

CIA killer Raymond Davis released by Pakistani authorities

New US drone attack kills dozens

Ali Ismail
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US spy Raymond Davis was released Wednesday from a Lahore jail where he was being held on murder charges for gunning down two Pakistani youths in a crowded market. The release followed weeks of secretive negotiations between the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pakistani military's spy agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI.

Even before Davis's release, it had become clear that he was likely to be freed as part of a recalibration of the sordid alliance between Washington and the Pakistani bourgeoisie and military establishment.

The CIA murderer Davis was flown out of the country within hours of relatives of the victims' acceptance—under heavy government pressure—of “blood money,” a cash payment in return for telling a court that they “pardoned” Davis.

The entirely predictable outcome of this affair has infuriated ordinary Pakistanis, for whom the Davis controversy only confirms the Pakistani elite's subordination to imperialism and callous disregard for their basic democratic rights. Protests have already been held around the country in response to Davis's release.

Raymond Davis was arrested on January 28 for the shooting deaths of two Pakistani youths, Mohammad Faheem and Faizan Haider, in a crowded market area of Lahore the previous day. Another man was killed when a vehicle belonging to the US consulate in Lahore ran him over as it raced to the scene of the shooting to prevent Davis's arrest.

The Pakistani government and the US Embassy both claimed that Davis's victims were thieves and that he shot them in “self-defense.” However, these claims were contradicted by police and forensics reports that revealed both victims had been shot in the back, and that one of the victims' bodies was discovered 30 feet away from his motorbike.

From the outset, the US insisted that Davis be immediately released under the diplomatic immunity provisions of international law, as he was a “technical adviser” to the US diplomatic mission in Pakistan.

Weeks later, the *Guardian* published corroboration of what was obvious from Davis's conduct and his previous service in the US Special Forces: he was a covert intelligence operative. The *New York Times* in a subsequent report admitted that, at the US government's request, it had kept Davis's CIA ties secret for weeks.

According to the *Times*, Davis was involved in surveillance and tasked with gathering intelligence on militant groups in Lahore as well as in Pakistan's Afghan border regions. But Pakistani and international media outlets uncovered strange and unexplained links between Davis and Islamicist militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba. (See “Pakistan: US spy Raymond Davis allegedly tied to Islamicist

groups”)

From the outset, the Pakistan People's Party-led national coalition government was anxious to comply with the US demands for Davis's release—demands that were backed by threats to curtail aid and downgrade relations. Pakistan's foreign minister was apparently not reappointed as part of a cabinet shuffle because he balked at backdating papers providing Davis with a diplomatic cover. Pakistan's prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani, had to publicly deny that he was pressuring the judiciary to release Davis.

The decision to release Davis was formally made during a hearing of the local court trying him for murder. According to Pakistani officials, his release was finalized when the families of his victims, as well as the family of the man run down by the US consular vehicle, accepted over \$1 million each in “compensation,” based on an Islamic ritual that allows Muslim relatives of a murder victim to pardon the killer in exchange for financial compensation.

Many critics of the deal have pointed out that only days ago the victims' relatives had asked for justice rather than compensation and have charged that the families were coerced into accepting the money. A lawyer representing the families of one of the victims has said that the “blood money” deal was done without his knowledge and that he had been held in detention while the agreement was reached.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has denied claims that the US paid compensation to secure Davis's release. Apparently this is literally true, as the payment was made by the Pakistan government, which is to forward the bill to Washington.

A senior official told BBC that the deal was brokered by Saudi Arabia, which, as it has done in the Middle East, has long played a supporting role in advancing US interests in Pakistan and the region to the detriment of ordinary workers and toilers.

According to Siddiqui Farooq, Punjab spokesperson of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), members of the family of the two men gunned down by Davis went on a pilgrimage to Mecca earlier this month where they collected the money before returning to Pakistan. The PML-N is the main party in Punjab's coalition government and has close ties to the Saudi royal family. While the party had initially associated itself with the call to subject Davis to Pakistani law, it is now being accused of aiding in the effort to get Davis released. From its birth, the PML-N has enjoyed close ties to the military and would have no qualms about coordinating its stand on the Davis case with the military-security establishment. It recently called for the military to be included in an all-party conference to discuss the myriad crises besetting the country.

