

Pakistan: US spy Raymond Davis allegedly tied to Islamicist groups

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A local court in Lahore, Pakistan ruled Thursday that the murder trial of US spy Raymond Davis should go ahead, despite the US's insistence that he is entitled to diplomatic immunity and repeated threats and relentless bullying from Washington. Meanwhile, potentially explosive allegations concerning Davis's covert activities in Pakistan continue to emerge.

Raymond Davis was arrested on January 28 for shooting dead two young men, Mohammad Faheem and Faizan Haider, in a crowded market in Lahore the previous day. A third man, Ibadur Rehman, was killed when he was run over by a US consulate vehicle that was rushing to the scene of the shooting to prevent Davis's arrest. A murder case was registered against Davis and he has also been charged with illegal possession of a firearm.

The Davis affair has infuriated ordinary Pakistanis—for whom the case typifies the neo-colonial relationship that exists between the US and their country—and has created yet another crisis for the highly unpopular PPP (Pakistan People's Party)-led national coalition government.

On February 20, the *Guardian* confirmed that Davis was an operative for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), contradicting US claims that he was a "technical advisor" to the US diplomatic mission in Pakistan. While the revelation came as no surprise considering his background as a Special Forces officer and his murderous actions, the confirmation of Davis's CIA ties has further complicated the efforts of the US and Islamabad to secure his release on the pretext of diplomatic immunity.

A subsequent report in the *New York Times* said that Davis was involved in surveillance and tasked with gathering intelligence on people not only in Lahore, but also in Pakistan's Afghan border regions.

A leader of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, an Islamicist militia that long enjoyed close ties to Pakistan's security establishment, has charged Davis with "helping in drone attacks."

But in recent days, several Pakistani and international news organizations, citing sources in Pakistan's police and security forces, have suggested that Davis was in fact involved in assisting Taliban-aligned militia in carrying out terrorist acts.

These reports note that at the time of his arrest Davis was found to be carrying multiple cell phones with call records showing exchanges with 27 militants from Tehreek-e-Taliban, a Pakistan-based group that has cooperated with the Taliban in opposing the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan, and Lashkar-e-Taiba, a sectarian anti-Shia militia.

Thursday's court hearing took place amid tight security at Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail where Davis is being held. It is set to resume next Tuesday, March 8. As for Davis's claim to diplomatic immunity, Pakistan's government has said that it will present evidence showing that Davis has legitimate, Islamabad-issued diplomatic credentials when the Lahore High Court charged with ruling on the issue convenes March 14.

The attorney representing Davis in the murder case argued Thursday that his client could not be prosecuted because the issue of his claim to diplomatic immunity has yet to be resolved by the courts. But the

presiding judge ruled the case against Davis should proceed for two reasons: the Lahore High Court has not said the prosecution of Davis should be suspended pending its ruling on immunity and in the past five weeks Davis and his legal counsel have not presented any evidence establishing Davis' immunity.

Long before the *Guardian* confirmed Davis's CIA ties, it was clear that he was anything but a "diplomat."

Davis's claim that he opened fire on the two men in self-defense has been greatly undermined by the evidence gathered by Pakistani authorities. Davis insists that his two victims had pulled up beside him on a motorbike and that at least one of them waved a gun at him, prompting him to fire his weapon out of fear that he was about to get robbed. However, police and forensics reports have established that both men were shot in the back.

According to Pakistani prosecutors, Davis stepped out of his car and shot one of the men execution-style twice in the back after shooting at both men through his windshield. One of the victim's bodies was found 30 feet away from his motorbike and Davis allegedly took photographs of the slain youths before calling the US consulate in Lahore for assistance.

While the US and some Pakistani officials attempted to paint Davis's victims as thieves, neither of the men he shot had a criminal record and the victims' families have rejected the allegations as baseless. Moreover, the guns allegedly found on the men were licensed and the bullets were in the guns' magazines, not the chambers. No fingerprints were found on the guns, contradicting Davis's claim that at least one of the men had brandished a weapon at him.

Materials found in Davis's possession increased the suspicion of Pakistani authorities and media outlets that he was some type of covert intelligence operative. According to the *Guardian*, "Pakistani suspicions about Davis's role were stoked by the equipment police confiscated from his car: an unlicensed pistol, a long-range radio, a GPS device, an infrared torch and a camera with pictures of buildings around Lahore." According to some reports, the camera found in Davis's possession had photographs of Pakistani military installations, as well as mosques and Islamic schools.

The *New York Times*, which admits to having colluded with the US government to suppress knowledge of Davis' role as a CIA operative, now reports that Davis operated out of CIA safe houses, first in Peshawar, then Lahore, and was responsible for carrying out scouting and reconnaissance missions for CIA case officers.

However, several Pakistani and Indian news outlets have claimed Davis' role was even more sinister. A Feb. 22 report in the Karachi-based *Express Tribune*, an affiliate of the *International Herald Tribune*, claimed that Davis has "close links" with the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP). The newspaper quoted a senior official in the Punjab police who said, "The Lahore killings are a blessing in disguise for our security agencies who suspected that Davis was masterminding terrorist activities in Lahore and other parts of Punjab.

"His close ties with the TTP were revealed during the investigations,"

added the official. “Davis was instrumental in recruiting young people from Punjab for the Taliban to fuel the bloody insurgency.”

The *Express Tribune* article said its sources contend that Davis was part of a US plan to create mayhem in Pakistan so “as to give credence to the American notion that Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are not safe.”

Pakistan’s military-security establishment and elite have been spooked by credible reports in the US media that the CIA and Pentagon have plans to seize Pakistan’s nuclear weapons should Islamicists ever threaten to take power in Islamabad or should the country, which is beset by national-ethnic and sectarian conflicts, begin to unravel.

