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The Guardian

US-Pakistan relations worsen with arrest of two alleged spies

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Relations between Washington and Islamabad deteriorated further when the US justice department charged two men alleged to have been in the pay of the Pakistani intelligence service.

One was involved with the Kashmiri American Council, through which it is alleged [Pakistan](#) channelled millions of dollars to influence members of the [US Congress](#). The US said there are also Kashmiri centres in London and Brussels that the [FBI](#) alleged are run by elements of the Pakistani government. FBI special agent Sarah Webb Linden, in an affidavit unsealed, named the one in London as the Justice Foundation/Kashmir Centre run by Nazir Ahmad Shawl.

The FBI arrested the executive director of the Kashmiri American Council, Ghulam-Nabi Fai, aged 62, at his home in Fairfax, Virginia, later. The other, Zaheer Ahmad, 63, is believed to be in Pakistan. Both are US citizens and face a prison sentence of five years if convicted.

Relations between the US and Pakistani intelligence have been increasingly strained this year after the arrest of a CIA operative, Raymond Davis, in Pakistan and the revelation that Osama bin Laden had been in hiding near Islamabad.

A US senator, Dianne Feinstein, chair of the intelligence committee, this week described the relationship as in crisis.

The US has also engaged in covert funding in Pakistan to achieve its goals. Last week the Guardian revealed how the [CIA funded an extensive fake vaccination programme](#) in Abbottabad, where Bin Laden was living, in order to obtain DNA samples from inside his house.

Fai's arrest may come to be seen as a tit-for-tat reprisal for the victimisation of several Pakistanis who participated in that vaccination programme. The arrests come as the US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, is on a visit to India.

The two men are accused of having conspired to act as agents of a foreign government without that interest being declared and falsifying, concealing and covering up the fact.

Lisa Monaco, assistant attorney general for national security, said the two were accused of breaking the law that required the US and the American public to know the underlying source of information and identity of those attempting to influence US policy and laws.

The US attorney for Virginia, Neil MacBride, added: "Mr Fai is accused of a decades-long scheme with one purpose – to hide Pakistan's involvement behind his efforts to influence the US government's position on Kashmir."

The affidavit alleges that the centre was run by elements of the Pakistani government, including Pakistan's military intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI).

According to the affidavit, Fai allegedly set out in a budget request to the Pakistan government in 2009 a request for \$100,000 for contributions to members of Congress. The justice department said there was no evidence that any elected official who received financial contributions was aware of the Pakistani connection.

Kashmiri activists reacted with dismay and shock to news of Fai's arrest, describing him as an eloquent advocate for the Kashmiri cause. Several said they believed he had become a victim of deteriorating relations between Washington and Islamabad in the wake of the US raid that killed Bin Laden on 2 May.

"I think his arrest is just about settling scores with Pakistan," said Tariq Naqash, a journalist in Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-held Kashmir. Farooq Rehmani, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Freedom League, said Fai came from Srinagar in Indian-controlled Kashmir but had been living in the US for at least 30 years. "I know him personally. He comes from Kashmir and he has been campaigning for our cause," he said.

According to the affidavit, a confidential witness told investigators the money was transferred to Fai through Ahmad, an American living in Pakistan. The FBI interviewed Fai in March 2007 when he allegedly stated he had never met anyone who said they were with the ISI. The affidavit alleged that four Pakistani government handlers have directed Fai's US activities and that Fai has been in touch with them more than 4,000 times since June 2008.