While Davis's release was facilitated by the pressure put on the victims' families by the Pakistani ruling elite and the Saudi royal family, it was ultimately secured as part of a recalibration of the relationship between Washington and the Pakistani bourgeoisie. On March 15, the English-language daily *Dawn* reported that a "breakthrough" was imminent in negotiations between the CIA and the ISI on improving their relationship.

"The immunity dispute quite expectedly remained unresolved in the LHC (Lahore High Court) because Davis is no more central to this controversy, which has been overtaken by other matters pertaining to the problematic Pakistan-US security cooperation whose bedrock is the collaboration between ISI and CIA," the report noted.

Pakistan's military-intelligence apparatus has long resented the endless US violations of the country's sovereignty, above all out of fear that they may lead to a popular uprising against the Pakistani ruling class and its reactionary alliance with imperialism. Elements of the Pakistani elite have repeatedly charged the US with developing its own network of spies and refusing to share intelligence and collaborate more closely with the ISI.

In the weeks immediately following the Lahore shooting and apparently in part because it learned Davis was one of hundreds of CIA operatives recently sent to the country without its knowledge, the ISI considered issuing a public denunciation of the CIA. But, as an unnamed official told *Dawn*, the ISI drew back and a deal was "made possible because of cool heads on both sides, who realized that keeping the ISI-CIA relationship intact was in the interest of both the agencies."

The rearrangement of the relationship between the US and Pakistan will apparently involve the CIA collaborating more closely with its Pakistani counterpart. In return Pakistan will escalate its bloody counterinsurgency campaign in the northwest tribal areas near the Afghan border, probably beginning with an army invasion of the North Waziristan agency in the Federally-Administered Tribal Agency (FATA).

On March 13, *Dawn* reported that the federal government has directed the FATA Disaster Management Agency (FDMA) to prepare a contingency plan for about 500,000 people likely to be displaced in the event of a military operation in North Waziristan. The Pakistani army has already deployed 20,000 soldiers to the agency. "The FDMA has received directives from the federal authorities to chalk out a plan in consultation with the United Nations' agencies and other humanitarian bodies to cope with the displacement," said an unnamed official.

While no timeframe has been given, Pakistani sources have also said that they have been asked to complete the task as soon as possible, signaling that an operation may be initiated in the coming weeks. The Pakistani military has already uprooted millions of Pashtuns in the northwest tribal areas as a result of its participation in the US "war on terror." The FDMA is already looking after over a million people displaced by Islamabad's brutal measures, which have involved the use of torture and collective punishment. According to official estimates, should an operation be launched the agency would only be able to provide shelter for half the refugees, while the rest would have to seek refuge at the home of a friend or relative.

There also appears to be a shift in the military establishment's stance on the illegal US drone attacks that have killed scores of innocent civilians. Ever since the Bush administration began using Predator drones in Pakistan to minimize US casualties, the Pakistani army and government have publicly criticized the drone attacks while

tacitly supporting them and even allowing Pakistani bases to be used to launch the attacks. However, the military in a recent statement contradicted numerous on-the-spot press reports, declaring that most of those killed in drone strikes have been "terrorists."

Speaking to journalists, Major General Mehmood Ghayur cynically declared that "myths and rumors about US Predator strikes and the casualty figures are many, but it's a reality that many of those being killed in these strikes are hardcore elements, a sizable number of them foreigners." In fact, several investigations have demonstrated that the vast majority of those killed in the drone attacks are civilians. This includes a report by the Brookings Institution that found that for every reputed militant killed by a drone strike, 10 civilians had been killed.

Just yesterday, a drone attack in North Waziristan killed at least 38 people attending a meeting of tribal elders, forcing Pakistan's army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, to condemn the strike as "unjustified" and "intolerable."

The recalibration of the reactionary alliance between Washington and the Pakistani elite, resulting in Davis's release, is a conspiracy against the Pakistani people. The governments of both countries are desperate to cover up US crimes in Pakistan. Throughout the history of Pakistan, the US has used the country as a pillar of its interests in the region and has done so by supporting a succession of dictatorships in Islamabad.

Most recently the US propped up the rule of military dictator Pervez Musharraf, who was finally forced from power in 2008. Under Musharraf, the Pakistani state played a critical role in the US-NATO invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and provided the US with offshore torture sites. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Pakistanis were kidnapped and handed over to US authorities, never to be seen again.

The Davis affair has once again demonstrated that no section of the Pakistani elite can be relied upon to defend the basic democratic rights of Pakistanis or to forge a path independent from imperialism.



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