

U.S. tries to smooth relations with Afghanistan

Karzai has accused West of meddling with presidential elections

By DEB RIECHMANN
The Associated Press

KABUL — President Hamid Karzai got a VIP briefing at NATO headquarters Saturday and the top American diplomat in Kabul went out of his way to smooth U.S.-Afghan relations — signs that Washington is using a softer touch in dealing with the unpredictable Afghan leader.

The turnaround is a bid to ease the rancor of the past week that flared after Karzai, seeking to rally national support, accused the West of meddling in his nation. Karzai's strident comments, just days after President Barack Obama visited

Kabul, alleged the U.N. and the international community interfered in last year's fraud-tarnished presidential election in Afghanistan.

Karzai's backlash came at a time when 30,000 U.S. reinforcements are streaming into the country to ramp up the war against Taliban insurgents.

"We occasionally have disagreements between us — of course we have disagreements between us occasionally — how can it be otherwise?" the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry, said in a footnote to a news conference in the capital announcing \$20 million in U.S. assistance to bolster local governance.

Across town at NATO headquarters, Karzai joked with U.S. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, dur-

ing a security briefing with senior military officials and members of the Afghan Cabinet.

Tension between Karzai and the U.S. was running high even before Obama made his first presidential visit to Afghanistan.

En route to Kabul on March 28, Obama's national security adviser, Gen. Jim Jones, told reporters that the White House needed to make the Afghan president understand that there are certain things that have not been paid attention to "almost since Day 1." He cited Western pressure for Karzai to pick government officials based on credentials, not cronyism, battle corruption, and fight narco-trafficking.

In recent days, Jones changed his tone. He told reporters Friday that U.S.-Afghan relations were on an "encouraging glide path." He didn't elaborate.



The Associated Press

Afghan President Hamid Karzai (right) listens to U.S. and NATO commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal on Saturday at the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan. Tension has built between the U.S. and Afghanistan after Karzai accused Western nations of meddling in Afghanistan's elections. The U.S. is sending 30,000 reinforcements into the country to fight the Taliban.

Thai army retreats; 15 dead

Protesters call for new elections in monthlong standoff

By GRANT PECK
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — A crackdown on anti-government protesters in Thailand's capital Saturday left at least 15 people dead and more than 650 injured, with no progress toward ending a monthlong standoff with demonstrators demanding new elections.

It was the worst violence in Bangkok since more than four dozen people were killed in an antimilitary protest in 1992. Bullet casings, rocks and pools of blood littered the streets where pitched battles raged for hours.

Army troops later retreated and asked protesters to do the same, resulting in an unofficial truce.

Four soldiers and 11 civilians, including a



The Associated Press

An armed Thai soldier wears a gas mask as he monitors the anti-government demonstration Saturday in Bangkok, Thailand. The army pulled back as violence increased.

Japanese cameraman, were killed, according to the government's Erawan emergency center.

The savage fighting erupted after security forces tried to push out demonstrators who have been staging a month

of disruptive protests demanding that Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajva dissolve Parliament and call new elections.

The demonstrations are part of a long-running battle between the mostly poor and rural supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and the ruling elite they say orchestrated the 2006 military coup that removed him from power on corruption allegations.

The protesters, called "Red Shirts" for their garb, see the Oxford-educated Abhisit as a symbol of an elite impervious to the plight of Thailand's poor and claim he took office illegitimately in December 2008 after the military pressured Parliament to vote for him.

Saturday's violence and failure to dislodge the protesters are likely to make it harder to end the political deadlock. Previously, both sides had exercised considerable restraint.



US Army Corps of Engineers
Kansas City District

PUBLIC NOTICE

Request for information about the Former Schilling Air Force Base

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is seeking additional information about past operational activities related to the former Schilling Air Force Base (AFB). New and existing information will be used to support the Department of Defense's Munitions Response Site Prioritization Protocol (MRSPP). The site is one of the many former military installations throughout the United States that will be reviewed under the MRSPP. The upcoming phase of work at the former Schilling AFB will assess chemical warfare materiel and assign priorities for additional investigation or removal that may be required.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is conducting a chemical warfare materiel site inspection at the former Schilling AFB located in Salina, KS. The area included in the site inspection provided chemical warfare training (recognition of toxic gases and decontamination exercises) to crews stationed at the Smoky Hill Army Air Base. The base was later renamed Schilling AFB. Currently the land is owned by the Salina Airport Authority (Salina Municipal Airport) and is leased for farming.

For more information or if you have information about past activities related to chemical warfare training at the former Schilling Air Force Base, please contact:

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Briefly

Sudan elections face challenges

EL-FASHER, Sudan — President Omar al-Bashir is pushing hard for a win in war-torn Darfur in Sudan's key elections this weekend, hoping for a boost in his legitimacy in the face of international war crimes accusations. But he faces a hostile population in a vote observers say is deeply flawed.

Rebels in Darfur have urged a boycott of the three days of voting, which begins today, and many among the 2.5 million refugees driven from their homes by years of war in the western region have not registered to vote. Several parties have pulled out of the race, complaining that al-Bashir's government has skewed the contest.

Since 2003, this vast arid region has been the scene of a bloody conflict between the Arab-led government in Khartoum and ethnic African rebels.

Paraguay bans smoking in public

ASUNCION, Paraguay — Paraguayans can no longer legally light up in restaurants, bars and shopping malls.

The new measure bans smoking in all closed spaces where people gather, including private businesses. Establishments that don't comply can be fined by the Health Ministry.

The ministry's anti-smoking czar, Victor San Martin, says the decree from President Fernando Lugo took effect Saturday.

Yemen not going after radical cleric

SAN'A, Yemen — Yemeni forces are not going after a radical U.S.-born cleric who has reportedly been added to the CIA's list of targets to be killed or captured, the foreign minister said Saturday.

The United States has not handed over evidence to support allegations that Anwar al-Awlaki is recruiting for al-Qaida's offshoot in the impoverished country on the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, the minister said.

The Obama administration has authorized his killing because it believes he has shifted from encour-

aging attacks on the U.S. to participating in them, The New York Times reported earlier this week.

Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi said Saturday that al-Awlaki is not a terrorist and is not on Yemen's own wanted list.

Iran: Sunnis must be included in Iraq

BAGHDAD — The Iranian ambassador to Baghdad said Saturday that Iraq's new government should include all political blocs — including Sunnis — in a shift for a country that has long advocated an Iraqi government dominated by fellow Shiites.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi's comments were a sign that Iran, which has promoted Shiite power since the fall of Saddam Hussein, recognizes that the March 7 parliamentary vote was simply too close to completely sideline any one political bloc.

Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya bloc, which drew on heavy Sunni support, came out two seats ahead in the national vote. But neither Allawi's list nor the Shiite-led bloc of incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, which came in second, got enough support to govern alone.

Now the sides are scrambling to cobble together enough backing to form a government.

U.K. investigates donor list errors

LONDON — Britain's transplant authority says it is investigating several hundred thousand organ donor list errors stretching back to about 1999.

The National Health Service Blood and Transplant organization says a proportion of its 14 million organ donor list has been affected by technical errors, meaning some of the choices filled out by donors may have been transposed.

That means, for example, that people who wanted to donate organs such as their lungs or their skin were put down as people who wanted to donate their corneas or heart.

The service stresses that all those on the register were willing donors of one form or another and that no data was lost.

From Wire Service Reports

remember mom

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