

ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES APPARENT POLICY OF HARASSING PAKISTANI DRONE CRITICS

Yesterday, US officials detained and questioned former cricket star turned politician and drone critic Imran Khan in Canada before allowing him to travel on to New York.

Khan told his followers on Twitter on Friday that he was detained and interrogated about his views on drones.

A State Department official confirmed Khan had been briefly detained, but said the Pakistani politician was later released to travel the United States. "The issue was resolved and Mr. Khan is welcome in the United States," said the official.

[snip]

Khan, who led a protest march to northern Pakistan earlier this month to protest U.S. drone strikes, sent a message about the incident on Twitter on Friday, vowing to continue opposing the deadly attacks. "Nothing will change my stance," he said.

"I was taken off from plane and interrogated by U.S. Immigration in Canada on my views on drones. My stance is known. Drone attacks must stop," Khan tweeted on Friday afternoon.

This is not an isolated example of harassment. This is at least the third time this year that the US has delayed or denied entry to the US for Pakistani drone critics.

In April, the government stalled on giving Shahzad Akbar, a lawyer suing the US for its drone strikes, a visa to speak at an anti-drone conference.

If you want to see how President Obama's drone war efficiently turns America's friends into adversaries, meet Pakistani attorney Shahzad Akbar. After getting his legal education in the United Kingdom, Akbar returned to his native Islamabad to practice the kind of corporate and public accountability law that the U.S. says it hopes to encourage in Pakistan. He worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development on trade issues. While prosecuting a Pakistan consular officer who was selling visas, he coordinated his case with the FBI.

Then came the Obama administration's escalation of the drone war. Now Akbar is a full-time critic of the U.S. government who was repeatedly denied a visa to visit Washington. After a spate of news articles, Akbar was granted permission to travel to Washington this weekend, where he warned Americans about the consequences of a remote control war where no U.S. lives are lost and Pakistani civilian casualties are routinely downplayed.

And in May, the government refused a visa to Muhammad Danish Qasim, preventing him from traveling to Seattle to accept an award for a film he made

In particular, "the film identifies the problems faced by families who have become victims of drone missiles, and it unearths the line of action which terrorist groups adopt to use victimised families for their vested interests." In other words, it depicts the tragedy of civilian deaths, and documents how those

deaths are then successfully exploited by actual Terrorists for recruitment purposes.

We can't have the U.S. public learning about any of that. In April, Qasim was selected as the winner of the Audience Award for Best International Film at the 2012 National Film Festival For Talented Youth, held annually in Seattle, Washington. Qasim, however, along with his co-producers, were prevented from traveling to the U.S. to accept their award and showcase their film because their request for a visa to travel to the U.S. was denied. The *Tribune* reported: "Despite being chosen for the award, the filmmakers were unable to attend the award ceremony as their visa applications were rejected twice.

This is becoming a pattern in which the US harasses any Pakistanis who might speak out against drones in this country.

Why is the government so afraid of Pakistanis explaining to Americans what the drone attacks look like from a Pakistani perspective?