

WASHINGTON — Newly declassified surveillance footage provides additional insights about the final minutes and aftermath of a botched U.S. drone strike last year in Kabul, Afghanistan, showing how the military made a life-or-death decision based on imagery that was [fuzzy, hard to interpret in real time](#) and prone to [confirmation bias](#).

The strike on Aug. 29 killed 10 innocent people — including seven children — in a tragic blunder that punctuated the end of the 20-year war in Afghanistan.

The disclosure of the videos was a rare step by the U.S. military in any case of an airstrike that caused civilian casualties, and is the first time any footage from the Kabul strike has been seen publicly. The videos encompass about 25 minutes of silent footage from two drones — a military official said both were MQ-9 Reapers — showing the minutes before, during and after the strike.

The at-times blurry footage that operators were watching will continue to be scrutinized for new details about how the episode unfolded, while demonstrating the heightened risk of error that accompanies any decision to fire a missile in a densely populated neighborhood.

The military had been working that day under extreme pressure to head off another attack on troops and civilians in the middle of the chaotic withdrawal. It has said it believed it was tracking an ISIS-K terrorist who might imminently detonate a bomb near the Kabul airport. Three days earlier, a suicide bombing at the airport had killed at least 182 people, including 13 American troops.

The New York Times obtained the footage of the strike through a [Freedom of Information Act lawsuit](#) against United States Central Command, which oversaw military operations in Afghanistan. The disclosure is likely to add fuel to a debate about the rules for airstrikes and protections for civilians in the era of drone warfare.

The videos — one of which is in grainy imagery, apparently from a camera designed to detect heat — show a car arriving at and backing into a courtyard on a residential street blocked by walls. Blurry figures are seen moving around the courtyard, and children are walking on the street outside the walls in the moments before a fireball from a Hellfire missile engulfs the interior. Neighbors can then be seen desperately dumping water onto the courtyard from rooftops.

[Watch the two videos here and read the rest of the article.](#)