

# Victims Sue Saudi Arabia Over 2019 Florida Shooting



This undated photo provided by the FBI shows Muhammad Saeed Alshamrani.

FLORIDA (AP) -- Victims of a 2019 shooting at a Florida military base and their families are suing Saudi Arabia, claiming the kingdom knew the gunman had been radicalized and that it could have prevented the killings.

The suit, filed Monday, also claims that Saudi trainees knew in advance about plans for the shooting but did nothing to stop it.

The suit centers on the Dec. 6, 2019, shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola in which Muhammad Saeed Alshamrani shot and killed three U.S. sailors. It comes nine months after U.S. officials revealed that Alshamrani, a

Saudi Air Force officer, had communicated with Al-Qaeda operatives about planning and tactics in the weeks leading up to the attack and that he had been radicalized abroad before coming to the U.S. to participate in a military training program.

The lawsuit casts a wide net of blame beyond Alshamrani. It alleges, for instance, that Saudi Arabia knew about Alshamrani's associations with Al-Qaeda and his radicalization and yet failed to monitor, supervise or report him. It also says the gunman told fellow Saudi trainees at a dinner party the night before the attack that he planned to carry out the shooting the following

day, but instead of reporting it, they called out sick morning of the killings. One recorded the shootings while standing outside the building; two others watched from a car nearby.

"None of the Royal Saudi Air Force trainees at the scene of the attack reported Al-Shamrani's behavior nor did they try to stop" it, the lawsuit says. "Because they supported it."

The complaint also says Alshamrani's Saudi trainees were aware that he had purchased and stored firearms and ammunition in his barracks, and that he had posted and shared extremist material on social media and screened videos of mass shootings before the attack.

"Al-Shamrani was a Trojan Horse sent by his country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its proxy, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for flight training at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida, under the auspices of a program tied to billions of dollars in military arms sales from the United States to the Kingdom," the lawsuit states. "Little did the American people know that such an arrangement would soon devolve into a horrific, Faustian bargain."

One month after the shooting, then-Attorney General William Barr announced that 21 Saudi trainees found to have had takfiri or anti-American sentiments on social media pages or "contact with child pornography" were being sent home.

## Muslims Say Justice Unserved a Year After Hindu Violence



A woman sitting with her husband and their child reacts next to damaged property after their house was burnt by a mob in a riot affected area in New Delhi, February 28, 2020.

NEW DELHI (AP) -- The shooter shouted "Victory to Lord Ram," the Hindu god, before pulling the trigger that sent a bullet into Muhammad Nasir Khan's left eye.

Khan placed his trembling hand on his bloody eye socket and his fingers slipped deep into the wound. At that moment, Khan was sure he would die.

Khan ended up surviving the violence that killed 53 others, mostly fellow Muslims, when it engulfed his neighborhood in New Delhi 12 months ago.

But a year after India's worst communal riots in decades, the 35-year-old is still shaken and his attacker still unpunished. Khan says he's been unable to get justice due to a lack of police interest in his case.

"My only crime is that my name identifies my religion," Khan said at his home in the capital's North Ghonda neighborhood.

Many of the Muslim victims of last year's bloody violence say they have run repeatedly into a refusal by police to investigate complaints against Hindu rioters. Some hope the courts will still come to their help. But others now believe the justice system under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's hard-line Hindu-nationalist government has become stacked against them.

Adding to the sense of injustice is that accounts from Muslim victims as well as reports from rights groups have indicated that leaders of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the New Delhi police force tacitly supported the Hindu mobs during the fevered violence.

Communal clashes in India are not new, with periodic violence breaking out ever since the British partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. But in the last seven years, observers say, religious polarization fueled by the Hindu nationalist base of Modi's party has further deepened the fault lines and raised tensions.

Many believe the catalyst for last year's riots was a fiery speech by Kapil Mishra, a leader from Modi's party. On February 23, 2020, he gave police an ultimatum, warning them to break up a sit-in by demonstrators protesting against a new citizenship law Muslims say is discriminatory, or he and his supporters would do it themselves.

When his supporters moved in it triggered pitched street battles that quickly turned into riots. For the next three days, Hindu mobs rampaged through streets hunting down Muslims — in some cases burning them alive in their homes — and torching entire neighborhoods, including shops and mosques.

## Blackwater Head Helped Evade Sanctions on Libya: UN



Erik Prince arrives for the New York Young Republican Club Gala at The Yale Club of New York City in Manhattan in New York City, New York, U.S., November 7, 2019.

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- Erik Prince, the private security executive and supporter of former U.S. President Donald Trump, "at the very least" helped evade an arms embargo on Libya, according to excerpts from a United Nations report seen by Reuters.

Independent UN sanctions monitors accused Prince of proposing a private military operation - known as 'Project Opus' - to Libya's eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar in April 2019 and helping procure three aircraft for it.

