

# INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

Beyond Raymond Davis

[Syed Babar Ali and Wendy Chamberlin](#)

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The Raymond Davis case is the latest in a long series of incidents that have undermined trust and communication between the governments of the US and Pakistan. The loss of life has been tragic. The disputes over facts and motives show that a more honest conversation about our national security interests and operations is long overdue. And the widespread anger in both societies makes it clear that we are in urgent need of serious, long-term efforts to bring our people together.

In the eye of the current storm, a diverse group of forty Americans and Pakistanis, outside our governments but influential with them, has started to rebuild partnerships based on complementary interests and common values. We are focusing on areas that matter to ordinary Pakistanis and Americans: education, jobs, entrepreneurship, and government accountability.

We met first in Lahore. We came from universities, businesses, non-profits, media, and think tanks. Many of us worried about the potential for constructive conversation, let alone meaningful new commitments, to come from a "US-Pakistan Leaders Forum" in such a highly charged moment.

We debated Mr Davis and challenged each other's understanding of who betrayed whom over the past thirty years. Then we stepped back, and found that we agreed on a set of clear, urgent priorities: bring more honesty to the security dialogue between our governments; broaden and deepen the ties among our people; and build new partnerships in sectors where we have complementary strengths and needs. We focused first on education, agriculture, and governance.

Pakistan's public education system needs reform, but it has exceptionally innovative leadership and success in charter and independent schools. Independent and quasi-charter schools across the country are serving more than six million students. Our Pakistani and US educators plan to work together in both countries to improve and expand public-private partnerships, while maintaining teaching quality.

Historically, many of Pakistan's top students came to the US for their graduate studies. They returned to Pakistan with positive views of the US and strong ties to its universities. In the last decade, more Pakistanis have chosen to study in Europe, and US visa restrictions have made student and faculty exchanges more difficult.

The US and Pakistani university leaders in our forum are committed to creating a new generation of higher education partnerships. Together, they will spur collaborative research, faculty and student exchanges, on-line dialogue, and social networks connecting faculty and students.

Beyond the formal education system, youth leadership was a strong thread in our discussions. One of our participants has already designed a new youth-service leaders exchange, and many others want to get involved.

In agriculture, Pakistan is one of the world's largest milk producers, but its cattle and water buffalo are scattered in very small herds. Our forum's agriculture experts and business people see huge potential to get more milk per head, improve nutrition, and create commercial joint ventures. They also agreed to explore the potential for developing a

commodity futures exchange for Pakistan. With a credible futures market, Pakistani farmers and traders and US investors could all gain.

Good governance is at the core of Pakistan's long term challenges, and lack of accountability is a serious problem for the US aid program in Pakistan. IT firms from the US are already setting up systems to track funds for flood relief, and there is high potential to apply them to other aid and development programs. Sister state and sister city programs can also promote accountability and public participation, by connecting elected officials, administrators and citizen groups for experience sharing and advice.

These partnership possibilities are only a fraction of what we discussed, and we have just begun to explore. The energy sector, venture capital, health insurance, the media, arts and culture are on our agenda for the future.

Most Americans and Pakistanis can grasp the potential for joint gains in the areas that matter most to families, businesses and professionals. Our group believes that broadening and deepening the relationships among leaders and people outside of government, while dealing more honestly with the differences between our governments, is the best way forward.

We know that there will be future problems in our relations, but they do not have to define our relationship. We can make sure that there are farmers, teachers, students, entrepreneurs, doctors and nurses, local officials and citizen groups in both societies who have a different set of stories to tell. Together, we can provide a counterweight when tensions arise. In the long run, we can change both of our societies for the better.

Syed Babar Ali is Pro-Chancellor, Lahore University of Management Sciences. Wendy Chamberlin is President of the Middle East Institute and former Ambassador of the United States to Pakistan.

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