The *Express Tribune* article also reported that in 2006, Pakistan’s then US-backed military strongman, General Prevez Musharraf, had “cut a secret deal with the US... allowing clandestine CIA operations in the country.” This included allowing the CIA to contract out functions to US-based security firms such as Blackwater (now known as Xe Worldwide).

Only recently Pakistani authorities have come to learn that the CIA has violated the terms of the 2006 agreement, crossing various “red lines,” while flooding the country with agents and contract employees.

It has been widely reported by both US and Pakistani media that the CIA dramatically increased its presence in Pakistan over the past two years—especially after the PPP-led government ordered its Washington embassy to speed up the issuing of visas and relax supervision by the Interior Ministry and Pakistan’s principal intelligence agency, the ISI.

In the wake of the Lahore shootings, Pakistan authorities have begun more aggressively scrutinizing persons working for, or in association, with the US government in Pakistan.

The Pakistani Foreign Office recently reported that there are 851 Americans claiming diplomatic immunity in Pakistan, out of which 297 are “not working in any diplomatic capacity.”

Recently, the Pakistani Interior Department arrested an American security contractor named Aaron DeHaven, who claimed to work for a company called Catalyst Services LLC. The company’s website boasts that it has offices in the US, Pakistan, and Dubai, specializes in “logistics, operations, security and finance,” and is led by “individuals who have been involved in some of the most significant events of the last 20 years,” including, “the break-up of the Soviet Union, the US effort in Somalia and the Global War on Terror.” DeHaven is being held on a 14-day remand and has been charged with overstaying his visa.

All claims concerning the Davis affair and the activities of the CIA in Pakistan made by the US or Pakistani governments and their respective security agencies should be scrutinized and treated with the utmost suspicion.

Neither side will tell the truth about the reactionary, decades-long conspiracy against the basic democratic rights of the Pakistani people that they have jointly conducted.

It has been widely reported, and there is much reason to believe, that the two youth Davis killed were in fact low-level ISI operatives who had been charged with tailing him. But Pakistan’s spy agency vehemently denies this and claims it had no foreknowledge that Davis was a CIA operative.

That said, it is not impossible nor implausible that Davis or other CIA operatives could be party to a US effort to destabilize Pakistan, so as to press its government and military to step up the counter-insurgency war against Taliban-aligned militia in the country’s northwest or to create a pretext for greater US intervention in the country.

It must be remembered that the CIA has a long involvement with Pakistan and Afghan Islamicist groups, having helped finance and arm them for over a decade, beginning in the late 1970s, as part of the US effort to make “Afghanistan the Soviet Union’s Vietnam.”

The Davis imbroglio brings to mind another murky affair, that of the Pakistani-American David Headley who played a major role in planning the terrorist attack in Mumbai, India in November 2008 in which 166 people were killed by gunfire and grenades. A member of Lashkar-e-

Taiba, Headley made frequent trips to Mumbai in order to scout locations for the impending attack, as well as purchasing equipment to carry it out.

In the two years since the terrorist attack, evidence has surfaced indicating that US intelligence agencies had advance-warnings about the Mumbai attack and that Headley was a longtime US government operative.

Last October, The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published reports revealing a decades-long relationship between Headley and the US intelligence apparatus. The report in the *Times* described Headley’s “overlapping, even baffling contacts among seemingly disparate groups—Pakistani intelligence, terrorists, and American drug investigators.”

Headley’s relationship with US officials began in 1988 after he was arrested for his involvement in a heroin trafficking ring in Germany. He served four years in prison while cooperating with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). When he was arrested again in 1997, agents quickly arranged his release and he became a “prized informant,” according to the *Post*. Claims made by unnamed US officials that the DEA stopped using Headley as an informant in 2001, just before he got involved in Pakistani terrorist activities have been challenged by the evidence.

In August of 2005, Headley’s American wife went to New York City to inform the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force of her husband’s involvement with Lashkar-e-Taiba, claiming that he boasted about being a paid informant for the US while attending terrorist training camps in Pakistan. Headley’s wife was interviewed by the FBI on three different occasions, but no action was taken.

In late 2007, Headley’s third wife visited the US Embassy in Islamabad where she warned officials about her husband’s involvement in terrorist activities and even showed them a photo of her and Headley at the Taj Mahal Hotel, one of the main targets of the Mumbai attacks. “I told them, he’s either a terrorist, or he’s working for you,” she told the *Times*. “Indirectly, they told me to get lost.”

The Indian government is still seeking access to Headley to gain more information about his role in the attacks.

Both the Davis affair and the controversy surrounding Headley are examples of how US intelligence agencies often intersect in strange and unexplained way with terrorist groups, including groups presented as a mortal threat to the US and its citizens.

The PPP-led government is committed to securing Davis’s release on the pretext of diplomatic immunity so as to placate the Obama administration. According to several Pakistani sources, President Asif Ali Zardari pressured the Foreign Office in early February to backdate a letter identifying Davis as being a staff member at the US Embassy in Islamabad. The country’s foreign minister at the time, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, refused to do so, leading to his removal as part of a larger cabinet shuffle.

On February 28, the Obama administration torpedoed a proposal it “trade” Raymond Davis for Affia Siddiqui, the Pakistani neuroscientist serving an 86-year sentence in the US on trumped-up attempted murder charges. The US flatly refused the proposal, claiming that “these are two different cases” and insisting that the return of the CIA murderer Davis is non-negotiable.

This author also recommends:

The New York Times and CIA killer Raymond Davis
[1 March 2011]

US frame-up victim Affia Siddiqui sentenced to 86 years
[4 October 2010]



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