The UN monitors wrote in the report that they had "identified that Erik Prince made a proposal for the operation to Khalifa Haftar in Cairo, Egypt on, or about, 14 April 2019." Haftar was in Cairo at the time to meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The report described Prince's proposal as "a well-funded private military company operation" designed to provide Haftar with armed assault helicopters, intelligence surveillance aircraft, maritime interdiction, drones, and cyber, intelligence and targeting capabilities.

"The Project Opus plan also included a component to kidnap or terminate individuals regarded as high value targets

in Libya," the monitors wrote.

Libya initially descended into chaos after the NATO-backed overthrow of leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 when the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo. The country has been divided since 2014 between the internationally recognized government in its west and Haftar's eastern-based forces.

The UN monitors reported that the air and maritime component of 'Project Opus' had to be aborted in June 2019 after Haftar was unimpressed with the aircraft procured for the operations and "made threats against the team management."

A South African team leader evacuated 20 private military operatives to Malta on inflatable boats, the monitors said.

The rival Libyan administrations agreed a ceasefire in October, but have not pulled back their forces. Haftar is supported by the United Arab Emirates and Russia, while the government is backed by Turkey. Egypt had backed Haftar, but Sisi last week offered his country's support to Libya's interim government.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has demanded an end to foreign interference in Libya.

## News in Brief

BERLIN (Reuters) -- Germany is in a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Chancellor Angela Merkel told lawmakers in her conservative party, two sources at the meeting told Reuters on Tuesday. "We are now in the third wave," they quoted her as saying and said she warned that any easing of lockdown measures introduced late last year and extended until March 7 would have to be done carefully and gradually. The closure of all non-essential businesses and border controls with Austria and the Czech Republic, where there have been outbreaks linked to a more infectious variant of the virus, have helped Germany bring down new daily COVID-19 infections. But a slow vaccination roll-out and the risk of major outbreaks of fast-spreading variants already identified in Germany could make any easing of restrictions more difficult. "We cannot afford ups and downs," Merkel told participants, suggesting she wanted any return to normal life to be done carefully to avoid having to reintroduce lockdown measures if infections start to rise again. She added that making rapid tests more available and boosting testing capacity could make a return to normality more durable, said the sources.

ANKARA/ATHENS (Reuters) -- Turkey said on Tuesday that four Greek jets harassed a Turkish research vessel in the Aegean Sea but Athens denied the accusation, which comes as the two NATO members seek to resume talks over maritime disputes. The Cesme research vessel started survey work last week in international waters between the two countries, prompting Greece to protest. The Turkish defense ministry said the four Greek F-16s approached the Cesme on Monday and one dropped a chaff flare two nautical miles from the vessel. Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Turkey responded with the "necessary retaliation... in line with the rules." "While we are carrying out scientific work, harassment is not appropriate, it is not befitting of good neighborly ties," he told reporters in parliament. A Greek defense ministry official denied the accusations, saying "Greek jets never harassed the Turkish vessel." After a five-year hiatus, Turkish and Greek officials met on Jan. 25 to discuss a decades-old dispute over the delimitation of maritime zones and rights to energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean. The allies have agreed to meet again in Athens.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China said on Tuesday that it condemned and rejected Canada's parliament passing a non-binding motion saying China's treatment of Uighurs is genocide. China have lodged stern representations with Canada, the foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular briefing. Canada's parliament passed a non-binding motion on Monday saying China's treatment of the Uighur Muslim minority in the Xinjiang region constitutes genocide, putting pressure on Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government to follow suit.

DAKAR (Reuters) -- Niger's ruling party candidate Mohamed Bazoum has solidified his lead in a presidential election runoff meant to usher in the first democratic transition of power in the West African nation, election commission data showed on Tuesday. With about 97% of the ballots counted, Bazoum led his challenger, former president Mahamane Ousmane, with 55.5% of the vote, according to provisional results published by the electoral commission. The data showed complete returns from four regions with three outstanding, and 259 out of 266 constituencies reporting.

CONAKRY (Reuters) -- Guinea started an Ebola vaccination campaign on Tuesday, the World Health Organization (WHO) said, as authorities race to contain the first resurgence of the virus there since the world's worst outbreak in 2013-2016. The vaccination was launched in Gouecke, a rural community in N'Zerekore prefecture, where the first cases were detected on Feb. 14, the WHO said, adding that the launch started with vaccination of health workers. "The vaccination uses the 'ring strategy' where all people who have come into contact with a confirmed Ebola patient are given the vaccine, as well as frontline and health workers," the WHO said in a statement. The resurgence of the virus, which causes severe bleeding and organ failure and is spread through contact with body fluids, has alarmed governments in the region and international health organizations, concerned that a major outbreak could overwhelm health infrastructures already battling a pandemic.

