

SHORTER STAFFORD SMITH TO OBAMA: “DON’T DRONE ME, BRO!”

On Saturday, a march is planned into South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. Three groups are involved in the march: Reprieve, of the UK, headed by attorney Clive Stafford Smith, CodePink, of the US, headed by Medea Benjamin and Pakistan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party, headed by former cricket star and likely presidential candidate Imran Khan. The march is intended to draw attention to the plight of innocent civilians suffering from drone strikes aimed at militants who hide out in the area.

Prior to leaving for Pakistan, Stafford Smith wrote a letter (pdf) to President Obama (with a copy also going to CIA head David Petraeus), asking that he not be targeted by drones while he is in South Waziristan. From the letter:

This letter makes a simple request: when I march into Waziristan on October 7th, 2012, please do not let the CIA kill me, Pakistani politician Imran Khan, or the others – including many Americans – who will be marching with me to highlight the plight of the innocent people, including at least 174 children, targeted by drones in recent months and years. Indeed, should my picture come up in your weekly Powerpoint display, please remember that you and I are both lawyers from the same tradition, and it would be unseemly (as well as being both illegal and upsetting for my family) if you were to authorize my assassination.

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In terms of the studied leak to the NY

Times that you and John Brennan studied St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas before authorizing a “hit”, I fear you guys must have been reading an edited edition of the ‘just war’ theory. We won’t even get into the rights and wrongs of the drone strategy, since Aquinas’ first principle was that the war had to be declared by an acknowledged sovereign: here there has been no declaration – only obfuscation by the secretive CIA – and we are waging war on an ally, Pakistan, without its consent. Arguments that these drone attacks are legal are, sad to say, hollow advocacy.

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I would be grateful if you would assure me – a simple email will do – that the CIA will not target me and my colleagues as we do what little we can to right these tragic wrongs. Surely I don’t ask much: simply not to be killed. In order that we may proceed in peace, I would appreciate such an assurance by 10am EST, on Monday, October 1st, 2012.

It does not appear that Stafford Smith has gotten Obama’s assurance that he will not be targeted.

There is now a “threat” against the march, prompting officials in the region to say that it cannot be permitted to take place, but the threat comes from a previously unknown militant group:

While terming Imran Khan’s rally to South Waziristan “a mere drama”, the Taliban have warned Tehrik-e-Insaaf Pakistan not to go ahead with the rally or face music.

According to media reports, the Taliban have distributed a pamphlet in Tank, the gateway to South Waziristan, and termed Imran Khan as an agent of the United

States, Britain and Israel and alleged that the cricketer-turned-politician is politicizing the issue and has no sympathy for the poor tribesmen. Interestingly, the pamphlet has been issued from an unknown Taliban group Jaish-ul-Mujahedeen-al-Khilafat.

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The one-page pamphlet, written in Urdu, was distributed in Tank Bazaar on Thursday night. It said, "We inform all and sundry with humble way that Imran Khan/PTI is taking a rally into South Waziristan with a slogan of anti-drone. (He has no sympathy with the tribesmen) actually it is a drama and he is the agent of Israel, US and Britain. On the politics of drone he is promoting the Jewish and agendas of Christianity (in Pakistan)."

The pamphlet further added, "We humbly request the people not to participate in this rally otherwise Imran Khan would be responsible if something unpleasant happens."

Citing threats, authorities are now saying the march will not be allowed to take place due to security concerns:

The political agent of South Waziristan said that Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) 'Peace March' to the agency's Kotkai area will not be allowed due to security threats. The political agent told *The Express Tribune* that the rally led by Imran Khan's party was dubbed a peace march and hopefully there will be no resistance from the PTI's side regarding the decision.

He warned that the security situation was not fit to host such a big rally and the decision to not allow it was taken at his own level without any federal

government involvement.

It will be very interesting to see how Khan, Stafford Smith and Benjamin respond to the threat and the claim that the march will not be allowed.

Since there seems to be no indication that the delegation includes a social scientist who will make sure that citizens who speak to the group are selected in a random fashion and not coached by ISI, don't look for any support for the march from Christine Fine or Joshua Foust.

Update: A new article from the Express Tribune has this from organizers of the march:

PTI Spokesperson Shafqat Mehmood said over 50,000 to 60,000 people will participate in the rally. He said that the local administration, police and the PTI workers will assure the security of the procession.

Mehmood added that the local PTI leaders will host the procession. "Come what may, we will go to Waziristan," he said.