

AS IT IS

Pakistani Doctor, Who Aided Hunt for bin Laden, Forgotten in Prison

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Shakil Afridi, a Pakistani doctor, helped the United States find Osama bin Laden in 2011. He was later arrested by Pakistani authorities and has been in prison waiting for a trial ever since.

The U.S. supports Afridi's release. However, the debate over his future is an example of the **complicated** relations between the two countries.

A difficult trial

Afridi has not seen his lawyer since 2012. His wife and children are his only visitors. For two years his **file** "disappeared," delaying his court appeal. The courts now say a **prosecutor** is unavailable, his lawyer, Qamar Nadeem Afridi, told The Associated Press.

"Everyone is afraid to even talk about him, to **mention** his name," said Nadeem, who is also Afridi's cousin.

Nadeem said lawyers working with Afridi have been threatened with violence. Nadeem's law office has bullet holes from a shooting incident several years ago. One of Afridi's lawyers was murdered outside his Peshawar home. Also, a jail administrator who supported Afridi was shot and killed.

Afridi used a **fake hepatitis** vaccination program to try to get **DNA samples** from bin Laden's family. However, he has not been charged with helping the U.S. to find bin Laden.

Nadeem said Afridi was accused under tribal law for helping militants in the nearby Khyber tribal **region**. In a tribal court, the law **allows** them to be closed to the public, does not require

the defendant to be present in court, and limits the number of appeals, he said.

If Afridi were charged with treason, he would have the right to public hearings and appeals, even up to the Supreme Court. This would allow details of the bin Laden operation to be discussed publicly, something both the government and military do not want.

Rising tension

As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump said he would free Afridi. In an interview with Fox News in April 2016, he said he would get him out of prison in “two minutes. ... Because we give a lot of aid to Pakistan.”

In a tweet after New Year’s Day, U.S. President Donald Trump said that Pakistan took \$33 billion in aid and gave only “**deceit** and lies” in return. He also accused Pakistan of protecting Afghan militants who attack American soldiers in Afghanistan.

Pakistan accused the U.S. of blaming them for its failure to bring peace to Afghanistan.

Shortly after, the U.S. suspended almost \$2 billion in military aid to Pakistan.

The Wilson Center’s Michael Kugelman said Pakistan and the U.S. should recognize their disagreements. And the countries should find areas where they can cooperate like fighting the Islamic State and al-Qaida terror groups. Both countries see them as threats.

For now, Afridi spends his days alone in a prison filled with militants who want to kill him for his **role** in **locating** bin Laden. Still, Nadeem said Pakistani authorities are treating Afridi well and he is in good health.

U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of State Alice Wells recently met with Pakistani authorities. There is no information whether Afridi’s case was discussed in the meeting.

In a statement, the U.S. State Department told the Associated Press that Afridi has not been forgotten. “We believe Dr. Afridi has been unjustly imprisoned and have clearly

communicated our position to Pakistan on Dr. Afridi's case, both in public and in private," it said.

I'm Phil Dierking.

Kathy Gannon wrote this story for the Associated Press. PhilDierking adapted this story for VOA Learning English. Hai Do was the editor.

How do you think the United States and Pakistan can find peace? We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section or on our Facebook page.

Words in This Story

allow - *v.* to permit (something)

complicated - *adj.* when something is more difficult or less simple

deceit - *n.* behavior that is meant to fool or trick someone

DNA - *n.* a substance that carries genetic information in the cells of plants and animals.

fake - *adj.* not true or real

file - *n.* a collection of documents that have information you want to keep and that are stored so that they can be found easily

hepatitis - *n.* a serious disease of the liver that causes fever and makes your skin and eyes yellow.

locate - *v.* to find the place or position of (something or someone)

mention - *v.* to talk about, write about, or refer to (something or someone) especially in a brief way

prosecutor - *n.* a lawyer who represents the side in a court case that accuses a person of a crime and who tries to prove that the person is guilty.

region - *n.* a part of a country, of the world, etc., that is different or separate from other parts in some way

role - *n.* a part that someone or something has in a particular activity or situation
