CIA DISRUPTS ONGOING US, PAKISTAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH DRONE STRIKE JUST AS BREAKTHROUGH NEARED

Despite no agreement being announced during Special Envoy Marc Grossman's visit to Pakistan last week, Pakistan Today reports that negotiations between Pakistan and the US had continued, and an agreement on transportation of NATO supplies through Pakistan, along with the resumption of the flow of support funding for Pakistan, was to be announced as early as today. Those plans, and the prospects for finalizing an agreement, were disrupted Sunday when the CIA unilaterally restarted drone attacks inside Pakistan, striking a former girls' school in which Uzbek and Tajik militants were said to be holed up.

Here is how Pakistan Today described the current situation:

> Intense negotiations between US Special Envoy Marc Grossman and Pakistan's civilian and military leadership have finally paved the way for the reopening of blocked NATO supplies and release of arrears under the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) by Washington, and a breakthrough in this regard is likely in a day or two, Pakistan Today learnt on Sunday.
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> This breakthrough is said to be planned for Monday (today) but Sunday's drone strike in North Waziristan by CIA despite a clear 'no' to such attacks by Pakistani parliament has not gone down well with Pakistani authorities and it could impact the process of reconciliation between Islamabad and

> Washington.
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> “Ambassador Grossman has left Islamabad but around 10 American officials are still here finalizing a deal on NATO reopening and CSF arrears’ release,” the diplomat said.
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> A member of the federal cabinet, Sheikh Waqas Akram disclosed that Islamabad and Washington were very close to reaching a deal on NATO supplies and CSF dues’ release.
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> “Yes that is true, this breakthrough is imminent and it was revealed by Ambassador Grossman himself when he met me and some other parliamentarians in his recent visit to Islamabad,” Akram, the Minister of State for Human Resource Development, said. He said that a breakthrough on NATO supplies and CSF arrears, according to his information was about to take place today (Monday) but the latest drone strike in North Waziristan could again sabotage the reconciliatory efforts.

Akram then placed blame for the drone strike on “hawkish elements” in the US and suggested it was intended to disrupt negotiations:

> “It seems that the hawkish elements in US establishment and among the political circles there do not want the improvement of ties between Pakistan and the US,” Akram said.

Leading these “hawkish elements”, of course, is the CIA, which both the Washington Post and New York Times identify as behind the drone strike Sunday. Both papers noted how Sunday’s strike undermines the ongoing negotiations. From the Times:

> The C.I.A. strike underlined the tensions between American diplomatic and security priorities in Pakistan. Officials from the two countries are trying to reset relations that stalled badly after American warplanes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers along the Afghanistan border in November.
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> Last week, President Obama sent his regional representative, Marc Grossman, to Islamabad for two days of high-level talks that aimed to reach agreement on a variety of contentious issues, including drone strikes, the reopening of NATO supply lines and the clearing of at least $1 billion in American military aid that is overdue.
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> Diplomats from both countries insist that their talks are starting to make progress in some areas, like the reopening of NATO supply lines, the dispute about overdue military aid — variously estimated between $1.18 billion and $3 billion — and the nudging of the Afghan Taliban toward peace talks.
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> Yet the drone strike on Sunday in Miram Shah indicated that the C.I.A. would press ahead with its operations.

And from the Post:

> CIA drone missiles hit militant targets in Pakistan on Sunday for the first time in a month, as the United States ignored the Pakistani government’s insistence that such attacks end as a condition for normalized relations between the two perpetually uneasy allies.
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> The drone strikes, which have long infuriated the Pakistani public, killed four al-Qaeda-linked fighters in a

> girls' school they had taken over in the North Waziristan tribal area, security officials there said.
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> Warning of diplomatic consequences, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the attacks, the first since Parliament's unanimous vote this month approving new guidelines for the country's relationship with the United States. Some politicians said the drone strikes might set back already difficult negotiations over the reopening of vital NATO supply routes to Afghanistan that Pakistan blocked five months ago.

Although the Times and Post note that Pakistani diplomats are not pleased by the attacks, they did not carry the strongest reactions from Pakistan. The Express Tribune quotes a statement from Pakistan's Foreign Office pointing out that drone attacks inside Pakistan are a violation of international law:

> A statement issued by the Foreign Office denounced the latest strike as "a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty".
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> "Such attacks are in total contravention of international law and established norms of interstate relations," it added. The matter would be taken up through diplomatic channels both in Islamabad and Washington.

As I noted a couple of weeks ago, an apology from the US for November's border post attack that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers is seen as one of the remaining actions needed to reach a final agreement on reopening the supply routes. Pakistan believed then that John Kerry would travel to Pakistan on April 29 to deliver the apology. The Pakistan Today article cited above repeats the expectation that an apology is still expected, but the Washington Post article states flatly that "Washington has made it clear that

an apology will not be forthcoming”, echoing the report in the New York Times on Friday that no apology was forthcoming.

The CIA on Sunday added an exclamation point to that flat statement.