



Pakistan has lashed out at America's top-ranking military officer, Admiral Mike Mullen, on Friday, saying that its relations with the US have been further damaged by his remarks blaming the Islamabad government for the killing, torture and murder of a Pakistani journalist.

The chairman of the joint chiefs of staff shocked Islamabad by saying publicly what US officials had confirmed only in private: that the Pakistani government had "sanctioned" the killing of Syed Saleem Shahzad, the investigative reporter for Asia Times Online whose mutilated body was found on 30 May in a canal 40 miles from the capital. He had been writing about jihadist infiltration of the Pakistani military.

Pakistan's information minister, Firdous Ashiq Awan, told a news conference Mullen had made an "extremely irresponsible and unfortunate statement".

"This statement will create problems and difficulties for the bilateral relations between Pakistan and America. It will definitely deal a blow to our common efforts with regard to the war on terror," she said, without going into details.

The row comes at a time when ties between the two countries have not recovered from the US raid that killed Osama bin Laden on 2 May in the central Pakistani town of Abbottabad. Pakistan's armed forces are smarting from the humiliation of the special forces mission, which was carried out without their permission or knowledge.

After discovering the al-Qaida leader near a military academy in a town full of retired officers, the US remains suspicious that he had been helped by members of the Pakistani government, army or the Inter-Services Intelligence spy agency.

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