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Pakistan Journalism: A Fantasy

► *Cullen Thomas*



Hamza Ahmed/Associated Press

He's looking at newspaper articles about CIA agent Raymond Davis, arrested for murder, then released, in the shattered zone of Lahore—the story a mystery.

Davis shot two Pakistanis on a motorcycle who'd supposedly ridden up to his car as it was stopped in traffic, or he was chasing them, maybe on a back street, by a crumbling wall, in broad daylight.

His mind is racing. It must have been crazy, the smell of dust, gasoline, and men, the headscarves, the whine and wail of terror, the wonder, the war.

And Davis, there in the picture, handsome, well built, his flannel-patterned button down casually stylish. He's out of a movie, Clooney-haired, sharp and fast with his gun, a marksman, a caricature. He'd ask Davis what he packed, there in the tribal zones, a modern Kipling.



It may have been that Davis saw these guys trailing his car on their bike, behind him in his mirrors, one view of history.

He'd known he was known, flashing around Lahore, enough for orders and shouts, guns in packs and belts, the fury of still hairless faces, young Pashtun blood, ghazis, maybe just paid for the job. Him, here, a picture, there, *Amrika*, follow his car! Shoot him! Kill him!

But Davis, he's too fast. He knows better.

Or he's too nervous, on a hair trigger, mad with the sounds of the main road.

He sees these men follow him, veering, stomping their thin sneakers down in the dirt, something unmistakable in their look, in the rough lurch of their bike, the jinn of that old city. Davis feels it. He readies his weapon, puts it in his right hand.

But is that how it went? On that side of his car, the side the bike angled for and retreated from, slinking back in his mirrors, out of view for a moment before the last paroxysm—and then he wastes no time and no chances.

Was his breathing heavy? Couldn't have been for his aim. In the picture, removed from the crucial moment, frozen forever in the *Times*, Davis looks like he doesn't ruffle much, appears self-contained.

So he raises his gun firm and fires, the noise like a radio, a shutter closing, a strange and familiar report.

But how did it really happen? He'll go and find out, and be brave and deadly in the beheading frontier. Like Davis.



Some said the men on the bike, that their guns weren't loaded, and not in their hands but still in their packs, sweaty against their shirts, their brown backs. They were poor, but with a motorbike.

Maybe this is how it was. They did road jobs, quick heists in awkward pants, on spindly legs with fierce mouths, guns in dust, grabbing money.

And here *Amrika* drives past, like in a miniature, off the big screen, affluent in his good looks, undercover, that other world always there, stuck in their traffic.

They ride up alongside, stick a kebab in his face, make a good score. But Davis is tense, his face and chest in a sweat, followed by someone, he doesn't know who, maybe from the mosque, the big talkers of the tea stall, pawns in the Game, just like him, with weapons and edge.

He'd spoken to the wrong guy. He'd bought the wrong vegetable, from the wrong market. A compromised phone, in a tiled lobby, a missed match, lights left on, low voices heard all the way back to Babur.

He'd find where the two Pakistani men were buried, the bodies secreted. Pictures from the police of where in the head or chest Davis had gotten them, before they got their guns out, before they got past him to other business, not even heeding the edgy assassin of another state, unknown until he shoots like this, out in the open, where people shout and see it, the toughs going down in the white hot street, sharp little glass, thuds, engine tear, cacophony and silence.

Fuck, Davis probably yelled.

But did he shoot through his own windshield, or out the window on his side, or through the passenger window? Decidedly different frames, angles in the



fast graphic novel in his head.

Hunting and hunted, Davis lives, he's executed, but his hand's been tipped, the chalice of Jamshid spilled in the idle of a red light.

He'd talk to the families of the two men killed, win their trust. He didn't love all things about America, killing innocent boys in streets in no part of the world for them. That's what he could say to ease them: Who do they, who do we, think we are?

They'd have tea. He'd stare down the implacable cousin who'd glare from across the table, the sun in the doorway. What do they do with all that money? 2.3 million. That's what the papers say, no more. It's not nearly enough. To two poor families, either radicals or thieves, or neither, students, Urdu waifs, fathers maybe, CIA killers, petty motorbike hoods you find on any alley in Partition.

Follow that blood money, that's what he'd do, that arithmetic on the frontier. They'd tell him what they did with it. How much to the homes, how much to the local group, to the mosque, to the fast ardent men out to change Lahore, the province, the people, that night.

He imagines that it's the women who tell him, who suffer the lost boys, wrapped and crying cups of tears. They talk to him while men stand quieter in eaves, in the doorways of pastel and metal, angry, ignorant, idolized, perplexed by this life, more Sufi than sinner or saint.

So much money. So foreign. Millions all at once, or would it be over time, in ludicrous installments, to two shambling houses, two wounded families on ancient streets?

And who brings it, a man like Davis? In the back of a car, a drop off, no



questions asked? If they were militants, how can *Amrika* pay the families? We've seen the martyrs' posters in Gaza and Teheran. Cool American millions, glib, fast, deadly.

At his table far from the fight, he continues to stare at the picture. Davis has assumed the right posture. He's caught, fallen on mercy. He did what operatives do. Davis walks with his head down, with his right hand appearing to grasp the wrist of a bearded pakol- and sweater-wearing Pakistani at his side who betrays no emotion. They are not self-conscious, just handcuffed together perhaps, after death, in a savagely tender touch.

Davis kills because it's his job, the photo seems to say. He has submitted, and walks with the Pakistanis in tacit understanding, the foul compromise. His fate is elsewhere. Someone will be able to tell him. God willing.

