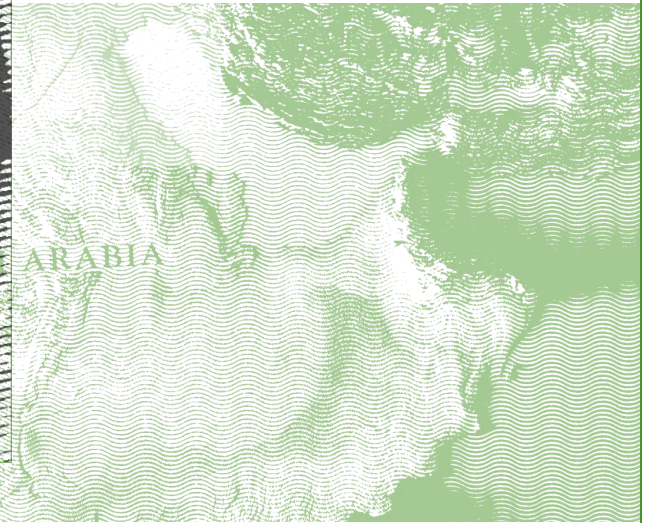
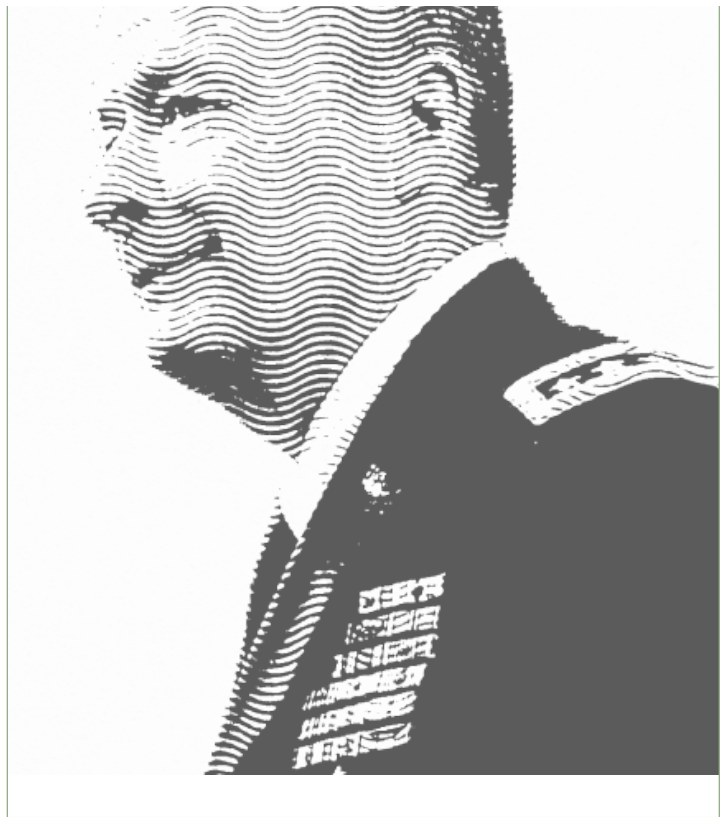




## **RETIRED U.S. GENERALS, ADMIRALS TAKE TOP JOBS WITH SAUDI CROWN PRINCE**





Hundreds of veterans have taken lucrative foreign jobs that U.S. officials approved — but fought to keep secret

From top, Saudi soldiers, Mohammed bin Salman, Keith Alexander, James Jones, U.S. Seal. (Illustration by Frank Hulley-Jones/The Washington Post; Photographs by Abdullah Al-Qadry/AFP/Getty Images, Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images, U.S. Marine Corps, Mark Wilson/Getty Images, U.S. Department of Defense)

By [Craig Whitlock](#) and [Nate Jones](#)

Oct. 18 at 6:09 a.m.



More than 500 retired U.S. military personnel — including scores of generals and admirals — have taken lucrative jobs since 2015 working for foreign governments, mostly in countries known for human rights abuses and political repression, according to a Washington Post investigation.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, 15 retired U.S. generals and admirals have worked as paid consultants for the Defense Ministry since 2016. The ministry is led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, who U.S. intelligence agencies say approved the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a Post contributing columnist, as part of a brutal crackdown on dissent.

