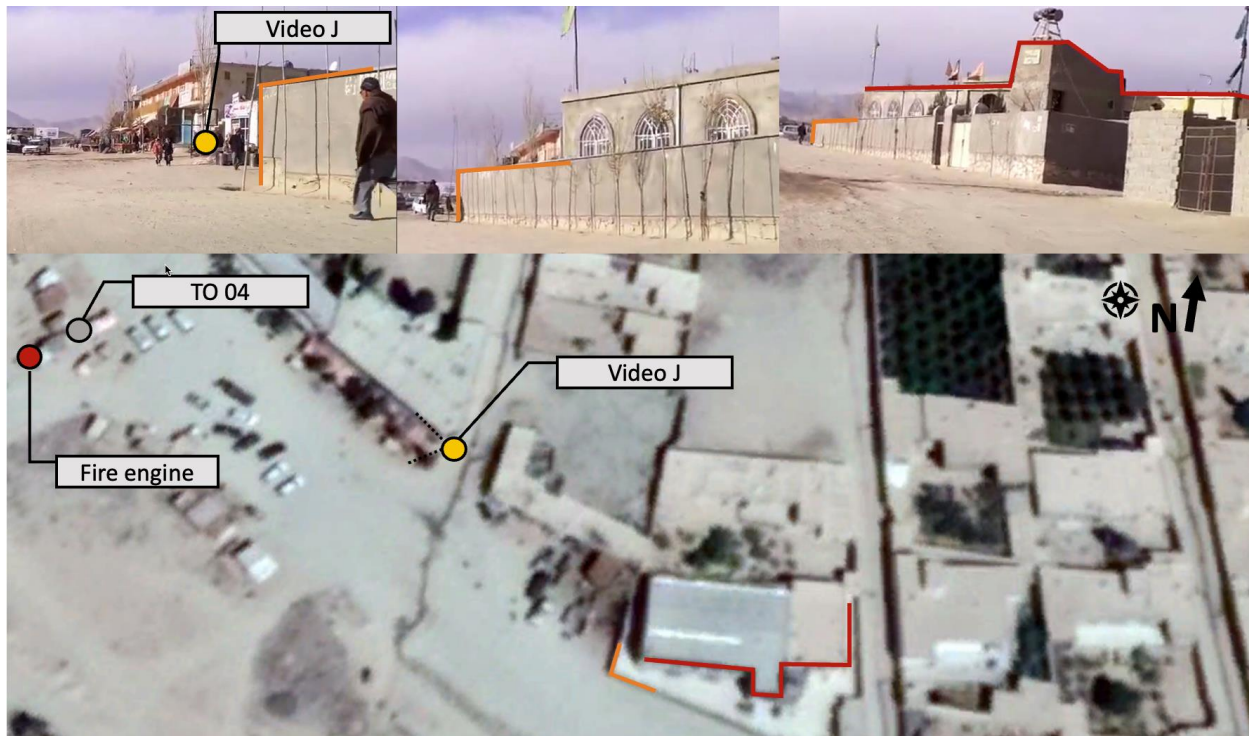


Figure 17: Collage of screenshots (02:50-03:06) of the YouTube video from the Qala-Shahada area, showing a mosque immediately after a row of shops, seen in incident footage (video J), geolocation (top) [33.596227, 68.399233]. Overview of incident location, showing location of the fire engine (red) and location of T03 when using his rifle to hit the man in black (grey) (bottom).

Geolocation of Video J shows unrest in Qala-Shahada as occurring 1.3 kilometres north of the unrest at the market in Nawabad (sections 2.2 and 2.3). Both incidents had similar trademarks, with firefighters using a fire hose in an attempt to disperse the gathered crowd, and both Taliban members and locals using forms of violence. Having established the location of Video J, AW investigators were able to chronolocate the video using shadows to early-afternoon, approximately 15:00.

## 5. Taliban response to unrest in Ghazni

In a [statement](#) published at the end of Ashura on 29 July 2023, the Taliban's acting prime minister thanked the group's security forces for performing their duties and protecting the Muharram-related celebrations throughout the country, with no mention of the incident in Ghazni.

