

U.S. Cables Fret Over Tashkent Corruption

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WASHINGTON — Corruption is rampant in Uzbekistan, and the government is linked to organized crime, according to U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks.

The leaked cables reveal delicate relations between the United States and the government of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, which provides help for the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan is one link in what the United States calls its northern distribution network, which brings supplies to Afghanistan through countries including Azerbaijan, Russia, Latvia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

The dispatches released by WikiLeaks detail one occasion last year where Karimov threatened to cut off the supply link after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented an award to an Uzbek human rights advocate.

The embassy was alarmed by the "icy tones" of Karimov's displeasure over Clinton's gesture, the cables said. Diplomats wrote that there were "a number of important issues on the table

right now" including the supply line to Afghanistan.

In March 2009, an enraged Karimov personally scolded U.S. Ambassador Richard Norland with an "implicit threat to suspend transit of cargo for American forces in Afghanistan via the northern distribution network," according to the dispatches.

Norland calmed Karimov down, but warned in a cable to Washington: "Clearly, pressuring him (especially publicly) could cost us transit."

Karimov, who has been in power for two decades, has been criticized by human rights groups for a record which they say includes the use of torture in jail. He denies the accusations.

Clinton met with Karimov this month in the capital, Tashkent. She has defended her visit to Uzbekistan as an opportunity to push for human rights, while deepening security cooperation.

Other U.S. Embassy dispatches released by WikiLeaks report "close connections between organized crime and the government of Uzbekistan" and that both public and private-sector jobs are routinely "bought."

Many of the leaked documents focus on the Uzbek's president's daughter, Gulnara Karimova, who was described as "the single most hated person in the country."

Cables dating back to 2004 claim the "first daughter" has leaned on the most lucrative businesses operating in Uzbekistan to acquire a share of the companies.

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