

shooting as ‘reprehensible and disgusting and tragic’. But some of the reaction in Pakistan was not so positive. While some papers described me as a ‘peace icon’, others carried the usual conspiracy theories, some bloggers even questioning if I had really been shot. All sorts of stories were made up, particularly in the Urdu press, such as one that claimed I had criticised the growing of beards. One of the most vocal people against me was a female MP called Dr Raheela Qazi from the religious Jamaate-Islami party. She called me an American stooge and showed a photograph of me sitting next to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke as evidence of me ‘hobnobbing with US military authority’!

Dr Fiona was a great comfort to us. My mother speaks only Pashto so couldn’t understand anything she said, but Fiona would gesture with a thumbs-up when she came out of my room and say ‘Good.’ She became a messenger for my parents, not only a doctor. She would sit with them patiently and would then ask my father to explain every detail to my mother. My father was astonished and pleased – in our country few doctors bother explaining anything to an illiterate woman. They heard that offers were pouring in from overseas to treat me including from America, where a top hospital called Johns Hopkins had offered free treatment. Individual Americans also offered to help, including Senator John Kerry, a rich man who had visited Pakistan many times, and Gabrielle Giffords, a congresswoman who had been shot in the head while meeting constituents at a shopping mall in Arizona. There were offers too from Germany, Singapore, the UAE and Britain.

Nobody consulted my mother and father on what should happen to me. All decisions were made by the army. General Kayani asked Dr Javid whether I should be sent abroad or not. The army chief was spending a surprising amount of his time on the issue – Dr Javid says they spent six hours discussing me! Perhaps more than any politician he understood the political implications if I did not survive. He was hoping to build a political consensus behind launching an all-out attack on the Taliban. But also those close to him say he is a compassionate man. His own father was just an ordinary soldier and died young, leaving him as the eldest son of eight to support his entire family. When he became army chief the first thing General Kayani did was improve housing, food rations and education for ordinary soldiers rather than officers.

Dr Fiona said it was likely I would have a speech impediment and a weak right arm and right leg, so I would need extensive rehabilitation facilities, which Pakistan didn’t have. ‘If you’re serious about getting the best outcome possible, take her overseas,’ she advised.

General Kayani was adamant that the Americans should not be involved because of the ongoing bad relations between the two countries after the Raymond Davis episode and the bin Laden raid as well as the killing of some Pakistani soldiers at a border post by a US helicopter. Dr Javid suggested Great Ormond Street in London, and specialist hospitals in Edinburgh and Glasgow. ‘Why not your own hospital?’ General Kayani asked.

Dr Javid had known this was coming. Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham is known for treating British soldiers wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its location outside the centre of the city also offered privacy. He called his boss Kevin Bolger, the hospital’s chief operating officer. He quickly agreed it was the right thing to do, although afterwards he said, ‘None of us ever imagined how much it would take over the hospital.’ Moving me – a foreign minor – to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital was not a simple exercise, and Bolger soon found himself tangled in the hoops of British and Pakistani bureaucracy. Meanwhile time was ticking away. Although my condition had been stabilised it was felt that I needed to be moved within forty-eight hours, seventy-two at the most.

Finally the go-ahead was given and the doctors had to face the problem of how I was to be moved