



NATO/ISAF UNCLASS



Headquarters
International Security Assistance Force
Kabul, Afghanistan

HQ ISAF

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TO: See Distribution

SUBJECT: Tactical Directive

The Commander of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), General Stanley McChrystal, issued a revised Tactical Directive on 02 July 2009. The Tactical Directive provides guidance and intent for the employment of force in support of ISAF operations and updates the previous version issued by the previous commander in October 2008. This directive also applies to all U.S. forces operating under the control of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A).

Although the Tactical Directive has been classified for the protection of our own forces, portions of the directive are being made public in order to ensure a broader awareness of the intent and scope of General McChrystal's guidance to ISAF and USFOR-A forces.

What follows are the releasable portions of the Tactical Directive:

Our strategic goal is to defeat the insurgency threatening the stability of Afghanistan. Like any insurgency, there is a struggle for the support and will of the population. Gaining and maintaining that support must be our overriding operational imperative – and the ultimate objective of every action we take.

We must fight the insurgents, and will use the tools at our disposal to both defeat the enemy and protect our forces. But we will not win based on the number of Taliban we kill, but instead on our ability to separate insurgents from the center of gravity – the people. That means we must respect and protect the population from coercion and violence – and operate in a manner which will win their support.

This is different from conventional combat, and how we operate will determine the outcome more than traditional measures, like capture of terrain or attrition of enemy forces. We must avoid the trap of winning tactical victories – but suffering strategic defeats – by causing civilian casualties or excessive damage and thus alienating the people.

While this is also a legal and a moral issue, it is an overarching operational issue – clear-eyed recognition that loss of popular support will be decisive to either side in this struggle. The Taliban cannot militarily defeat us – but we can defeat ourselves.

I recognize that the carefully controlled and disciplined employment of force entails risks to our troops – and we must work to mitigate that risk wherever possible. But excessive use of force resulting in an alienated population will produce far greater risks. We must understand this reality at every level in our force.

I expect leaders at all levels to scrutinize and limit the use of force like close air support (CAS) against residential compounds and other locations likely to produce

civilian casualties in accordance with this guidance. Commanders must weigh the gain of using CAS against the cost of civilian casualties, which in the long run make mission success more difficult and turn the Afghan people against us.

I cannot prescribe the appropriate use of force for every condition that a complex battlefield will produce, so I expect our force to internalize and operate in accordance with my intent. Following this intent requires a cultural shift within our forces – and complete understanding at every level – down to the most junior soldiers. I expect leaders to ensure this is clearly communicated and continually reinforced.

The use of air-to-ground munitions and indirect fires against residential compounds is only authorized under very limited and prescribed conditions (specific conditions deleted due to operational security).

(NOTE) This directive does not prevent commanders from protecting the lives of their men and women as a matter of self-defense where it is determined no other options (specific options deleted due to operational security) are available to effectively counter the threat.

We will not isolate the population from us through our daily conduct or execution of combat operations. Therefore:

Any entry into an Afghan house should always be accomplished by Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), with the support of local authorities, and account for the unique cultural sensitivities toward local women.

No ISAF forces will enter or fire upon, or fire into a mosque or any religious or historical site except in self-defense. All searches and entries for any other reason will be conducted by ANSF.

The challenges in Afghanistan are complex and interrelated, and counterinsurgencies are difficult to win. Nevertheless, we will win this war. I have every confidence in the dedication and competence of the members of our force to operate effectively within this challenging environment. Working together with our Afghan partners, we can overcome the enemy's influence and give the Afghan people what they deserve: a country at peace for the first time in three decades, foundations of good governance, and economic development.