

'No Afghanistan withdrawal in 2011'

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The US won't pull out of Afghanistan in 2011.

President Obama's top national security adviser, who has played a key part in designing the new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy, has been trying to clear up some confusion about the exit strategy.

Gen James Jones told me that "in no manner, shape or form" would the US withdraw from Afghanistan in 2011.

[In his speech on Tuesday](#), President Obama for the first time put a date on the beginning of the end of the United States presence in Afghanistan.

He said "these additional American and international troops will allow us to accelerate handing over responsibility to Afghan forces, and allow us to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011. Just as we have done in Iraq, we will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground."

While it was a necessary political message to those Americans who are doubtful about this war, sweetening the pill of the troop increase, [it has worried many in the region](#), where some have interpreted it starkly as meaning that America will pull out in a year and a half's time.

Gen Jones was deeply involved in designing the new strategy, attending all 10 meetings between the president and his top advisers at which the strategy was discussed. And he told me that wasn't so.

He said that "with a relentless application of this new force in 2011 we will be successful in reaching our goals...That will allow us to start pulling some of our forces out. So there is no contradiction."

I put it to him that that wasn't the way the speech had been seen in the region. This was his response:

"Its very important that people in Afghanistan hear this very clearly: this is not a withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in 2011, it is a decision to turn over to the Afghans some of the responsibility where they are ready to accept that responsibility. But in no manner, shape or form is the United States leaving Afghanistan in 2011."

I asked Gen Jones whether the combination of the push in Pakistan and the new strategy from the United States made him more confident about killing or capturing Osama Bin

Laden. He said:

“It certainly makes it more optimistic that we can dislodge al-Qaeda, hopefully capture him, he is a very important symbol, but I would be satisfied if we could cause the insurgent safe havens to feel less secure and to have to move. Once you eliminate sanctuary for an insurgency it becomes very difficult for that insurgency to operate. So obviously capturing Bin Laden would be terrific but the important thing is to eliminate those sanctuaries.”

Despite recent reports, he said that the conventional wisdom was that Bin Laden was still in northern Waziristan but he hoped he would be “forced to rethink his location” soon.

[Interview with Gen James Jones](#)

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