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Night raids will continue to target Taliban

By CHRIS CARROLL

November 22, 2011

The [controversial tactic](#) of U.S. troops using the cover of darkness to surprise Afghan insurgents sheltering in homes will continue, said Gen. Daniel Allyn, the commander of U.S. and coalition forces in the hotly contested eastern region of the country.

Afghan leaders and civilians have complained of the jarring night raids, and point to high-profile mistakes that led to the death of innocent civilians.

Some Western observers have blasted the tactic, too. “They are a huge boon to insurgent propaganda and recruitment, helping them to replace fighters quicker than they can be killed,” said Erica Gaston, who [studied night raids for the Open Society Foundation](#) in 2010.

But Allyn said Tuesday that night raids, where U.S. technological and tactical superiority are in full effect, are an invaluable tool against Taliban insurgents. Striking in the dead of night is also safer for civilians, he said, because most are at home and out of the line of fire.

“Those enemies of Afghanistan clearly are successfully targeted at minimum risk to civilians through night raids,” he said, speaking to the Pentagon press corps by video connection from Afghanistan. “Those will continue to be important.”

But encounters between U.S. troops and groggy Afghans should decline, Allyn said, as more Afghan forces become operational.

“They’re increasing every day,” he said. “And ultimately, as we will with all operations, the goal is for them to take the lead.”

Allyn said that eastern Afghanistan, a focus of insurgent activity and cross-border incursions by fighters supported by groups in Pakistan, will avoid deep cuts in troop levels as tens of thousands of surge troops are drawn down over the next year.

“We’ve got about 200 troops to withdraw from the east to meet our target and our portion of the surge recovery,” he said. “And none of those troops are frontline combat troops, so we will sustain our focus on partnership and pressure on the insurgent networks.”