



The CIA has pulled its station chief from Islamabad, one of America's most important spy posts, after his cover was blown in a legal action brought by victims of US drone strikes in the tribal belt.

The officer, named in Pakistan as Jonathan Banks, left the country yesterday, after a tribesman publicly accused him of being responsible for the death of his brother and son in a CIA drone strike in December 2009. Karim Khan, a journalist from North Waziristan, called for Banks to be charged with murder and executed.

In a rare move, the CIA called Banks home yesterday, citing "security concerns" and saying he had received death threats, Washington officials told Associated Press. Khan's lawyer said he was fleeing the possibility of prosecution.

"This is just diplomatic language they are using. Banks is a liability to the CIA because he's likely to be called to court. They want to save him, and themselves, the embarrassment," said lawyer Shahzad Akbar. Pakistani media reports have claimed that Banks entered the country on a business visa, and therefore does not enjoy diplomatic immunity from prosecution.

The recall comes at a sensitive moment for Washington. This week's Afghanistan policy review brought fresh focus on Taliban safe havens in Pakistan's tribal belt. Meanwhile CIA drone attacks – which are co-ordinated from the Islamabad embassy – have reached a new peak. Three drones struck targets in Khyber, a previously untouched tribal agency, on Friday, reportedly killing 24 people and signalling a widening of the CIA covert campaign.

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