

SPY V. SPY: UNMASKED?

From the very first reports of Raymond Davis' killing of two Pakistanis and subsequent arrest, the insistence he was just a consular employee was obviously just polite fiction. The Guardian has stopped sustaining that fiction.

Based on interviews in the US and Pakistan, the Guardian can confirm that the 36-year-old former special forces soldier is employed by the CIA. "It's beyond a shadow of a doubt," said a senior Pakistani intelligence official. The revelation may complicate American efforts to free Davis, who insists he was acting in self-defence against a pair of suspected robbers, who were both carrying guns.

[snip]

The Pakistani government is aware of Davis's CIA status yet has kept quiet in the face of immense American pressure to free him under the Vienna convention. Last week President Barack Obama described Davis as "our diplomat" and dispatched his chief diplomatic troubleshooter, Senator John Kerry, to Islamabad. Kerry returned home empty-handed.

Yet even as Pakistani officials now willingly admit they've known all along that Davis is a spook, it's still unclear to what degree the press is sustaining further fictions.

Consider the ABC report that the two men in the rescue vehicle that attempted to pick Davis up had "slipped out" of the country.

A Pakistani court has demanded the arrest of a second U.S. official in connection with a deadly shootout in Lahore, Pakistan, last month, but that official, as well another American

official involved in the incident, have already slipped out of the country and are back on American soil, a senior U.S. official told ABC News.

Which gives the Guardian's source the opportunity to admit – shockers! – they've escaped.

The US refused Pakistani demands to interrogate the two men and on Sunday a senior Pakistani intelligence official said they had left the country. "They have flown the coop, they are already in America," he said.

FB Ali, at Pat Lang's blog, reports that these men flew back to the US on John Kerry's CoDel plane.

The US, concluding that playing the heavy wasn't achieving much, sent in the 'good cop', in the person of Senator Kerry, co-author of the 7.5 billion Pakistan aid bill. He expressed public regret for the deaths, held out the assurance that Davis would be criminally investigated back in the US, and met with the principal Pakistani players. His whirlwind one-day tour didn't achieve much beyond smuggling out of the country on his plane the three Americans who had been in the backup van (and were being sought by the police and the courts).

Which sort of makes you wonder whether the Pakistanis are so shocked that these men "flew the coop."

Then there's all the discussion about the tie between Davis' arrest and the halt to drone attacks in Pakistan, which Reuters confirms as news in the same way the Guardian confirmed Davis' CIA ties as news.

After months of frequent strikes from unmanned U.S. aircraft on militant hideouts in tribal areas on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, where bloodshed has hit record levels, reports of covert strikes have gone quiet for over three weeks.

Many analysts believe Washington has stopped the attacks to avoid further inflaming anti-American fury in Pakistan just as it pressures a vulnerable Islamabad government to release Raymond Davis, a U.S. consulate employee imprisoned after shooting two Pakistanis last month during what he said was an attempted robbery.

But FB Ali raises another possibility: that the tribal belt Pakistanis whose numbers were listed in his cell had helped him to target the drones.

On his cell phone were numbers that were later traced to phones in the tribal belt where the Taliban operate, while his camera had pictures of religious schools and military sites.

[snip]

A more 'innocent' explanation for these contacts is not being considered, at least publicly. They may merely have been informants that he and his colleagues had set up in the tribal areas to relay information for drone targetting. Incidentally, ever since his arrest drone attacks in the tribal belt have ceased. This may be due to a US desire not to further inflame Pakistani public opinion, or it could be because target information has dried up, or both.

Note, too, that the last strike was on January 23, four days before Davis killed the Pakistanis. (Or rather, the last strike before

today was several days before Davis' arrest.) Which, if FB Ali's suggestion is right, might suggest Davis lost his targeting assistance before the incident in Lahore. Or maybe they're just trying to save themselves at this point.

In any case, Reuters validated this as news and Voila! More drone strikes.

If there is such a direct tie between Davis and drone targeting, it's probably worth recalling (as the Guardian does, implicitly) the suspicion that the ISI may have outed the Islamabad station chief in December so he could be sued in a drone suit.

The identity of the CIA station chief is a closely guarded secret in any country. Khan's lawyer said he had obtained Banks's name from one Pakistani journalist and confirmed it with a second. "I asked around, then got an answer after three or four days of searching," he said.

There was also speculation that Banks could have been named by a disgruntled element within Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence spy agency. Last month, several senior ISI officials were named in a New York legal action brought by relatives of the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

At the root of all this polite fiction, after all, is the very rude fiction that the US has been bombing Pakistan without the consent of the government. Pakistan's government—and so presumably the ISI—have been players in the drone campaign and the fiction that sustains it. While it seems clear that the unveiling of the fictions about Davis are part of a nervous and dangerous game between Pakistan and the US, what seems to underlie it is some lack of faith in that larger rude fiction. The fiction that Pakistan has nothing to do with our drone campaign depends, after all, on mutual trust and sustenance of the fiction. The ISI has to be

willing to play its part. And it's not clear
everyone wants to play that game anymore.