KATHMANDU (Reuters) -- Nepal's top court on Tuesday ordered the reinstatement of parliament, dealing a blow to Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli two months after he dissolved the house and called for an early election amid squabbling within the ruling Communist party. The ruling means Oli, who was elected in 2018 following his party's landslide win in an election in 2017, faces a no-confidence vote once parliament resumes. The Himalayan nation has been in political turmoil since December when Oli, who turned 69 on Tuesday, made a sudden decision to call elections 18 months ahead of schedule amid the coronavirus pandemic that has hit the tourism-dependent economy hard. Judges heard more than a dozen petitions challenging Oli's move as unconstitutional and seeking the reinstatement of the house, which still had two years to run when it was dissolved.

## Italian Plans in Congo to Retrieve Body of Ambassador



A van carrying the bodies of Italian ambassador to Democratic Republic of Congo Luca Attanasio and his bodyguard Vittorio Iacovacci is seen at the Goma February 23, 2021.

GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo (Reuters) -- An Italian military plane arrived in eastern Congo on Tuesday to bring home the bodies of its ambassador and his bodyguard, who were shot dead in an ambush on a United Nations convoy, while the militia accused of killing them denied any involvement.

Ambassador Luca Attanasio, 43, and his bodyguard Vittorio Iacovacci, 30, were killed on Monday while traveling in a World Food Programme convoy to visit a school feeding project. WFP driver Mustapha Milambo was also killed.

In the eastern city of Goma, a UN van transported Attanasio and Iacovacci's bodies to the airport, where the Italian cargo plane had landed early in the afternoon. The bodies were due to be flown to Rome.

Democratic Republic of Congo's interior ministry on Monday blamed a Hutu militia called the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), but did not provide any evidence.

The FDLR was founded by senior Rwandan officers and militiamen who the United Nations and others have said helped orchestrate the 1994 geno-

cide in neighboring Rwanda. It is one of around 120 armed groups operating in eastern Congo.

"The FDLR declare that they are in no way involved in the attack," the rebel group said in a statement, condemning what it called a "cowardly assassination".

Congo's presidency said on Tuesday that President Felix Tshisekedi had dispatched his top diplomatic adviser to Goma to support an investigation by local authorities.

A Congolese envoy in Rome was also expected on Tuesday to present a personal letter from Tshisekedi to Italian President Sergio Mattarella, Congo's presidency said.

The FDLR has been blamed for previous kidnappings in the area, including of two British tourists in May 2018. The tourists were held for several days before being freed.

Monday's ambush was carried out by six armed men, who stopped the two-car convoy on the road north from Goma, the presidency said.

The attackers led the seven passengers away from the cars after killing one of the drivers.

Army and park rangers tracked the group and a firefight ensued.

"The kidnappers fired point-blank shots at the bodyguard who died on the spot and at the ambassador, wounding him in the abdomen. The ambassador died of his wounds an hour later at the United Nations peacekeeping hospital in Goma," the presidency said.

## Pentagon Under Fire for Failures at Capitol Raid

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Testifying publicly for the first time about the Jan. 6 insurrection, former security officials were poised to cast blame on the Pentagon, the intelligence community and each other for the disastrous failure to anticipate the violent intentions of the mob and defend the Capitol.

In prepared remarks before two Senate committees Tuesday, former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund was to describe a scene that was "like nothing" he had seen in his 30 years of policing.

"When the group arrived at the perimeter, they did not act like any group of protestors I had ever seen," the ousted chief will say, arguing that the insurrection was not the result of poor planning but of failures across the board from many agencies.

Congress was set to hear from the former U.S. Capitol security officials for the first time about the massive law enforcement failures on Jan. 6, the day the violent mob laid siege to the building and interrupted the presidential electoral count.

Three of the four scheduled to testify Tuesday before two Senate committees resigned under pressure immediately after the deadly attack, including Sund.

Much remains unknown about what happened before and during the assault, and lawmakers were expected to aggres-

sively question the former officials about what went wrong. How much did law enforcement agencies know about plans for violence that day, many of which were public? How did the agencies share that information with each other? And how could the Capitol Police have been so ill-prepared for a violent insurrection that was organized online, in plain sight?

The rioters easily smashed through security barriers on the outside of the Capitol, engaged in hand-to-hand combat with police officers, injuring dozens of them, and broke through multiple windows and doors, sending lawmakers fleeing from the House and Senate chambers and interrupting the certification of the 2020 presidential election. Five people died as a result of the violence, including a Capitol Police officer and a woman who was shot by police as she tried to break through the doors of the House chamber with lawmakers still inside.

The hearing was the first of many examinations of what happened that day, coming almost seven weeks after the attack and over one week after the Senate voted to acquit former President Donald Trump of inciting the insurrection by telling his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his election defeat. Thousands of National Guard troops still surround the Capitol in a wide perimeter, cutting off streets and sidewalks that are normally full of cars, pedestrians and tourists.