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The Guardian

US congressman refused entry to Afghanistan over criticisms of Karzai

Renewed tension between Washington and Kabul after Afghan president tells Dana Rohrabacher he would not be welcome

4/22/2012

Relations between the US and [Afghanistan's](#) president, [Hamid Karzai](#), came under renewed strain after a senior Congressman highly critical of the Kabul government was barred from entering Afghanistan.

Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, Republican chairman of the House foreign affairs subcommittee on oversight and investigation, has been an outspoken opponent of Karzai. Rohrabacher has engaged with other Afghan leaders about a more decentralised form of government for Afghanistan and called for a US investigation into alleged government corruption.

He had been leading a delegation to Afghanistan but was stopped in Dubai on Friday on his way to Kabul. The other members of the delegation had visas for Afghanistan but Rohrabacher did not.

According to his press spokeswoman, the US secretary of state, [Hillary Clinton](#), personally intervened to convey a message from Karzai that the congressman would not be welcome and asking him not to continue to Kabul.

Rohrabacher was still in Dubai on Sunday but scheduled to depart on Monday.

Karzai has repeatedly infuriated the [Obama administration](#) with his sharp public criticism of the US, even as Washington spends billions of dollars on security and aid in Afghanistan.

Blocking entry to a member of Congress adds to the growing tally of incidents that have strained ties.

"This doesn't look great a month before Chicago," a senior diplomat in Kabul said.

Nato is due to hold discussions at the Chicago summit next month on future relations with Afghanistan, and the US and its allies are expected to seal an agreement for long-term funding of the Afghan police and army.

Tara Olivia Setmayer, communications director for Rohrabacher, said: "Karzai told the state department he was not welcome and Secretary Clinton personally conveyed that sentiment to Mr. Rohrabacher and asked him not to continue on to Kabul with his fellow members. Out of respect, he obliged."

Setmayer said Rohrabacher had been a vocal critic of government corruption and "the US's failed strategy of foisting a western-style democracy from a central government in Kabul. He has advocated involving the former Northern Alliance factions in the government, much to the chagrin of Karzai."

Rohrabacher has been in discussion with Afghan leaders for several months about a less centralised form of government. In January the Afghan foreign ministry criticised what they saw as interference by the congressman in Afghanistan's domestic affairs, after a meeting with several opposition leaders in Berlin.

Rohrabacher has had a long and colourful association with Afghanistan dating back to the 1980s when he accompanied mujahideen forces fighting the Soviet Union. He became personal friends with many of the commanders who, with the support of US forces, toppled the Taliban government. Among them was Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostum with whom Rohrabacher remains in dialogue, and whom the delegation met on Sunday.