

The Pendulum seeks to inspire, entertain and inform the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty as well as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

Editorial

Too little, too late in Afghanistan



Ryan Maass
Columnist

Eight years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, President Barack Obama delivered a speech last week reminding the country that, although the administration has taken a different

approach in foreign affairs from that of the previous Bush administration, the United States remains a nation at war with al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Almost everything about the troop deployment to Afghanistan to rout out al-Qaida has divided politicians and American citizens alike — from the amount of troops to be deployed, to the amount of time they will be occupying the country.

But is the government truly committed to the complete destruction of al-Qaida and its allies?

Furthermore, is the deployment of an additional 30,000 troops excessive, or does it fall short of what could be an effective surge in the country?

Judging from the optimistic remarks included within the fact sheet released from the Office of the Press Secretary, Obama is interested in the elimination of al-Qaida from Afghanistan and other havens for the terrorist group alongside the border of Pakistan.

The fact sheet more or less reiterates what Obama said in his speech, in that it stresses that threats to Americans at home are still a reality.

al-Qaida's growth has become a more serious problem in the recent months and these are threats "we cannot tolerate," according to the fact sheet.

In response to this unacceptable threat, Obama has announced that he will send in 30,000 troops to reinforce the 68,000 already deployed, with NATO promising an additional 5,000.

Is this enough, or does it fall short to the degree that our government is sending more Americans into a foreign country merely to fall victim to more insurgency bombings?

Given that the request from Gen. Stanley McCrystal, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, was for 40 - 60,000 troops, commanders on the ground are likely to desire the latter.

Aside from failing to send in an adequate amount of reinforcements, another flaw in the Obama administration's plan is the strict time limit the military was given to carry out its operations.

As mentioned before, it has been eight years since our forces, with the help of NATO and other key allies, invaded Afghanistan in the attempt to force terrorism out of the region.

Even at this moment, al-Qaida and its allies are still planning attacks on the Western world, the United States in particular.

After eight years, how long has the Obama administration given our military to finalize the conflict? Eighteen months.

Even with the additional 30,000 troops serving as reinforcements, it would seem like the administration has simply given the terrorists more targets instead of more obstacles.

Hungering for better food

The gap between student appetites and activism



Tyrice Johnson
Columnist

A survey was recently conducted by Kristen Haney in various dining halls around Elon's campus in which 94 randomly selected students were asked to fill out a

questionnaire. One hundred percent of students surveyed were either indifferent or would absolutely like to see full salad bars in all Elon dining halls.

Currently, only two out of the eight dining halls accepting meal swipes offer full salad bars with more than iceberg lettuce.

Ninety-five percent of students surveyed are either indifferent or would absolutely like to see healthier foods available in campus dining halls and included on the meal plan. Ninety percent of the students surveyed wouldn't mind or would absolutely like to see nutritional facts readily available for all of the food offered in dining halls.

Seventy-four percent said they wouldn't mind or would absolutely want to see less unhealthy foods in dining halls.

These findings suggest that Elon's dining arrangements need to be

altered in some way in order to create better and healthier options for the student body.

In order to fix the dining issues, students need to speak up about their concerns and offer a possible solution.

Since 100 percent of the students surveyed wouldn't mind seeing a full salad bar — with romaine lettuce — in all of the dining halls, that could be an easy fix in each dining location.

Also, altering the meal plan system to allow more food options to fit within its barriers could also help. This year, more combo meals were added, but the nutritional value is not up to par with what a college student needs.

The question now is how to go about making this happen.

Based on a recent interview with ARAMARK Resident District Manager Jeff Gazda, students can make a huge impact in the dining selections here.

According to Gazda, students in the Student Government Association approved the idea for the new meal plan that so many students are displeased with.

"I remember repeating over and over in the meeting with SGA, is this what you want ... are you sure ... and they approved it," Gazda said.

He also suggested that if the

students want to get involved, ARAMARK is accessible and is open to suggestions.

"We have focus groups that run often, but only a few students show up," Gazda said. "ARAMARK is open, it is as easy as scheduling an appointment, and we will reply to you as soon as possible."

