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<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/27/280358/secret-cia-units-protect-its-spies-abroad/>

Secret CIA armed guards protect its spies in foreign lands

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Former CIA armed contractor Raymond Davis (R) was arrested and jailed in Pakistan after killing two Pakistani men in Lahore in 2011 but was soon released following intense pressures from Washington.

Since the suspicious September 11, 2001 terror incidents in the US, American spy agency, the CIA, has recruited hundreds of former US elite Special Forces operatives to serve as secret guards for its spies overseas.

CIA's secret security force, innocently named Global Response Staff (GRS), "is designed to stay in the shadows, training teams to work undercover and provide an unobtrusive layer of security for CIA officers in high-risk [foreign] outposts," major US daily *The Washington Post* reports on Thursday.

According to the report, two of the Americans killed last September in an angry attack on US Consulate in Benghazi, Libya were members of the spy agency's GRS, shedding light into "a key element" of CIA's "defensive arsenal," which was created following the 9/11 terror events in New York and against the Pentagon building just outside Washington, D.C.

The reports insists that the secret CIA guards prevented a second attack against supposed US diplomatic compounds near its consulate building in Benghazi, Which was run over by angry protesters following the release of a vigorously offensive US-made film, demonizing Muslims and their prophet.

However, it adds, a series of deadly incidents "over the past four years" has highlighted the expanding role of GRS and "its emerging status as one of the CIA's most dangerous assignments."

The daily further emphasizes that the spy agency's GRS contractors have also been involved in "shootouts" in other countries during which foreign nationals were murdered. It then refers to a 2011 incident in Pakistan, where an armed CIA contractor Raymond Davis was arrested and jailed for weeks after killing two Pakistani men in Lahore, triggering a diplomatic crisis between Washington and Islamabad.

Davis was eventually released and returned to the US following intense pressures, and even reported threats, from Washington and amid widespread protest rallies in Pakistan against persisting US intervention in its internal affairs.

The increasingly noticeable role of the secret GRS force, notes the report, is part of a "broader expansion of the CIA's paramilitary capabilities" over the past decade.

Other than recruiting former US military commandos, the spy agency has further "collaborated with US Special Operations teams on missions," including the attack on a Pakistani compound that allegedly killed Osama bin Laden and has killed "thousands of Islamist militants and civilians" with its fleet of armed assassination drones.

The paper goes on to quote veteran CIA spies as saying that GRS teams have become "a critical component of conventional espionage, providing protection for case officers whose counterterrorism assignments carry a level of risk that rarely accompanied the cloak-and-dagger encounters of the Cold War."

Although the American spy agency originally created the GRS to protect officers in war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan, it has expanded their mission in a bid to protect "secret drone bases as well as CIA facilities and officers" in Middle Eastern countries, including Yemen, Lebanon and Djibouti.

In some cases, the report adds, elite GRS operatives provide security for American agents from other US government agencies, “including National Security Agency teams deploying sensors or eavesdropping equipment in conflict zones, a former special operator said.”

The most skilled GRS security operators are informally known as “scorpions.”

The secret apparatus “relies heavily on contractors who are drawn by relatively high pay and flexible schedules.” In exchange, “they agree to high-risk assignments in places such as Benghazi and are largely left on their own to take basic precautions, such as finding health and life insurance.”

The daily also quotes “current and former US intelligence officials” as saying that the GRS has nearly 125 employees working in foreign nation “at any given time, with at least that many rotating through cycles of training and off-time in the United States.”

Of the 14 CIA operatives killed abroad since 2009, five worked for the GRS, all as contractors, including two killed at Benghazi, as well as three others that died on December 31, 2009, when an alleged “Jordanian double agent” detonate his explosive vest at a CIA compound in Khost, Afghanistan.