The same day, an X account for the [Ghazni Governor's Office Media Centre](#), which releases press statements from the Taliban Provincial Governor's Office, posted a [statement](#) regarding an incident during the Ashura ceremony in the Nawabad area of Ghazni city:

"Yesterday at around 2:30 PM in the Nawabad area of the Police District (PD) 6 in Ghazni city, some participants of the Ashura ceremony attacked the security forces. They threw stones at the security forces, and from amongst the crowd, some evil elements also opened fire and a number of people were injured."

The statement also claimed that “some evil and corrupt people outside the country” gave them “the plan for such destructive actions.”

In a continuation of the thread on X, which was subsequently deleted by the author, the account claimed:

“It was also agreed that street processions would not be held because the security forces received reports of possible attacks on ceremonies, as well as the attacks from inside the ceremonies, against the security forces, and misuse of the opportunity by some miscreants.”



Figure 18: The photo on the left shows the thread published by the Ghazni Governor’s Office Media Centre and the deleted post. The photo on the right shows the further text of the deleted statement.

According to the statement, a delegation, alleged to include Shia representatives, had been assigned to comprehensively investigate the incident, identify the perpetrators, and present them to the Justice Department.

Subsequently, on 9 August 2023, a Taliban-appointed delegation, composed of Shia leaders and Taliban officials, [reportedly](#) visited Ghazni province to address local concerns. The delegation was led by Sheikh-ul-Hadith Madar Ali Karimi, a Hazara from Bamyan, serving as the Deputy Minister of Urban Development and Housing, and included Mawlawi Hashemi from the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI). The delegation also included Shia community representatives Sayed Sufi Gardizi and Sayed Sharifi Balkhabi. During the visit, the delegation reportedly engaged with local Shia

representatives and provincial Taliban officials, pledging to deliver justice through their investigation and reporting. However, no specific outcomes were publicly announced.

In addition to the statement by the Provincial Governor's Office, and the visit of the Taliban-appointed delegation, Taliban Spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid was asked about the killing of two children in the Ghazni incident during an interview with an unnamed journalist. In the 01:23-minute video clip of the interview, [published](#) by the Taliban's National Anis Daily on 1 August 2023, and also shared by Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson said:

“Yes, unfortunately, we were also very affected by this incident, which should not have happened, but of course, when you stand against some conspiracies, there will be clashes. As a result of the incident and some security problems, we had casualties. However, they wanted to exploit this incident and create big chaos, but it was prevented. But we are sorry that the children lost their lives.”

A Shia journalist, [Alisher Shahir](#), and another [account](#) on X reported that, following the Ashura incidents, the Taliban Governor of Ghazni province visited the victims' families. According to these accounts, the Governor reportedly expressed sympathy and provided the victims' families with some financial support, claiming that the individuals who opened fire were Ashura commemoration participants, not Taliban members. AW assess there was no available evidence to support claims of armed individuals among the crowd.

## 6. Conclusion

Through open-source techniques, AW has verified the use of violence by three Taliban members in two locations in Ghazni province (the Nawabad market and Qala-Shahada), in the form of striking or slapping crowd members, in one case with a baton, and threatening them with rifles. Crowd members were also sprayed with fire hoses by firefighters. AW also verified that at least six members of the crowd threw rocks at Taliban members and firefighters.

AW verified that one child was injured during the unrest, in an alleyway 200 metres southeast of the market where the initial unrest took place. It is likely that the armed Taliban members moved toward the crowd in this alleyway, as well as the alleyway northeast of the market. The movements of the Taliban indicate an attempt to disperse the gathered crowd beyond the market area.

One of the videos shows a crowd of men and boys running away while audible gunfire can be heard. AW investigators note that at least six shots of gunfire audible in this video sound different from the aerial firing heard previously at the market. These six shots are consistent with a bullet flying at close proximity to the camera in the direction of the crowd. However, this could also be due to overhead firing, and does not indicate with certainty that the crowd was directly targeted.

The unrest in Qala-Shahada occurred 1.3 kilometres north of the unrest at the market in Nawabad. Both incidents demonstrated similar events, with firefighters using water cannons in an attempt to disperse the gathered crowd, while Taliban members and crowd members alike engaged in forms of violence.

