THOUSANDS OF SPOOKY AMERICANS DOING WHO-KNOWS-WHAT IN PAKISTAN?

As I have followed the Raymond Davis saga, this passage from an early Jeremy Scahill story on the CIA/JSOC/Blackwater programs operating in Pakistan, has haunted me.

> The Blackwater operatives also assist in gathering intelligence and help direct a secret US military drone bombing campaign that runs parallel to the well-documented CIA predator strikes, according to a well-placed source within the US military intelligence apparatus.
>
> [snip]
>
> The source said that the program is so "compartmentalized" that senior figures within the Obama administration and the US military chain of command may not be aware of its existence.

That is, back in November 2009, even the Americans claimed not to be sure what people like Davis were doing.

There are a number of versions of stories talking about both the Pakistanis and Americans being clueless about what Raymond Davis was doing, as in this Daily Beast story suggesting the drone strikes halted to give the Americans time to figure out what we were doing in Pakistan.

> The U.S. government also has its own questions about what Davis and other shadowy Americans are up to in Pakistan. According to the senior Pakistani official, the U.S. government has only a sketchy notion of what Davis and other security contractors and intelligence

> agents are actually doing on the ground.
> As a result, the CIA's activities in
> Pakistan have more or less been
> temporarily shut down, according to the
> official, while a review of the agency's
> activities is carried out. Hence the
> temporary drone freeze, since the drone
> program is under the direction of the
> CIA.

And admittedly, both parties have an incentive to plead ignorance. Plausible deniability, after all.

But what's striking about this AP version pleading ignorance is the sheer numbers involved.

> The ISI fears there are hundreds of CIA
> contracted spies operating in Pakistan
> without the knowledge of either the
> Pakistan government or the intelligence
> agency, a senior Pakistani intelligence
> official told the AP in an interview. He
> spoke only on condition he not be
> identified on grounds that exposure
> would compromise his security.
>
> Pakistan intelligence had no idea who
> Davis was or what he was doing when he
> was arrested, the official said, adding
> that there are concerns about "how many
> more Raymond Davises are out there."
>
> [snip]
>
> The ISI is now scouring thousands of
> visas issued to U.S. employees in
> Pakistan. The ISI official said Davis'
> visa application contains bogus
> references and phone numbers. He said
> thousands of visas were issued to U.S.
> Embassy employees over the past five
> months following a government directive
> to the Pakistan Embassy in Washington to
> issue visas without the usual vetting by
> the interior ministry and the ISI. The
> same directive was issued to the

> Pakistan embassies in Britain and the
> United Arab Emirates, he said.
>
> Within two days of receiving that
> directive, the Pakistani Embassy issued
> 400 visas and since then thousands more
> have been issued, said the ISI official.
> A Western diplomat in Pakistan agreed
> that a "floodgate" opened for U.S.
> Embassy employees requesting Pakistani
> visas. [my emphasis]

In other words, some time back in September or thereabouts, the Pakistani government opened the floodgates for a bunch—hundreds or thousands—of spooky types who would not be vetted.

Back in the 60s in Vietnam, they called those hundreds and thousands "advisors," I think.

In any case, at this point, the Pakistanis are making a concerted effort to make it clear (or claim) that they let these thousands into the country with no vetting without first ascertaining what they would be doing. Mind you, they probably did know, at least vaguely. But if these numbers are true, the sheer scope of this program may be one of the big sources of the embarrassment here.