

NATO SUPPLY SHIPMENTS THROUGH PAKISTAN RESUME WITH PAYMENTS TO AFGHAN TALIBAN INSTEAD OF PAKISTAN

After US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued an apology to Pakistan on Tuesday, the first supply trucks entered Afghanistan from Pakistan this morning. Although there had been suggestions during the negotiations to re-open the supply lines that were closed last November after the US killed over 20 Pakistani troops at a border post that Pakistan would charge a "toll" of up to \$5000 per container shipped through the country, no fees to Pakistan are being paid. There does, however, appear to be an agreement in the works under which the US will re-pave the highway destroyed by the supply convoys. The Express Tribune is reporting this morning that extortion payments from the US to the Afghan Taliban for "protection" of the convoys, a practice that was in place prior to closure of the supply routes, will resume.

Here is the apology Clinton delivered to her counterpart in Pakistan:

This morning, I spoke by telephone with Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar.

I once again reiterated our deepest regrets for the tragic incident in Salala last November. I offered our sincere condolences to the families of the Pakistani soldiers who lost their lives. Foreign Minister Khar and I acknowledged the mistakes that resulted in the loss of Pakistani military lives. We are sorry for the losses suffered by the Pakistani military. We are committed

to working closely with Pakistan and Afghanistan to prevent this from ever happening again.

As I told the former Prime Minister of Pakistan days after the Salala incident, America respects Pakistan's sovereignty and is committed to working together in pursuit of shared objectives on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect.

Reuters brings us the news of the first trucks passing from Pakistan into Afghanistan:

A pair of trucks carrying NATO supplies crossed into Afghanistan on Thursday, Pakistani customs officials said, the first time in more than seven months that Pakistan has allowed Western nations to use its roads to supply troops in Afghanistan.

Customs officials said the container trucks had passed through the Chaman border crossing into southern Afghanistan, a milestone following a deal this week with the United States ending the impasse triggered by the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers by U.S. aircraft last November.

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While Pakistan got the apology it wanted for the November border killings, the government agreed to drop demands to raise fees on supply trucks going into Afghanistan.

Instead of getting direct fees for the trucks passing through Pakistan, it appears that the US will rebuild highways destroyed by them:

The United States and Pakistan are trying to work out a separate arrangement for rebuilding the highway used for carrying supplies to

Afghanistan, diplomatic sources told Dawn.

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While announcing the agreement, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: "Pakistan will continue not to charge any transit fee in the larger interest of peace and security in Afghanistan and the region."

The announcement angered many in Pakistan and political commentators demanded that Islamabad should urge the Americans to at least rebuild the highway unpaved by Nato supply vehicles.

When Dawn checked with sources in Washington, it learned that the United States and Pakistan were already working on such an arrangement. The sources said the arrangement was not announced with the agreement to reopen supply routes because it was not finalised yet.

While Pakistan will not receive direct payments for the shipments, that is not the case for the Afghan Taliban. They appear quite happy that the routes have re-opened, because their supply of cash will now also re-open:

The resumption of supply lines in Pakistan appears to be good news for the Afghan Taliban, as well as local militants, as the closure had deprived them of millions of dollars they used to receive as 'protection charges' from Isaf and Nato.

A prominent militant leader, known for his close ties with Mullah Omar, told *The Express Tribune* on the condition of anonymity, that the Afghan Taliban and local militants who are active on the Pak-Afghan borders were "seriously annoyed" over the ban.

The leader, who is also one of the key

leaders of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council, said that the Afghan Taliban had even protested when his council was holding nationwide demonstrations pressing Pakistan against the lifting of the ban.

“The Taliban had frankly told me that the ban had caused them huge financial losses during the last eight months,” the militant leader said.

“We are offended over the resumption of the Isaf/Nato supply lines from Pakistan to Afghanistan but at the same time we are glad that at least our Taliban brothers in Afghanistan would be happy over this decision,” he said, adding: “Believe me it is good news for Taliban and militants.”

The Express Tribune is quite adamant about the existence of the protection money paid to the Taliban by the US, as elsewhere in the article they say:

According to international media reports, it is an admitted fact that US and Nato pay a handsome amount of money to the militants in return for safety and security of their supplies to Afghanistan via two land routes in Pakistan.

So let's see. The US pays “a handsome amount of money” to militants in Afghanistan to prevent them attacking convoys of supplies meant to be used in putting down the activities of militants in Afghanistan. Did it ever occur to the US that perhaps those funds they pay to the Afghan Taliban are used to fund attacks on NATO personnel by the Afghan Taliban? It will be very interesting to see whether the Afghan Taliban is suddenly able to bring more weapons and IED's into their attacks on NATO now that they have a renewed source of funding. If so, we will know how the Taliban came into the funding needed to

procure those supplies. Of course, then NATO will need more supplies to put down the Afghan Taliban attacks, which will mean the Afghan Taliban will get more "protection" money, which means they can fund even more attacks...