AW assess that while some of the visuals assessed by investigators match the statement posted by the Taliban, some inconsistencies remain. As claimed by the Ghazni Governor's Office Media Centre, a standoff occurred between Ashura participants and Taliban members, in which participants can be seen throwing stones at Taliban members.

It is unclear, however, what led to the sudden escalation of the standoff. AW assess it is likely that the crowd's failure to disperse when hosed by the fire engine led the Taliban to resort to aerial firing. The Ghazni Governor's Office Media Centre claimed that there were armed people amongst the crowd; AW found no evidence of this in the videos and imagery examined in this investigation. Likewise, had armed elements been amongst the Ashura crowd, it is highly likely that a firefight would have ensued between them and Taliban members, which would have resulted in high casualty figures in the square. As such, AW assess that the Taliban likely fired into the air, both in the square and down the streets, in an effort to disperse the crowd. This use of aerial firing, in turn, likely resulted in the accidental shooting of at least two of the victims – Victim 1, the young boy in video H – and the young male (Victim 2) seen severely injured among the Ashura crowd.

Sequencing and gaining a full understanding of the events of the incidents is difficult from open-source materials alone. The material circulated online was not posted chronologically or as the events unfolded. AW observed several more individuals present at the scenes of unrest who were filming. It is likely that videos with further evidence were circulated around local and closed social media groups, which could not be accessed by AW.

It is AW's assessment that the Taliban were responsible for the death of the two young males – killed by gunfire – and that there were two further deaths whose cause cannot be established from the available footage. It is likely that the two deaths from gunfire were accidental, as a result of the firing to disperse crowds in the market square and surrounding streets, rather than the result of direct and deliberate fire at the crowds by Taliban forces.

## Appendix: Key footage cited

Content	Date and duration	Description	Verification notes
<a href="#">Video A</a>	28 July 2023 (00:25 length)	Unrest at market/main square. A Taliban member hitting one man and locals throwing rocks at Taliban members.	Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584767, 68.400300]
<a href="#">Video B</a>	28 July 2023 (00:30 length)	Unrest at the main market/main square. Firefighter hosing down crowd members and audible gunfire.	Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584767, 68.400300]
<a href="#">Video C</a>	28 July 2023 (01:41 length)	Unrest at the main market/main square. Firefighter hosing down crowd members and audible gunfire. A Taliban member hitting civilians.	Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584738, 68.400072]
<a href="#">Video D</a>	28 July 2023 (01:22 length)	Unrest at the market/main square. Audible gunfire and locals throwing rocks at Taliban members.	Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584682, 68.399962]
<a href="#">Video E</a>	28 July 2023 (00:32 length)	Unrest at the market/main square. Audible gunfire and firefighter hosing down crowd members. Locals throwing rocks at Taliban members.	Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584910, 68.400173]
<a href="#">Video F</a>	28 July 2023 (00:24 length)	Locals running and audible gunfire.	Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584868, 68.399248]
<a href="#">Video G</a>	28 July 2023 (00:34 length)	Crowd members running and audible gunfire.	Second clip: Nawabad, Ghazni [33.584530, 68.399725]



<p><a href="#">Video H</a> [WARNING: GRAPHIC] (<a href="#">original post</a> <a href="#">deleted, but</a> <a href="#">archived by AW</a>) (Link to short version of full video)</p>	<p>28 July 2023 (Original: 00:48 length)</p>	<p>Child on the ground with visible blood, crowd running, and Taliban visible nearby.</p>	<p>Nawabad, Ghazni [33.586018, 68.399712]</p>
<p><a href="#">Video I</a> [WARNING: GRAPHIC]</p>	<p>31 July 2023 (00:14 length)</p>	<p>Young adult on the ground with a large pool of blood.</p>	<p>Not Located.</p>
<p><a href="#">Video J</a></p>	<p>30 July 2023 (01:47 length)</p>	<p>Unrest at the second location. A Taliban member hitting one man, a local man struggling with a Taliban member and a firefighter using a hose.</p>	<p>Qala-e Shahada, Ghazni [33.596227, 68.399233]</p>



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