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US envoy says Afghanistan 'more than Karzai'

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WASHINGTON (AFP) — The US pointman on Afghanistan on Friday played down tensions with President Hamid Karzai, saying that the problems in the war-torn nation involved more than one man.

Richard Holbrooke, the special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said he wanted to "get us away from the idea that there's this one-stop solution for an immensely complicated country."

"Let's not expect one man to solve the problems for the country. Historically Afghanistan, even in peacetime conditions, was not governed centrally," Holbrooke told a luncheon in Washington.

Holbrooke and other members of President Barack Obama's administration have had tense relations with Karzai and pressed him when he won a disputed election last year to crack down on what US officials saw as rampant corruption.

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AFP | AFP | US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke speaks during an address to the [Women's Foreign Policy Gr...](#)

Holbrooke said Karzai pledged to do better but added that the leader could not "personally end corruption" in Afghanistan.

"What other leader in the world is held to the standard, including our own, of eliminating corruption because you're the head of the government? Corruption is a huge problem in Afghanistan," Holbrooke said.

"I understand why all of us focus on Hamid Karzai -- he speaks excellent English, he's charismatic, he's been in full American view now for eight years," he said. "But the government is a lot more than Hamid Karzai."

Holbrooke insisted he had a solid working relationship with Karzai, saying he had "great respect" for him and believed he was the legitimately elected president of Afghanistan.

But Holbrooke acknowledged the relationship was soured by opinion articles the veteran US diplomat wrote before Obama's election criticizing Karzai's record.

Karzai and Holbrooke had a widely recounted altercation during last year's election over US concerns about ballot-stuffing.

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