

National Security Adviser General James Jones to Visit Afghanistan, Pakistan, India

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President Barack Obama's top security adviser James Jones will visit Afghanistan and Pakistan to monitor implementation of the new US war plan, a US official said Monday.

Jones, who will also visit India, will meet local officials, US diplomats, military personnel and representatives of foreign nations battling alongside US troops in the Afghan war coalition.

"At the request of the president, national security advisor Jim Jones is traveling to Afghanistan and Pakistan to follow-up on the implementation of our new, comprehensive strategy," said National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer.

Obama put Pakistan at the center of the US fight against Al-Qaeda when he unveiled a new war strategy in March to commit thousands more troops and billions of dollars to the Afghan war.

Exact dates of the visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan were not released for security reasons. Sources in India, however, had disclosed over the weekend that Jones would be in New Delhi on June 25.

"General Jones will also visit India at the invitation of his counterpart National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan," said Hammer.

"General Jones's visit to New Delhi is part of our ongoing effort to further deepen and strengthen our key bilateral partnership with India."

Jones's trip was made public as the New York Times reported Monday that the US military commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, said he would sharply restrict the use of airstrikes in an effort to reduce civilian deaths.

The newspaper said McChrystal noted in interviews over the past few days that the use of airstrikes during firefights in Afghanistan would mostly be allowed only to prevent US and other coalition troops from being overrun.

Pakistan's army, meanwhile, said Monday it was in the final phase of a campaign to crush militants in Swat valley, which had been encouraged by the United States.

Fighter jets pounded strongholds of Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud in the tribal regions where the military is steeling for a full-scale offensive, while militants stepped up resistance with rocket attacks on troops.

Security forces are wrapping up an eight-week campaign against Islamist militants in northwest Swat and are opening up a second front along the Afghan border, where Al-Qaeda rebels are also believed to be hiding.

Unveiling the new US war strategy in March, Obama vowed to “disrupt, dismantle and defeat” Al-Qaeda, which he said was plotting deadly new assaults against the United States more than seven years after the September 11 attacks.

He said he would plunge 4,000 more US troops on top of an already announced 17,000 into the “increasingly perilous” unfinished war, triple US aid to Pakistan to 7.5 billion dollars over five years, attempt to peel away more moderate Taliban factions and lead a global civilian surge to Afghanistan.

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