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The National Post, Canada

Leaked memo could spark Afghan-Canadian diplomatic storm

By John Ivison

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Canada's ambassador in Kabul has put his job on the line in a secret memo that lays bare the extreme level of mistrust and antipathy that exists between the Afghanistan government and the NATO alliance.

In a diplomatic note to Ottawa obtained by the National Post, William Crosbie says there are fears the WikiLeaks storm could force Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai to "burn his bridges" with the coalition.

The ambassador also reveals that a leaked U.S. Embassy report from Kabul will name him as making disparaging comments about Mr. Karzai and his family. Mr. Crosbie said he is worried his criticisms will cause a problem with bilateral relations between Canada and Afghanistan. "If my own comments become the focus of attention...then consideration should be given to replacing me so that the bilateral relationship is not unduly affected," he wrote. "Needless to say I cannot retract my words (nor could I do so in good conscience)."

Mr. Crosbie's frank memo followed a meeting with U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry last Saturday at which the U.S. diplomat warned of the "potentially cataclysmic fallout" from the release of thousands of leaked embassy cables with regards to Afghanistan.

“The main concern he [Eikenberry] has is that these leaks will reveal tactical and strategic political considerations and assessments as well as privileged relationships with members of the Karzai government and other leading figures in Afghanistan,” he writes.

“Eikenberry believes these will feed Karzai’s paranoia and mistrust of the U.S. (and its allies); will put pressure on the reformers within the govt to leave and will drive Karzai evermore into a confrontational role with the US and NATO.”

The U.S. and NATO are increasingly concerned about the influence wielded by Mr. Karzai’s chief of staff, Umar Daoudzai, who Mr. Crosbie characterized as a “corrupt, Iranian-backed eminence grise whose influence appears to increase daily.”

The WikiLeaks come at a particularly sensitive time in Kabul, where the results of the Afghan parliamentary election to elect members to the Wolesi Jirga have not yet been endorsed by the president. The West fears that a breakdown in relations with the Karzai administration might lead it to annul the election altogether and prevent the inauguration of the new Wolesi Jirga.

Afghanistan’s elections body declared the disputed results final Wednesday but the president has not commented on those findings.

In Mr. Crosbie’s diplomatic note he reveals he will be named by WikiLeaks in one report of a meeting from last February at the U.S. embassy. At the meeting, Mr. Crosbie said he spoke critically about the misuse of power by Mr. Karzai and his family and called on the international community to oppose the president’s attempts to take control of electoral law in the country. Last February, Mr. Karzai’s administration unilaterally rewrote Afghanistan’s election law and reformed the Electoral Complaints Commission to allow the president to choose its members. Particular mention was made of Ahmed Wali Karzai, the president’s half-brother, who has been described by U.S. diplomats as “widely understood to be corrupt and a narcotics trafficker.”

Mr. Crosbie said he recalled the meeting with Mr. Eikenberry because he was upset with what he thought was a “lame” U.S. response to the president’s electoral decree. “The report accurately notes that I was ‘emotional’ and quotes me as saying that Karzai’s actions ‘made my blood boil’. I heard some time later that Eikenberry was not happy with my approach at the meeting,” he wrote.

A spokeswoman for Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, said the government does not comment on leaked documents.

David Jacobson, U.S. ambassador to Canada, said he condemned in the harshest terms the release of information by WikiLeaks that was intended to be confidential. “It impacts on the foreign policy interests of the United States and our friends like Canada.” He refused to comment on specific cables.

