

Karzai Sacks Aide Amid Plot Rumours

Daily Telegraph - 18 /01/2007

By Ahmed Rashid in Lahore

In a major shake up in the presidential palace in Kabul, President Hamid Karzai has removed Jawed Ludin, his British educated chief of staff, and replaced him with his predecessor in the job, the Daily Telegraph has learnt.

Mr Ludin was forced to resign this morning, senior officials in the Afghan cabinet said. The move has shaken Western diplomats in Kabul and is seen as a sign that Mr Karzai is struggling to control the loyalty of his government.

Mystery surrounds the sudden resignation of Mr Ludin who first served Mr Karzai as press spokesman and then as chief of staff after graduating from a British university.

However the officials said the cause of the shake up was due to political infighting within the president's staff.

It has triggered a flood of rumours amongst Afghan cabinet ministers about a possible conspiracy by some warlords against Mr Karzai just as Afghan and Nato forces brace themselves for a major Taliban offensive in the next few weeks.

In recent months Mr Karzai has faced harsh criticism from many Afghans including members of his staff, senior Western diplomats and Nato officials for not being more decisive in curbing corruption and drug trafficking, while Nato and Afghan forces battle the Taliban.

Much of the blame for the president's poor performance has been placed on his staff and cabinet ministers, and Mr Ludin appears to have become a victim of the blame game, according to palace sources.

Today Mr Ludin spent his last day in office and he will be replaced by Omar Daudzai, who served as chief of staff to Mr Karzai two years ago. Afghan officials said Mr Ludin will be offered an ambassadorship in Europe.

The crisis surrounding the chief of staff's resignation has been going on for several days, even as US secretary of defence Robert Gates was in Kabul, where he announced that additional US troops will be quickly sent to Afghanistan to face the Taliban offensive. Mr Gates has also asked for more troops from Nato countries including Britain.