

Victory Institute Fact Sheet

7 Jul 2010

No. 4

Rules of Engagement in Afghanistan

Based on recent events and testimony of our fighting forces in Afghanistan, the Victory Institute has determined that the U.S. military's restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) have a negative effect on our ability to fight and win in Afghanistan while placing our troops in increased danger. Note: Due to operational security concerns this is not a complete list of the ROE and examples of their negative effects.

Examples:

- If the enemy is firing, our troops can engage him. Once he lays down his weapon, they cannot.¹
 - Enemies can move from one firing position to another unchecked
- Our troops cannot return fire if:
 - Civilians are present
 - Civilians may be present
 - It is unsure whether civilians are present
- If an enemy is placing an explosive device, he can be engaged. If he walks away, he cannot.
- Mosques and historical sights may not be fired upon or entered except by ANSF²
- U.S. forces can't conduct night or surprise searches³
- U.S. forces are not allowed to search houses without the presence of Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) personnel, whose actions are unreliable at best and are in many cases supportive of the Taliban.
- Artillery and air support is denied if civilian structures are in the vicinity

Effects:

- Even in an ambush, troops have held their fire until an officer gave the go-ahead to return fire⁴
 - By then, their attackers had disappeared
- A request for an illumination round to reveal the enemy's position was denied, citing possible collateral damage⁵
- Smoke rounds – intended to mask the movement of U.S. troops – are deliberately fired off target in order to avoid collateral damage, leaving our troops exposed⁶

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<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2010/04/marine_roe_041310w/>

2 McChrystal, Stanley. "Tactical Directive." 6 July 2009 <http://victoryinstitute.net/intel/Tactical_Directive_090706.pdf>

3 Carter, Sara A. "U.S. troops battle both Taliban and their own rules." Washington Times 16 Nov. 2009

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4 Motlagh, Jason. "Will Petraeus Change the Rules for Shooting Back?" Time 7 July 2010

<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2001936,00.html?xid=rss-mostpopular>>

5 Will, George. "An NCO recognizes a flawed Afghanistan strategy." Washington Post 20 June 2010

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/18/AR2010061803760.html>>

6 Ibid.

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- Enemies no longer run from air support as aircraft are unlikely to attack⁷
- Four Marines, a Navy corpsman, eight Afghan soldiers and the unit's interpreter died when commanders rejected a unit's repeated calls for artillery and air support⁸
 - Support denied despite repeated assurances that unit was not near any village
 - Calls for smoke rounds to mask the unit's withdrawal were denied for nearly an hour
- In some instances, troops have been ordered to patrol without loaded weapons⁹
- The Taliban order Afghans to act as human shields in order to take advantage of the ROE¹⁰

Findings:

- Our enemies in Afghanistan do not have rules
- Some Afghans even feel that we should be acting “more strongly”¹¹
- Lack of mortar, air, and artillery support has marginalized U.S. advantages over the enemy, leaving our troops prone to longer engagements and more casualties
- Senior military officials have admitted that the Taliban have become more effective due to gaps in our ROE¹²
- Troops say that the restrictive ROE put them at increased risk without seeing positive results¹³

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9 Carter, Chris. “Some US troops in Afghanistan may patrol with no rounds chambered in weapons.” The US Report 19 May 2010. <<http://www.theusreport.com/the-us-report/some-us-troops-in-afghanistan-may-patrol-with-no-rounds-cham.html>>

10 Associated Press. “Afghan Official: Taliban Using Human Shields.” Fox News 17 Feb. 2010

<<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/02/17/afghan-official-taliban-using-human-shields/>>

11 Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. “Sole Informant Guided Decision On Afghan Strike.” Washington Post 6 Sept. 2009

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/05/AR2009090502832_pf.html>

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<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/01/AR2009090103908.html?hpid=topnews>>

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