



HEADQUARTERS
International Security Assistance Force/
United States Forces-Afghanistan
Kabul, Afghanistan
APO AE 09356



TO: See Distribution

SUBJECT: COMISAF *Night Operations Tactical Directive*

DATE: 1 December 2011

The Commander of NATO's *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)*, General John R. Allen USMC, recently issued a revised *Night Operations Tactical Directive*, which sets out his intent and direction for the conduct of night operations. The thrust of the Directive is to minimize the disruption and the concern caused by night operations to law-abiding Afghan citizens, while at the same time removing dangerous insurgents from society in a controlled manner which significantly reduces the possibility of civilian casualties. All night operations are carried out as 'partnered' operations, i.e. every such operation is carried out alongside specially trained Afghan soldiers and policemen, who are increasingly taking on responsibility for the command and control of night operations, with a view to transitioning this responsibility to them entirely as their capacity and capability develops. It should be noted that this Directive applies equally to all US Forces operating under the control of *United States Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A)*.

What follows are the releasable portions of the *Night Operations Tactical Directive*:

Purpose. To provide guidance and intent for appropriate procedures for ISAF operations conducted at night.

Introduction.

- We are in a war of perceptions. Ultimately, how the Afghan people view our conduct and perceive our intentions will be decisive factors in their judgment to support the combined Afghan and Coalition effort to defeat the insurgency. Not only must we protect the people, we must also earn their respect and their support - both of which are critical to the success of the mission.
- Properly conducted night operations that remove key insurgent leaders and operators from the battlefield deliver military benefits disproportionate to their cost and are an important aspect of our COIN campaign. However, negative perceptions of such operations are widely held. In order to maintain our ability to conduct night operations, ISAF and US Forces must ensure that they are carried out in a manner that minimizes the opportunity for such perceptions to flourish.
- Because of cultural norms and sensitivities, night operations can make Afghans feel violated and dishonored - even if no injuries or damage are caused. Furthermore, our enemies have, for some time, used exaggerated and distorted messages about night operations to promote their interests. Even the best-executed night operation

UNCLASSIFIED/RELEASEABLE

may provide our enemy with an opportunity to spread misinformation.

Commander's Intent. My intent is to maintain relentless pressure on the insurgent leadership through the highly effective tactic of partnered night operations, increasingly led by *Afghan National Security Forces*¹ (ANSF), conducted in a manner which minimizes disruption to Afghan civilians, protects their property, prevents civilian casualties, and shares the maximum information possible with local leadership and civilians before, during and after the operation.

Direction. In order to achieve my intent, you are to:

- comply with the intent of my *Tactical Directive* in the conduct of all night operations.
- encourage ANSF to take the lead – they should be the first force to make contact; they should be the first force seen and heard by the occupants of any compound entered. Successful transition will be characterized by our Afghan partners taking increasing responsibility for the planning and command and control of these night operations.
- conduct the operation at night only where darkness and/or timing give a benefit over a daytime operation.
- always treat Afghan civilians with dignity and respect.
- ensure that the Provincial Governor, or his designated representative, is notified prior to commencement of the operation.
- transparency is vital, so share as much information about the operation as is tactically possible with affected communities before, during and after it has taken place.
- initiate entry to the targeted residence by means of soft-knock (progressive breach) procedures with an Afghan-led call-out in the appropriate Afghan language. If tactical considerations preclude the use of soft-knock, the ground force commander must seek authorization for the transition to hard knock. The call out should include clear instructions, and the occupants given sufficient time to comprehend, acknowledge, and comply.
- only introduce military working dogs into the living spaces of compounds and houses for clear and justifiable military benefit. Dogs are considered unclean in Afghan culture and the use of them is deemed particularly sensitive during night operations.
- conduct searches as follows:

¹ The term ANSF encompasses Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), the Afghan National Army (ANA) and other bodies responsible for the security of the country.

UNCLASSIFIED/RELEASEABLE

- always use ANSF personnel where available;
- always use female searchers for searching women and children;
- provide written notification of any individuals detained, both to the household and subsequently to a local leader within 24 hours, where possible.
- provide an itemized inventory of all seized items, whether by ISAF or ANSF, to include prohibited items.
- record any property damaged or destroyed by ISAF or ANSF during the operation.
- plan post-operation mitigation. Our most effective mitigation tool is dialogue with tribal elders or other key communicators before, during, and after the mission.

Compliance with the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). In addition to the requirements above, I expect every participant in a night operation to comply with LOAC. This includes, but is not limited to, adherence to the principle of proportionality in the application of force and avoidance of death or injury to civilians and damage or destruction to their property, and protection of the wounded and sick and the provision of medical care to the injured, to include those insurgents who have come under the control of friendly forces.

Conclusion. Night operations are a vital tool that can deliver critical campaign effects, unachievable by other means. In order to earn the support of the people – one of my key strategic priorities – we must ensure that we do everything in our power to mitigate any potential negative perception of these operations. Ultimately, the Afghan people will decide the outcome of this conflict. Only with their support can we achieve our objectives. To that end, the conduct of night operations must be tactically sound and judiciously executed – and they must be as transparent as possible for the Afghan people most affected. I expect commanders at every level to carefully balance the potential military value of each operation against the potential costs before moving forward in accordance with my guidance.

Original signed by

JOHN R. ALLEN
General, United States Marine Corps
Commander
International Security Assistance Force/
United States Forces-Afghanistan