



HEADQUARTERS  
International Security Assistance Force/  
United States Forces-Afghanistan  
Kabul, Afghanistan  
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SUBJECT: COMISAF's Tactical Directive

DATE: 30 November 2011

The Commander of NATO's *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), General John R. Allen USMC, recently issued a revised *Tactical Directive*, putting his own personal stamp on the manner in which the Campaign is to be conducted. The *Tactical Directive* provides guidance and intent for the employment of force in support of ISAF operations and updates the version issued by his predecessor, General Petraeus, on 7 July 2011. This Directive also applies to all US forces operating under the control of *United States Forces – Afghanistan* (USFOR-A) under Operation *Enduring Freedom*. General Allen is absolutely committed to eliminating the tragic waste of human life amongst the law-abiding citizens of Afghanistan, and spares no effort in preventing civilian casualties whether caused by ISAF or US forces, or by the insurgents.

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

**Purpose.** To provide my guidance and intent for the employment of force in support of ISAF and ANSF-partnered operations.

#### **Introduction.**

- Our counter-insurgency campaign has achieved extraordinary success over the past 12 months. We continue to remove insurgent fighters from the battlefield at a very high rate; many more are voluntarily removing themselves from the fight. Much of this success is directly attributable to our application of well-founded counter-insurgency principles, specifically the focus on the Afghan population. We have improved security in key areas and measurably reduced the number of civilian casualties resulting from our operations. The population is becoming increasingly supportive of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) and ISAF. We will continue to protect the citizens of Afghanistan.
- We must balance our pursuit of the enemy with our efforts to minimize the loss of innocent civilian life and our obligation to protect our troops. Every civilian casualty is a detriment to our interests and those of the Afghan government, even if insurgents are responsible. We must redouble our efforts to eliminate the loss of innocent civilian life. Consider all use of force carefully. Ensure that the use of force is necessary and proportionate to the threat faced, and when applied it is precisely delivered. We must never forget that the center of gravity in this campaign is the Afghan people; the citizens of Afghanistan will ultimately determine the future of their country.
- We must maintain our resolve in the face of a determined enemy. We are committed to protecting the people of Afghanistan. We must tenaciously pursue

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the enemies of the Afghan people, but to be clear, we must fight with great discipline and tactical patience.

- We can and will accomplish our mission through an even more judicious application of force. The insurgency is in disarray—we have disrupted their command and control and many of their leaders have retreated to safe havens abroad. This creates an opportunity to capitalize on the Afghan public's discontent with the insurgency's destructive impacts on their lives. It is time to exploit the insurgency's disarray by reinforcing through action that we are here to support the people of Afghanistan. This is not about comparing our actions with those of the insurgents as we are rightly held to a higher standard by both the Afghan population and the International Community.
- Afghan forces are vital to the execution of the combined campaign plan. They know and understand this country in a way none of us ever will, and they already shoulder much of the security responsibility, and the majority of the casualties. Their participation in all of our operations is essential to success.
- Finally, we must be consistent in our application of this directive, the rules of engagement and the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). I expect all commanders to conduct regular reinforcement training in the application and employment of force, guided by Rules of Engagement (ROE), LOAC and the intent of this Directive. I also insist that all planning and execution of operations account for our obligations to employ force consistent with the principles of military necessity, proportionality, distinction and humanity in accordance with LOAC.

**Commander's Intent. My intent is to eliminate ISAF-caused civilian casualties across Afghanistan, and minimize civilian casualties throughout the area of operations by reducing their exposure to insurgent operations. I am equally determined that my direction in no way compromises the inherent right of every individual and unit to employ appropriate measures in self-defense.**

**Direction.** In order to achieve my intent:

- Presume that:
  - every Afghan is a civilian until otherwise apparent;
  - all compounds are civilian structures until otherwise apparent;
  - in every location where there is evidence of human habitation, civilians are present until otherwise apparent.
- Partner with *Afghan National Security Forces*<sup>1</sup> (ANSF) whenever possible. ANSF should be in the lead wherever possible. ISAF operations benefit from ANSF situational awareness and lowering civilian anxiety when communicating with fellow countrymen.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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- Conduct ground battle damage assessments in all situations where there is a potential loss of life or injury to insurgents or Afghan civilians, except when an assessment would put ISAF personnel at greater risk.
- Investigate every allegation of civilian casualties.
- Apply the LOAC principles: military necessity/objective, distinction, proportionality, and humanity on all operations:
- Value every Afghan civilian life.
- Manage the consequences of any mistake expeditiously, honestly and openly, properly expressing condolences.

**Respect for Human Rights.** A significant component of our campaign is championing the respect for human rights and supporting GIRoA's development of institutional protections of every citizen's human rights in accordance with LOAC, international law, and the laws of Afghanistan. ISAF will support and encourage GIRoA to hold those responsible accountable for their actions. These actions are vital in building the Afghan population's confidence and trust.

**Command Responsibility.** Eliminating civilian casualties is a difficult task, requiring constant command attention. I expect commanders at all levels to place as high a priority on it as I do. It is a command responsibility to reinforce, refresh and review training of and for subordinates on a regular basis, identify failings and take corrective action. Where engagements *appear* to have breached any aspect of this Directive, whether or not they resulted in civilian casualties, I expect commanders to investigate. We are in a better position tactically, operationally and strategically when we are first with the truth.

**Conclusion.** We need to build on the momentum we have achieved. I require all personnel to use force judiciously, especially in situations where civilians may be present. This is a critical challenge at a critical time, but we must and will succeed. I expect everyone under my command to adhere to both the letter and spirit of this Directive. Commanders' judgment should always be guided by my intent.

Take the fight to the enemy, protect the Afghan people and help our Afghan partners defeat the insurgency.

*Original document signed by*

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