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The Washington Post

Leaders in Afghanistan, Pakistan speak out against WikiLeaks information

By Ernesto Londono

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The Afghan president and the Pakistani prime minister on Saturday disputed the accuracy of derogatory information contained in leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, calling some of the allegations in the dispatches absurd.

Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani said reports that the country's civilian leaders are subservient to military and intelligence chiefs are unfounded.

"I would request that you not trust Wikileaks," the prime minister said at a press conference in Kabul during his first official visit to the neighboring country.

"These are some of the views of junior [U.S.] officers. We should not even take them seriously."

The release on Sunday of the first batch of thousands of diplomatic cables obtained by Wikileaks, an online whistleblower group, has strained Washington's already tense relationships with leaders in Kabul and Islamabad.

The cables have added an irritant to bilateral relations with the two governments at a time when the Obama administration is trying to show that its Afghan war effort is on solid footing after nine years of missteps.

U.S. officials view Pakistani cooperation in Afghanistan as crucial because the leadership of the Taliban and other extremist groups operate in safe havens the Pakistani government has little control over.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai pushed back on the notion that some of his cabinet members have been working behind the scenes with U.S. officials to reel in the president's sometimes erratic behavior.

A cable sent to Washington last February quotes Afghan Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal telling U.S. officials that Karzai was "an extremely weak man."

The dispatch said the minister felt Karzai "did not listen to facts but was instead easily swayed by anyone who came to him to report even the most bizarre stories or plots against him. Whenever this happened, Karzai would immediately judge that person to be loyal and would reward him."

Karzai said the finance minister has assured him the information in the U.S. cable is inaccurate.

The cables have shed light on the extent to which the relationship between Karzai and Washington has deteriorated in recent years.

They also address Afghanistan's endemic corruption in excruciating detail.

Karzai mocked one of the most startling anecdotes in the cables: that authorities in the United Arab Emirates detected Afghan vice president Ahmad Zia Masood carrying \$52 in cash during a trip to Dubai - an allegation Masood has denied.

"If you put \$52 million in boxes, it will be at least 30 suitcases," Karzai said in a scornful tone. "Can someone carry 30 suitcases with him?"

The two leaders addressed each other warmly as they sought to portray the historically frayed relationship between the two nations as thawing.

"Whatever the intention was of Wikileaks, they helped the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan," Karzai said.

The official visit came a day after President Obama flew to Afghanistan for a three-hour trip. Obama and Karzai did not meet during the three-hour visit, which both leaders attributed to hazy weather that made it dangerous for Obama to fly from Bagram Airfield to the capital.