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The Guardian

Afghan war logs: will Kabul turn on Pakistan?

By Jon Boone in Kabul

07/26/2010

* Karzai shocked at size of leak, but not its content

* Afghan president has long held view Pakistan's intelligence agency supports Taliban against Kabul government

Hamid Karzai is said to be shocked by the massive leak of classified military documents, but to be hoping further allegations of links between Pakistan and the Taliban will support his claim that Islamabad is directly supporting the insurgency.

Waheed Omar, the Afghan president's spokesman, told journalists the Afghan government would not seek to exploit revelations of previously unknown incidents in which Nato troops have killed Afghan civilians, even though in the past Karzai has publicly berated the US and its allies after high-profile tragedies.

Omar said: "As far as the substance of these leaked documents, the president's reaction was that most of this is not new and has been discussed in the past, and has often been raised in the past with our international partners."

Omar praised the "good progress" made over the last 18 months to lower the number of civilians accidentally killed.

General Stanley McChrystal, the recently sacked US commander of Nato troops in Afghanistan, took the issue particularly seriously and introduced tough rules of engagement restricting the use of force by foreign soldiers.

Meanwhile, William Hague, the foreign secretary, speaking in Brussels, said the leaks would not harm international efforts in Afghanistan. "A good deal of progress is being made, in building up the capacity of the Afghan state and in Afghanistan working together with so many nations in the world," he said.

"So I hope any such leaks will not poison that atmosphere, and I don't think they will."

But observers in Kabul warned that allegations of Pakistani involvement – while not new – could heighten tensions with Afghanistan's neighbour.

Haroun Mir, a political analyst, Karzai critic and parliamentary candidate, predicted that the intelligence documents alleging skulduggery by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence agency (ISI) would make it harder for the coalition to tolerate anything less than full Pakistani support in fighting the Taliban.

"For us, this is no secret – it is something we have been talking about since day one. But now there is no secret left. These are no longer allegations; these are facts," he said.

"It is up to the US and the UK to do something about it. Every day we see Nato soldiers die and Pakistan is very clearly linked to these killings, but there is no reaction. The west just rewards bad behaviour by the Pakistanis."

He said that when the details are re-reported by Afghan media, they will fuel popular conspiracy theories that the western powers are not serious about beating the Taliban and instead are looking for excuses for the permanent occupation of Afghanistan.

Any anti-Pakistani uproar will probably disrupt the detente between Karzai and Pakistan's leadership.

For months now Karzai has pointedly dropped his old anti-Pakistani rhetoric, and has held a series of meetings with Pakistan's army chief, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and Ahmad Shuja Pasha, the head of the ISI – the very organisation cited in the documents as being part of an alleged plot to assassinate the Afghan president.

Mir said: "We have all been trying to warn President Karzai that you cannot trust the Pakistanis. They are not co-operating with the US and the UK, so why should they co-operate with Afghanistan?"