



Clinton's 'sorry' is unlikely to stop Pakistan's support of insurgents

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WASHINGTON — The American “sorry” to Pakistan that eased the logistical challenge of the Afghanistan war does little to solve tougher issues that divide the two countries, including Pakistan’s support of insurgents who attack American troops, scholars who study the region said.

The flow of food, fuel and other goods for the war effort resumed along supply routes through Pakistan last week in the wake of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s carefully worded expression of regret for the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers in a botched border confrontation in November. U.S. administration officials have since voiced hope that a new chapter would be opened on U.S.-Pakistani relations.

“Foreign minister [Hina Rabbani] Khar and I acknowledged the mistakes that resulted in the loss of Pakistani military lives,” Clinton said in a statement. “We are sorry for the losses by the Pakistani military.”

But the two countries’ aims in the region are so divergent that there’s unlikely to be a broader payoff for the U.S. reversal after seven months of refusal to issue an apology, experts said.

Powerful elements in Pakistan’s government will continue to support groups that attack U.S. targets in Afghanistan, such as the Haqqani network, as policy instruments, said Malou Innocent, foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian Washington think tank.

“This is very unlikely to trigger a shift in the current calculus of the Pakistani security establishment vis-a-vis support for certain militant groups,” she said.

The Haqqanis and another group, Lashkar-e-Taiba, are viewed as part of a struggle steeped in “paranoia” aimed at limiting the power of India as well as the United States in the region, Innocent said.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials have lashed out at Pakistan for that posture, with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta declaring last month that American patience with Pakistan was running out.

The new agreement on the supply routes, including a plan to release more than \$1 billion in funds for Pakistan's military, sidestepped the issue, said Ashley Tellis, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who specializes in Asian security issues.

"The administration hopes that resolving the [supply route] issues will have a positive, moderating impact on Pakistan's behavior regarding support for the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network, but that is excessively optimistic in my view," Tellis wrote in an email. "Pakistan has ambitions in Afghanistan which unfortunately run counter to the aims of [the Afghan government] and the international coalition. That brute fact has not been transformed by reopening the [supply lines], important though that is for all sides."

The primary benefit of Clinton's statement was simply getting the supply routes open, agreed Stephen Tankel, an expert in terrorism and insurgency and an assistant professor at American University in Washington.

But the willingness to give Pakistan an apology — even one with finely tuned wording that the head of Pakistan's military described as "insufficient" — keeps the two countries working together in at least one arena, helps prevent a total breakdown that could be disastrous for the future of Afghanistan.

"This was related more to opening the [supply lines] than changing Pakistan's behavior," he said. "But it also signals that the U.S. is prepared to continue engaging Pakistan, at least transactionally, on these issues rather than going out of its way to be as punitive as possible."

The administration faced no perfect choice when it decided how to deal with the supply route issue, said James Carafano, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think tank.

"Walking away is not a good answer and buying Pakistan off is not a good answer," he said. "It's going to be this kind of tough back and forth. As long as the Pakistan continues with a policy that allows groups like the Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba to function while the government tries to use them as foreign policy instruments, it's going to be a rocky relationship."