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2010-07

# Jones: Afghanistan Drawdown Hinges on Success of Current Campaign

Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

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# Jones: Afghanistan Drawdown Hinges on Success of Current Campaign

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Events on the ground in Afghanistan during the remainder of the year may well determine the extent of any drawdown of U.S. forces in 2011 and the future of U.S. strategy in what some have called a "graveyard of empires."

That's the assessment from Seth G. Jones, faculty member at the Naval Postgraduate School and leading authority on Afghanistan.

Jones began work in May at a new Pentagon-based position as Representative for the Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, after working in the war-torn country as a Plans Officer and Advisor for the Commanding General of U.S. Special Operations Forces.

On the heels of the new job came accolades from the Council on Foreign Relations, which awarded Jones the Silver Medal in its 2010 Arthur Ross Book Awards for his book, "In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan" (2009, W.W. Norton & Company).

Many candidates in the looming mid-term elections are sure to clamor for the withdrawal of U.S. forces. However, Jones said military leaders will be examining the strategy instituted by then Gen. Stanley McChrystal, and continued by Gen. David Petraeus, when gauging the future U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.

"The president has talked about a drawdown in 2011," Jones said in June while in Monterey. "What that means has yet to fully be determined. The intention from the beginning was that it would require an assessment by the end of 2010 and into 2011 on the state of the counter-insurgency effort."

That counter-insurgency effort is a "population-centric" approach that provides protection and assistance to local populations while utilizing Special Forces to leverage tribes and clans who are fighting against the Taliban.

And drawdown won't equate to withdrawal.

"It means that Afghan national security forces will increasingly take over responsibility for security in some areas," Jones said.

Jones' daily duty covers the role of Special Operations Forces in the Afghanistan and Pakistan efforts. The combined U.S. effort in those countries has played a key role in weakening one of the early targets of the war – Al Qaida. The organization has seen setbacks.

"Across the board, Al Qaida has been weakened in the past two to three years," Jones said. "It has suffered human losses, individuals who have been captured or killed. It has suffered financial losses. Those things have had an impact on its operations, including its operational security. Yet it is still capable of pulling off attacks."



Al Qaida leaders are releasing far fewer statements out of fear they could be tracked. Jones said some are even sleeping in orchards instead of buildings due to security concerns. At the same time, the organization – or groups linked to it – continues to pose a threat to U.S. homeland security, which is a theme Jones focuses on at CHDS.

He argues in his CHDS classes that recent plots in the United States – such as the Times Square plot in May 2010 involving Faisal Shahzad or the September 2009 arrest of Najibullah Zazi – suggest that there is a growing threat to the U.S. homeland from Pakistan.

"We have seen a troubling trend of individuals migrating to this area," Jones said "to conduct training in improvised explosive devices, improve counter-intelligence methods, acquire financial assistance, receive operational guidance, and interact with key militant leaders. And they are trying to take these lessons back to the United States."

Another case he cites is that of five men from Alexandria, Va., who were convicted in Pakistan in 2010 of plotting to aid militant groups in Pakistan and attack the United States.

"These cases indicate a notable threat coming from Al Qaida and other allied extremist groups in Pakistan," Jones said.

Jones interest in Afghanistan was stirred after the Sept. 11 attacks, and he has studied and written extensively on the country since then.

The book prize from the Council on Foreign Relations is awarded based on works that contribution to the understanding of foreign policy or international relations. In it, Jones traces American involvement in Afghanistan from the late 1960s, through its civil war with the Soviet Union, continuing with the rise of the Taliban government and the invasion by the United States. The aim is to examine why an insurgency erupted after the Taliban government was toppled.

The book ends with a series of lessons learned. For starters, insurgents received too much support from outside forces while the new government received too little help from its outside allies, Jones noted.

Also, a government's failure to provide stability and protection to the population invites insurgency.

In this case, a bulk of U.S. resources necessary for rebuilding Afghanistan were diverted to Iraq from 2002-2004. Absent a sustained commitment, the diplomatic, intelligence and military resources needed to gird the government were unavailable.

It is that situation the current U.S. policy is trying to reverse.

"Part of the issue is allowing the strategy some time to work," Jones said. "I think by the end of the summer and into the fall, the strategy will have had about a year or so to be implemented. We can take a look at the areas that have been successful and the areas that have been less successful, and make an assessment on how to move forward."

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