



Karzai behavior blasted as 'reckless,' could threaten US-Afghan cooperation

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WASHINGTON – The already chilly relationship between Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai and the United States could be headed for a deep freeze as his erratic behavior threatens to undermine military cooperation in that country as the war winds down.

Karzai has lashed out several times in recent months, most recently accusing the U.S. government of plotting civilian raids in orchestrated plots allegedly drafted to destabilize Afghanistan and weaken his power. In a claim met with outrage by U.S. officials, Karzai pointed to a recent bomb-and-gun assault on a Lebanese restaurant in Kabul that left 21 people dead, including three Americans. While many in the international community believe the Taliban was responsible, sources inside Karzai's close circle of advisers reportedly say he believes something more sinister is at play.

The accusations were included in a recent [Washington Post report](#), which struck a nerve with Washington lawmakers who are now calling on the Obama administration to stop negotiating with an increasingly erratic Karzai over final troop withdrawals in Afghanistan.

U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan James Cunningham called Karzai's latest accusations of American involvement in the bombing attack "divorced from reality," and suggested Karzai's comments were to "throw us off balance."

Others say Karzai is playing a complicated game that is alienating much of the West.

"Since the beginning, the United States has invested a lot in him personally," Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, told FoxNews.com.

“Our strategy has depended on him and we built him up. If he’s now not on the same page with us, conflict is inevitable.”

Preble, along with other experts, believes Karzai’s accusations against America are a tactical move to shore up his credibility with the Afghan public – something he will only be able to do by divorcing his image as a “puppet of America.”

But it won’t be easy.

“He’s in a very difficult situation,” Preble said. “He’s trying to square the circle of diametrically opposed interests.”

John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and Fox News contributor, said Karzai’s actions are on the verge of being “delusional.”

“You have to wonder what Karzai’s motive is here because what he is basically accusing the United States of doing is conspiring with the Taliban against him and that has to be as far from reality as you can get,” Bolton told Fox News.

Bolton believes Karzai’s comments are “the mark of a government collapsing.”

“I think this is the sort of behavior you see in government that knows that they’re in their final days, and yet it comes at the same time Karzai will not sign ... [an] agreement with the United States that would at least keep 10,000 Americans there,” Bolton said.

Karzai has indeed been slow to sign a security agreement that would leave thousands of U.S. troops in Afghanistan after the formal end of American military operations this year.

“He’s in a tough spot,” Preble said. “In Afghanistan, people are extremely wary about foreigners in their country.”

Many lawmakers in Washington, including Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., say Obama should wait out Karzai’s presidency, which is expected to come to an end in April, and then negotiate a final exit strategy with the new president.

While some like Bolton paint Karzai’s response as reckless at best, others say his recent actions – which include releasing 37 detainees from Bagram prison – are dangerous.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., called Karzai’s decision to release the inmates a “slap in the face to the enormous sacrifices that thousands of our men and women in uniform have made in support of the Afghan people.”

Inhofe, who recently returned from a congressional trip to Afghanistan, said he hopes Karzai “will re-think his irresponsible decision and remember all that the American people have done and continue to do on behalf of his countrymen and for a free and secure Afghanistan.”

“Karzai’s continued reckless behavior threatens to undermine support for the mission and undo much of the progress that has been achieved at great cost in American blood and treasure,” Inhofe said in a written statement.