

Pakistan: Another “Important Ally” at Risk?

US Double Standards Over Diplomat Killing

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Region: [Asia](#)

Global Research, February 09, 2011

9 February 2011

The US has threatened to cut off a multi-billion-dollar aid package to Pakistan if an American diplomat being held on murder charges is not immediately released from custody.

The case has sparked widespread public fury across Pakistan, with accusations that it is yet another example of American personnel having a “licence to kill” in their country. Also, the rapid diplomatic intervention by senior US officials in the case, which has now raised the threat of immediate suspension of aid from Washington to Islamabad, is in stark contrast to the refusal by the US government to cut off similar aid flows to the Mubarak regime in Egypt where more than 300 civilians in pro-democracy protests have been killed by state forces.

Thirty-six-year-old Raymond Allen Davis, was arrested on 27 January amid furious scenes after he apparently shot dead two Pakistani men riding on a motorbike in the busy streets of Lahore, the main city in Punjab Province.

Davis, described by the US government as a consular employee on a diplomatic visa, is reported to have been stopped in his car by angry crowds as he tried to flee the scene. A third Pakistani, a bystander, was killed when he was run over by another US consular vehicle rushing to Davis’ assistance. Pakistani police are seeking to question the driver of the second vehicle, but his whereabouts appear to be unknown. Davis, who is said by US officials to have been employed in a “technical assistance” role for the American consulate in Lahore, claims that he shot the men in self-defence during an attempted robbery. But eyewitnesses flatly dispute this claim, saying that it was Davis who was pursuing the motorbike riders.

An ex-US army soldier, who also served in the Special Forces, Davis is believed by many Pakistanis to have been working for private security firm, Xe, formerly known as Blackwater, which is known to have carried out covert murder operations in Iraq, Afghanistan. Over the past year, US undercover agents are suspected to have stepped up assassination operations against Pakistani militants and civilians.

US efforts to free Davis include a snub from secretary of state Hillary Clinton to her Pakistani counterpart at a security conference in Munich last week, which was aimed at signaling Washington’s disapproval of Islamabad’s insistence on normal judicial process.

The US ambassador, Cameron Munter, has also met with Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari and urged him to release the accused American.

Now the US is threatening to cut off a \$2 billion military aid programme to Pakistan

approved late last year by US president Barack Obama. On a recent trip to Islamabad, Congressmen Howard McKeon, who heads the House Armed Services Committee, John Kline and Silvestre Reyes, the senior Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, are reported to have warned that the aid is now conditional on Davis' immediate release.

The Pakistani government in Islamabad is facing the danger of widespread popular revolt if it capitulates to pressure from Washington over the Davis case. Public anger is already at an all-time high as a result of continuing US military drone attacks in that country that have claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians, including women and children, in remote border areas with Afghanistan. The Pakistani government is accused by its own people of complicity in US crimes against humanity. If Islamabad caves in on the Davis case, that could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Another cause for public outrage is the "rough justice" case of Pakistani neuroscientist Aafia Siddiqui. This month marks the first anniversary of her conviction by a US court for attempted murder of American interrogators during detention in Afghanistan. The case against Siddiqui is widely seen as a travesty. She now faces a life sentence.

As with Egypt under Hosni Mubarak, Pakistan has been hailed an "important ally" by Washington in its so-called war on terror. Pakistan has been similarly bankrolled with US tax dollars. But while Washington can quickly reach for the cash tap when the fate of one American is concerned, it has evidently not the will to do likewise regarding Egypt where the regime has killed hundreds of civilians in recent weeks.

But such are the contradictions and hypocrisies coming out of Washington, that the US government is at risk of losing another "important ally" brought down by the mass of people who are losing all tolerance of US double standards and US-imposed misery and injustice.

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