

Turkmenistan President Called 'Dumb, Dishonest' in Cable

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Turkmenistan's leader is described as "not very bright" and "a practiced liar" in a cable from the U.S. Embassy in the gas-rich state that was published Thursday by the web site WikiLeaks.

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov does not like the United States, Iran or Turkey, but is fond of China, the cable said. Fastidiously neat, he also once insisted that all men who worked in his dental clinic had creases in their trousers.

The cable, sent Dec. 18, 2009, by then-charge d'affaires Sylvia Reed Curran, did not reveal the identity of the source who delivered the withering analysis of the Turkmen leader. Curran is now consul general in Vladivostok.

The classified message, part of the biggest-ever leak of U.S. diplomatic documents, is sure to embarrass Washington at a time when U.S. firms are seeking to strike deals to develop lucrative oil and gas deposits in Turkmenistan.

"Since he's not a very bright guy, our source offered, he is suspicious of a lot of people," the

U.S. diplomat was quoted as relaying in the cable published by Britain's Guardian newspaper.

It said he was "not fond of" Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Several calls to Turkmenistan's Foreign Ministry for comment on the contents of the cables went unanswered.

A separate cable dated in January describes two incidents involving the presidential motorcade that were perceived as possible assassination attempts, noting that there have been persistent rumors of a failed attempt to kill Berdymukhammedov in August 2009.

In one, a motorist reportedly cut off the president's motorcade. The hapless driver was "beaten black and blue," sentenced to 25 years in jail for attempted assassination, and the acting head of the capital's traffic police and two deputies were immediately fired, the memo said.

In the other, a cat darted out in front of the president's car near his home and the security officer responsible for monitoring that area was promptly fired, the cable said, citing military sources.

In another cable, sent by Curran on Oct. 23, 2008, unidentified expatriate sources were quoted as saying Berdymukhammedov had set sail on a 60 million euro (\$79 million) presidential yacht.

The president had wanted a yacht similar to that owned by billionaire Roman Abramovich, but had to settle for a smaller model that would be able to fit through canals leading to the Caspian Sea, the cable quoted a source as saying.

Turkmenistan, holder of the world's fourth-largest gas reserves, was largely isolated under the eccentric rule of Berdymukhammedov's predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov, who died four years ago after imposing a formidable personality cult.

Berdymukhammedov is now the "decider" in Turkmenistan, the 2009 cable read. "Since his word is often law, it is beneficial to understand what makes him tick."

The source said Berdymukhammedov "did not like America, Iran or Turkey, but likes China." Curran qualified this by saying he probably viewed countries in terms of what they could do for him and Turkmenistan, rather than "liking or disliking."

Turkmenistan fell out with Russia, its traditional gas market, after a pipeline rupture last year and is seeking to diversify its energy sales to China — which has supplied billions of dollars in loans — as well as Iran and Europe.

U.S. oil companies Chevron Corp, ConocoPhillips and TXOil, chaired by a younger brother of former U.S. President George W. Bush, were named by state media in August as preferred bidders for oil blocks in the Caspian Sea.

The cable also quoted the unidentified source as describing Berdymukhammedov as "vain, suspicious, guarded, strict, very conservative, a practiced liar, a good actor and vindictive."

He also, the cable said, never forgets.

(Reuters, AP)

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