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## Breaking Down Doors in Afghanistan

By Sarah Holewinski

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There's a new tactical directive from Gen. Stanley McChrystal, head of international forces in Afghanistan, on night raids—one of the most controversial tactics used by foreign and Afghan troops to search homes for suspected militants or weapons. The directive remains classified, but will likely put in place new rules to address anger among Afghan civilians for what they consider an insulting, extreme practice.

The Open Society Institute today released a report on how civilians feel about night raids, based on research in Afghan villages from September to December 2009.

OSI researcher Erica Gaston reached an unambiguous conclusion:

"Night raids cause tremendous trauma within Afghan communities, often alienating the very people whom international forces are supposedly trying to protect."

The raids cause the death of family members, the prolonged detention of breadwinners, injuries, property destruction, and other losses. Aside from their destructiveness, the raids cause especially deep resentment in a culture where women are generally hidden from public view and where the home is a fiercely private domain.

What's more, Gen. McChrystal's very public apology for civilian deaths in Oruzgan this week is a stark contrast to the silence Afghans hear following a night raid. Since these raids happen without transparency, literally in darkness, and with little known oversight or accountability, the Afghans who find themselves targeted but then are cleared of any wrong-doing almost never get apologies or compensation for damages. In addition to a new, respectful way of searching homes, international and Afghan forces obviously need to recognize civilian losses and offer timely assistance to families.

No wonder there's a new tactical directive. The stakes are high and international forces have to prove that they're there to protect, not harm, civilians. When they come a'knockin' it should be gently.