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Press TV

US turning Afghanistan into military pariah: Analyst

An interview with James Jennings, president of Conscience International, from Atlanta

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Press TV has conducted an interview with James Jennings, president of Conscience International in Atlanta, to further discuss the issue. The following is a transcription of the interview.

Press TV: The Taliban's spring offensive is expected every year against the US-led forces in Afghanistan. You would think that they would be better prepared as the spring started, wouldn't you?

Jennings: Yes. This is a major event and not since the beginning of the war in October, 2001, has there been this much fighting or these kinds of attacks in Kabul itself, and also in Jalalabad and other places.

What is not surprising is that they were able to mount this kind of attack; in a way, I'm surprise it hasn't happened more often before.

It does remind one of the 1968 Tet-offensive in Vietnam, certainly not in terms of scale but in terms of the surprise of the attack. And what has happened is that over time people have let their guard down, been lulled into a false sense of security when these people are ready to attack almost at any time and made a concerted effort to do so.

And what it does do is call into question the whole commitment and strategy of the United States in Afghanistan, and the idea of training the Afghan nationals to take care of their own security which, at least, shows that they're not ready.

Press TV: Speaking of which, the US ambassador to Afghanistan has already said that the

current situation indicates that a pullout before Afghans take a full grip on security would mean setting the stage for another attack on America. Do you agree with that assessment?

Jennings: No, I don't. I disagree with Ryan Crocker, the Ambassador, on that question because previously, you remember, that the United States official said in Iraq that the Iraqis could take care of their own security and that they had to be there.

But, you see, in Afghanistan they've militarized the situation of national building to such an extent that the solution has to be a military solution, and there is no military solution especially in the southern part of the country and the connection that it has with north and south Waziristan and the groups that are ready to fight in all of those areas in the south and the east of Afghanistan.

So, that interpretation is just simply a military approach to national building and to solving problems that are cultural, religious and economic that cannot be dealt with primarily by the military forces that are there.

Press TV: Indeed, but Crocker is already using Sunday's events to lay the foundations for a prolonged US military presence in Afghanistan. Can the US even afford such a move given the unpopularity of the war both at home and in Afghanistan, as well as the billions that it is spending to maintain this presence?

Jennings: Actually, the United States cannot afford the continued campaign in Afghanistan and I think everybody in Washington knows that, but they are attached to their ideology. For ten years, the United States has been spending enormous amounts of money in that country. It affected the US economy in a devastating way.

Those who are realistic about Afghanistan say, 'well, we have to stay there - the US troops - for another 20 years at least'.

The Obama administration, it becomes a political event at this point, is saying, 'well, we're going to exit the country in 2014', and most of the military leaders say that's too soon.

Those who are opposed to the war - actually, it turns out to be some of the Republican candidates for president right now - are saying 'that we can't afford to stay there'.

It's a real conundrum. The United States cannot leave and it cannot stay. It's a very bad position for the policy makers in Washington to be in.

Press TV: Crocker has also said that a pullout before Afghans take a full grip on security would mean inviting Taliban and al-Qaeda to set another stage of attack on America. Given that the pretext here for a prolonged US presence in Afghanistan is that of the training of the Afghan security forces. Since those training these forces are not being able to handle the security situation, what's to say that the Afghan security forces will, eventually?

Jennings: Well, I don't think it's very likely that there will be the kind of outcome that the

United States policy makers are dreaming of. Remember they were dreaming in Vietnam and they said the same thing for many years. They were dreaming in Iraq that the situation would solve itself and still violence is wrecking that country.

What the United States needs to do is to adopt a regional policy and engage in all the countries that are neighbors of Afghanistan which includes Pakistan, most importantly, but also Iran and the other countries in the vicinity including China. The United States has not done that successfully.

That could be one step forward because, certainly, the people in the region are very tired of the violence and even the people in Pakistan where so much is happening, in Kabur Paktun province, are saying what we need is peace and a way forward that is not just an overmilitarization of the problem.

Press TV: Given that over a decade of occupation now has not resulted in bringing about the solution that you speak of, added to it this serious lapse on part of the US as far as security goes, what does this spell for the legacy of the war this is going to leave behind?

Jennings: Well, my prediction from the beginning was that the United States was going to leave in the same way that the British left Afghanistan in 1843, with a lot of things not accomplished that they had attempted, and with a great many corpses, dead bodies of troops and those who are working to try to build the country who are non-governmental organizations.

I think that's still true, but in the last 10 years most of the Pentagon analysts and also the people in Congress and the White House have laughed at that idea saying that the overwhelming technology that the United States is able to bring to bear on the problem will solve it. It's not the same as when Alexander the Great came into the country or when the Afghans expelled the British.

That may be true that the technological edge is tremendous, but at the same time the people who are resisting occupation are able to do certain things. And you saw that today in the violence that occurred and the attacks that were such a surprise in Kabul and Jalalabad.