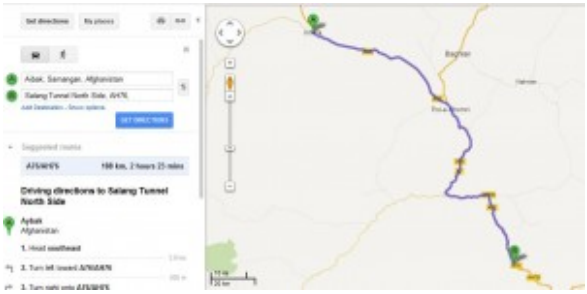
TALIBAN DESTROY 22 SUPPLY TRUCKS IN AFGHANISTAN: NO “PROTECTION” MONEY ON NORTHERN ROUTE?



Google Map showing relative locations of Aibak and the Salang tunnel in Afghanistan. (Click on map for a larger view.)

When the flow of supply trucks through Pakistan into Afghanistan restarted earlier this month, I pointed out a report from the Express Tribune on the large amounts of cash paid to the Taliban as “protection” money. A detail in that report is that the protection money paid is to “Afghan Taliban and local militants who are active on the Pak-Afghan borders”.

Today, the Taliban have claimed responsibility for an attack that destroyed 22 NATO supply trucks, most of which were fuel tankers. The attack was in Aibak, in Samangan province. The screen capture of a Google map of the area shown here indicates that Aibak is only 117 miles from the northern opening of the Salang tunnel that is the key choke point on the “northern route” that NATO used for supplies while the Pakistan crossings were closed. Does today’s attack mean that the Taliban in the north of Afghanistan have now placed a marker indicating that protection money will have to paid to them as well? It is not clear whether they were paid protection money while the Pakistan route was

closed and it has now stopped or if they are angling for a hefty protection fee when this route is used for evacuation of NATO equipment as the drawdown moves into its active phase soon.

Here is Reuters' description of the attack:

> A bomb planted by the Taliban destroyed 22 NATO trucks carrying supplies to their forces in northern Afghanistan, the Taliban and police said on Wednesday.
>
> Eighteen fuel trucks and four supply vehicles were parked in Aibak, the capital of Samangan province, when a bomb ripped through them, wounding one person, local police said.
>
> "At 2 a.m. the mujahideen attacked the invader NATO trucks," the Taliban said in a statement, referring to the wagons which had been driven from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan's north.

The Taliban in this region have been flexing their muscle lately:

> The trucks were attacked in the same province where prominent anti-Taliban lawmaker Ahmad Khan Samangani was killed on Saturday at his daughter's wedding, in a suicide bomb attack that killed 22 other guests.

It will be very interesting to see if reports of protection money along the norther route begin to surface.

One more aspect of this attack bears watching. From the AP story on the attack as carried by Dawn:

> "We put explosives on a fuel tanker. When it exploded, we fired on the trucks," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told The Associated Press in a

> telephone call.
>
> Sidiq Azizi, a spokesman for the province, said many tankers and semi-trailers caught fire after the bomb went off around 2 a.m.
>
> By mid-day, heavy black smoke still poured from the Rabatak area of the province where the truckers had stopped to rest. Firefighters were spraying water on the burning vehicles.
>
> ”There was a big boom,” Azizi said.
>
> ”It’s possible that is was a magnetic bomb from insurgents. We are investigating.”

The referral to a magnetic bomb is interesting. Going back to the Reuters report:

> Separately, police in neighboring Baghlan province said they had detained 10 suspected Taliban members with so-called magnetic bombs, which they were trying to attach to supply trucks.

Will NATO try to assert that the magnetic bombs are supplied by Iran? Recall that Iran was accused of using a magnetic bomb in India to attack an Israeli diplomat in reprisal for the presumed Israeli magnetic bombs that have been used to kill Iranian nuclear scientists. The US made accusations of Iran helping the Taliban back in 2010 but never provided conclusive evidence for the Sunni Taliban and Shia Iranian regime working together. Will the accusations resurface based on the magnets?