

Criminal Drone attacks on Pakistan Cease as

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U.S. seeks to secure release of CIA operative, Raymond Davis

WASHINGTON: A mysterious halt to U.S Predator strikes on Pakistan after the Raymond Davis incident in Lahore has led to intense speculation the American 'diplomat' was connected to the CIA Drone program even as Washington and Islamabad are going eyeball-to-eyeball over his status.



Raymond Davis, captured CIA Murderer

Davis, 36, was apprehended by Pakistani police after he shot dead two Pakistanis on a busy Lahore thoroughfare on January 27, four days after the last drone U.S Drone strike in Pakistan. There has not been a single strike in the 25 days since then, making it the third-longest period of inactivity since the U.S ramped up the Predator program to take out terrorists infesting Pakistan's frontier regions, according to Long War Journal (LWJ), a blog that tracks U.S Predator attacks.

Speculation is now rife that Davis was somehow connected to the Predator program since he was reportedly carrying a GPS, telescope, camera and assorted equipment not usually associated with thoroughbred diplomats. Pakistani authorities have also accused him of unauthorized travels to the Frontier region and being in touch with extremist elements in Waziristan, which suggests he might have been coordinating the attacks with U.S moles in the region.

While Davis claimed that he shot the two Pakistanis in self-defense when they were trying to rob him, some reports have said they were ISI tails assigned to follow him because the Pakistani intelligence felt he had crossed certain unspecified "red lines." Those red lines may have involved discovering the Pakistani establishment's links with terrorists group, a pursuit which led to the death of Wall Street Journalist Danny Pearl.

According to the LWJ, it is also possible the Obama administration has halted the Drone strikes for political reasons, as Washington negotiates Davis' release.

A Lahore court on Thursday gave the Pakistani government three weeks to determine whether Davis had diplomatic immunity while extending his custody, even as Washington demanded that Islamabad (and not the court) make the call immediately and release him.

But a bitter wrangle has erupted in Islamabad between ultra-nationalist/pro-Jihadi elements in the government determined to stand up to Washington and deny Davis diplomatic immunity and those in favor of immunity because of Pakistan's parlous financial situation and its need to remain in Washington's good books.

Pakistan's ousted foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who signed up with the former group, lost his job earlier this week for his stand, and on Wednesday, foreign office spokesman Abdul Basit was replaced overnight after he too toed an anti-American line. On Thursday, Pakistan's prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani warned his new cabinet not to speak out of turn on the Davis issue.

Amid all this political and diplomatic brouhaha though, there has been a reprieve in the Frontier regions from incessant Drone attacks that sometimes numbered two to three a week. According to LWJ, the two most extended periods of operational inactivity so far have occurred in 2009. The longest recorded pause was 33 days, from Nov. 4 to Dec. 8, 2009. The second-longest pause was 28 days, from May 16 to June 14, 2009.

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