

Tweeters peck at secrecy over Obama's Afghan trip

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US President Barack Obama (L) speaks before signing a strategic partnership agreement with Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the Presidential Palace in Kabul. The wall of secrecy around Obama's visit to Afghanistan Tuesday cracked slightly under continual chatter on Twitter in a country obsessed by the instant communication site.

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First to suggest that Obama had arrived in Kabul to meet Afghan President Hamid Karzai was a tweet by Afghanistan's TOLONews, the country's leading television news station -- several hours before he landed.

The world's major news groups, including AFP which had a photographer travelling with the president, kept their knowledge of the trip under tight wraps because of the normal security conditions imposed on such trips.

But after the first Tweet, the unfettered [Twitter](#) took wing, with wild surmise winning over any facts.

As the website ran hot with speculation in the early hours of the evening, Afghanistan time, the US embassy in Kabul Tweeted: "Reports that President Obama is in Kabul are false."

But that failed to quiet the chatter. Perhaps the embassy was just being sneaky with the reference to "Kabul" and the president was at Bagram airbase north of the capital?

It turns out that he would in fact be there, but not yet, while some Tweets suggested he had already been and gone.

US embassy spokesmen failed to answer their phones as they rang off the hook, as did most government officials -- although some Tweets quoted a palace source echoing the embassy and saying the reports of Obama's visit were "wrong".

The US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) joined the clamour, Tweeting that "contrary to some media rpts, ISAF has NOT confirmed Pres. Obama visit; we are not in position to do so".

Confusion on the website was compounded by reports that Karzai's spokesman had dismissed reports that Obama was in Kabul, suggesting that perhaps the fuss had been sparked by a visit of a group of US senators.

Slowly the [Tweets](#) died away as the night wore on, although some appeared to hear his plane arrive and others heard it depart -- long before it did.

Then the news wires finally broke the story: Obama was in Afghanistan to sign a strategic partnership deal with Karzai covering relations after the 130,000 US-led troops leave the country by the end of 2014.

The US embassy's final tweet had a touch of smugness about it: "Our previous tweet that Obama was not in Afghanistan was true; he has since arrived to sign the Strategic Partnership Agreement."

Obama was later due to address the US people from Bagram airbase at around 4:00 am local time -- causing Tweeters still awake to complain that most of Afghanistan would be fast asleep.

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