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From: OpsNewsTicker
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Subject: U.S. Admiral Ties Pakistan to Killing of Journalist (NYT)

WASHINGTON — Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Thursday that he believed that the government of Pakistan had “sanctioned” the killing of a Pakistani journalist who had written scathing reports about the infiltration of Islamic militants into the country’s security services.

Admiral Mullen, who is due to retire at the end of September, is the first American official to publicly accuse Pakistan, an American ally, of the kidnapping, torture and death of the journalist, Saleem Shahzad, 40. His comments about a case that has intensified criticism of the government in Islamabad are certain to further aggravate the poisoned relationship between the United States and Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden was killed in an American raid in May.

Admiral Mullen said he could not specifically tie Mr. Shahzad’s death to Pakistan’s powerful spy agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, known as the ISI, although Obama administration officials believe that the ISI ordered the killing. But Admiral Mullen made clear that he thought Pakistani officials were complicit in Mr. Shahzad’s death.

“It was sanctioned by the government,” Admiral Mullen told journalists during a Pentagon briefing. “I have not seen anything to disabuse the report that the government knew about this.”

A military official later declined to say whether Admiral Mullen believed that the knowledge of the planned killing extended to President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan or to Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the chief of the Pakistani Army. But the official said that Admiral Mullen was “appalled” at learning of the circumstances behind the death of Mr. Shahzad, who, according to one of the doctors who conducted the post-mortem, sustained 17 lacerated wounds delivered by a blunt instrument, a ruptured liver and two broken ribs. Mr. Shahzad’s waterlogged body was retrieved May 30 from a canal 60 miles from Islamabad, the Pakistani capital.

The ISI has denied any involvement in the killing.

Husain Haqqani, Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States, said in reaction to Admiral Mullen’s remarks that Pakistan had already appointed a commission to inquire into the death. “Any evidence that our American friends have should be shared with that commission,” Mr. Haqqani said in a telephone interview. “We are as interested in getting to the bottom of this matter as anyone else in the world, given our concern about human rights.”

The Obama administration has long expressed alarm about reports of human rights abuses in Pakistan,

particularly a steady stream of accounts from human rights groups that thousands of political separatists and captured Taliban insurgents have disappeared into the hands of Pakistan's police and security forces.

Admiral Mullen's remarks were significant because he is one of the closest American officials to the Pakistani leadership, most notably General Kayani. The admiral has traveled to Pakistan more often than any other senior Obama administration official and has had dozens of meetings over the last four years with General Kayani. Although Admiral Mullen regularly says that Pakistan needs to work harder to flush out insurgents on its eastern border, who attack American forces in Afghanistan, he also frequently defends its military.

But in this case Admiral Mullen said that he had a "huge concern" about Mr. Shahzad's death and indicated that it had further damaged Pakistan's relationship with the United States. "It's not a way to move ahead," he said. "It's a way to, quite frankly, spiral in the wrong direction."

The White House had no reaction to Admiral Mullen's remarks, which were not in sync with the Obama administration's previous public comments on the killing. While several senior administration officials had in recent days privately acknowledged what the admiral said, his remarks brought into the open what had been a highly classified intelligence assessment.

Mr. Shahzad, who wrote predominantly about security and terrorism issues for the Hong Kong-based Asia Times Online and the Italian news agency Adnkronos International, disappeared on May 29 in Islamabad, two days after writing an article suggesting that a militant attack on the Pakistani Navy's main base in Karachi on May 22 was in retaliation for a naval crackdown on Al Qaeda infiltrators in its ranks.

Pakistan's armed forces were humiliated by the 16-hour battle at the Navy base, which shocked the country. The armed forces were even more humiliated by the raid on Bin Laden's compound in the garrison town of Abbottabad, which the United States carried out without Pakistan's prior knowledge. Mr. Shahzad had been receiving threats from the ISI for about three years because of his reporting, which often relied on sources inside the intelligence agencies and inside the Taliban and other militant groups.

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