

ADMINISTRATION AGAIN ATTEMPTS TO KEEP NEWS OF ITS DRONE DAMAGES OUT OF THE COUNTRY

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Nieman Watchdog asked Scott Shane recently why he had granted Administration officials anonymity so they could insinuate that those who report on civilian drone deaths were terrorist sympathizers. Shane defended violating the NYT's prohibition on letting sources attack others under cover of anonymity because of the importance of getting two sides to the story. He also claimed that Administration sources were referring to ISI propagandists, not the journalists reporting on civilian deaths, when they suggested such reports amounted to support for terrorism.

Shane, in written responses to a number of questions that Nieman Watchdog posed to him about the two articles, said he believes this particular quote was not necessarily directed at BIJ, calling it "ambiguous, and I wish I had been able to clarify it." He added: "Based on all my reporting over the last couple of years, I believe U.S. government officials have in mind not BIJ or other journalists as sympathizers of Al Qaeda but militants and perhaps ISI officers who supply what they consider disinformation on strikes to journalists."

There's a problem with that, though: The Administration's repeated reluctance (and at times outright refusal) to let Pakistani drone critics into this country.

The latest example is Pakistani student filmmaker Muhammad Danish Qasim, who was denied a visa so he can accept an award for his film on how terrorists are capitalizing on drone strikes at a film festival in Seattle. As Glenn Greenwald explains,

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.

In the same way that The Bureau of Independent Journalism’s reporting on drones rebutted some of the claims made by militants, it appears that Qasim’s film shows how terrorists exploit the victims of drone strikes. It is not al Qaeda propaganda, no matter what anonymous cowards in the Administration might think.

Never the less, the Administration appears determined to keep even nuanced critiques of its

drone program out of the country.