We need to ensure that the SGA communicates with the student body more often to eliminate the likelihood of future miscommunication. The SGA needs to release what it is planning that will have any significant effect, such as this, on the overall student body.

Furthermore, Elon needs to enforce that students become more proactive about what is offered to them, whether that be by implementing a mandatory session for all incoming freshmen or a mandatory meeting for each resident area.

Sessions could stress the importance of eating habits as well as inform students about what they can do if they are displeased with what is offered in the dining halls.

An increase in efforts from both parties, according to the results from the survey, will enforce a supportive system where students and ARAMARK are on the same page with decisions that affect their dining.

Letters to the Editor:

To the Editor,

President Barack Obama's decision to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan is a tragic one for those who hope for change in this administration.

Although the stated reason was United States security, support was scant. The Taliban is no threat to us, and it gains in numbers where people endure abject poverty.

The president's national security adviser, Gen. James Jones, estimates al-Qaida has fewer than 100 operatives there, so its threat is better met by a targeted police action, strong intelligence and enlisting the cooperation of neighboring countries.

Speaking at Elon in October, author Khaled Hosseini reminded us no foreign invader has ever succeeded in Afghanistan. Indeed, just over two decades ago, we mocked the futility of Soviet efforts there.

The real enemy, Hosseini said, is poverty.

Afghans have a life expectancy of 42 years, 20 percent of children die before the age of five and half the population is without potable water. Poverty, albeit less desperate, also exists in the United States, right around us, as last week's Pendulum highlighted.

Congress has the power to cut funding for this war and use it to repair the destruction in Afghanistan and bring job programs to the United States. It is now time to lean on Congress to assume its responsibility for the budget and for declaring and funding wars.

Rep. Barbara Lee's, D-Ca., H.R. 3699 would stop funding for further troops. If you think a troop surge, whether for 18 months or decades, is not the answer, please ask your representative to co-sponsor this bill.

Anne Cassebaum
Department of English

To the Editor,

As you, the class of 2013, prepare to enter the final exam period, take a minute to reflect on what you've learned this semester. Many of you have focused on Afghanistan this fall in GST 110. It appears as if you may have a better understanding of the culture, geography and history of Afghanistan than the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

As an example, freshman Mary Schwarzwaelder, a student in associate director of tutorial services Laurin Kier's GST 110 class, gave a presentation earlier this month in which she outlined 11 key factors that led to the Soviet failure in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Among them were:

- Failure to understand the Afghan culture
- Underestimation of the role of Islam
- Civil war and ethnic tribal lines
- Inadequate troop preparation
- Use of traditional weapons that were ineffective
- Extreme terrain
- No defined objective

After eight years of conflict, our military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan still face many of these same issues. I would argue that based on Obama's speech on Dec. 1, our national leaders still do not understand the fundamental fallacies of our efforts in Afghanistan, or, if they do, they continue to mislead the citizens of this country.

It is important to understand this isn't a limited conflict taking place halfway around the world. You remain under threat of international terrorism. You have classmates, family and friends serving in the armed forces. You will pay for this war.

Whether you support the escalation of this war by Obama or not, recognize that many of you now know as much or more about Afghanistan than many of our national leaders. You don't have to wait until you walk across the stage Under the Oaks in 2013 to become involved in international issues in a significant way.

Regardless of your position on this conflict, I encourage you to contact your members of Congress, to write your local or student newspaper, to participate in peaceful assemblies, to challenge assumptions about this conflict and to educate others about what you know.

Most of the members of the class of 2013 were 10 years old when the conflict in Afghanistan began. Most of you will graduate from Elon before the majority of our troops come home. As you leave Elon for winter break, I encourage you to take time to consider what you've learned and how you've changed over this first semester.

Give thanks for the tremendous opportunity you've been given. Start putting your education to work outside the "Elon Bubble." And if you happen to see someone in uniform at the airport as you fly home, take a minute to say thank you.

Jason Springer
Director of Elon 101