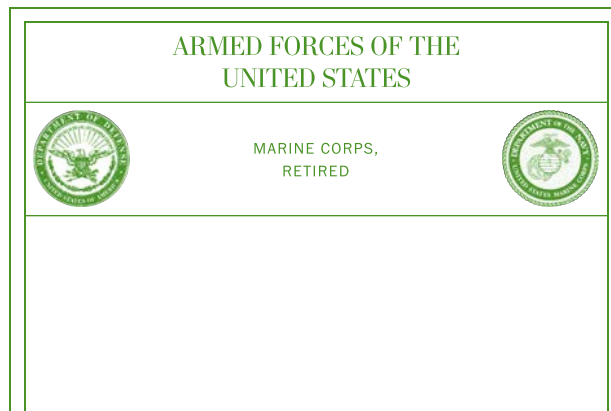
Saudi Arabia's paid advisers have included retired Marine Gen. James L. Jones, a national security adviser to President Barack Obama, and retired Army Gen. Keith Alexander, who led the National Security Agency under Obama and


President George W. Bush, according to documents obtained by The Post under Freedom of Information Act lawsuits.

Others who have worked as consultants for the Saudis since Khashoggi's murder include a retired four-star Air Force general and a former commanding general of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Retired Gen. James L. Jones, center, national security adviser at the time, with Defense Secretary Robert Gates at Camp Lejeune, N.C., in 2009. Jones has two firms that have held contracts with the Saudi Defense Ministry. (Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images)

Most of the retired U.S. personnel have worked as civilian contractors for Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Persian Gulf monarchies, playing a critical, though largely invisible, role in upgrading their militaries.



	RANK ★★★★★ <b>GEN.</b>
	YEARS OF U.S. SERVICE <b>40</b>
	U.S. MILITARY RETIREMENT <b>2007</b>
<b>JAMES L. JONES</b>	
FOREIGN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT Security consultant, Ironhand Security / <b>Saudi Defense Ministry</b> Security consultant, Jones Group Intl. / <b>Government of Libya</b>	
U.S. GOVERNMENT SERVICE • White House national security adviser, 2009-2010 • Commandant, Marine Corps, 1999-2003	

All the while, the gulf countries' security forces have continued to commit human rights abuses at home and beyond their borders. With shared intelligence, aerial refueling and other support from the U.S. government and contractors, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have intervened in Yemen's civil war to disastrous effect, triggering a global humanitarian crisis and killing thousands of civilians, according to United Nations investigators.

Foreign governments have long advanced their interests in Washington by paying Americans as lobbyists, lawyers, political consultants, think tank analysts and public relations advisers. But the hiring of retired U.S. military personnel for their expertise and political clout has accelerated over the past decade as oil-rich gulf monarchies have splurged on defense spending and strengthened their security partnerships with the Pentagon.

#### FOREIGN SERVANTS



#### READING NOW Part 1



**PART 4**  
Air Force hid generals' foreign consulting deals to avoid scandal



**PART 2**  
UAE has paid hundred retired U.S. troops to join its military

Congress permits retired troops as well as reservists to work for foreign governments if they first obtain approval from their branch of the armed forces and the State Department. But the U.S. government has fought to keep the hirings secret. For years, it withheld virtually all information about the practice, including which countries employ the most retired U.S. service members and how much money is at stake.

Saudi soldiers fire artillery from Jazan, on the kingdom's Red Sea coast, toward the border with Yemen in April 2015, just weeks after a Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen's civil war. (Hasan Jamali/AP)

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[i](#) **Click or tap these icons** to see the FOIA documents and other source material.

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To shed light on the matter, The Post sued the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Marine Corps and the State Department in federal court under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). After a two-year legal battle, The Post obtained more than 4,000 pages of documents, including case files for about 450 retired soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. [1](#)

The documents show that foreign governments pay handsomely for U.S. military talent, with salary and benefit packages reaching six and, sometimes, seven figures — far more than what most American service members earn while on active duty. At the top of the scale, active four-star generals earn \$203,698 a year in basic pay.

In comparison, the government of Australia has given consulting deals worth more than \$10 million to several former senior U.S. Navy officials. A consulting firm owned by six retired Pentagon officials and military officers negotiated a \$23.6 million contract with Qatar, a Persian Gulf sheikhdom that hosts a major U.S. air base, though the proposal later fell through. In Azerbaijan, a retired U.S. Air Force general was offered a consulting gig at a rate of \$5,000 a day.

Retired generals and admirals command the most money, but former enlisted personnel can also collect hefty foreign paychecks on top of their U.S. military pensions, records show.

Saudi Arabia hired a former Navy SEAL to work as a special operations adviser for \$258,000 a year. The UAE gave annual compensation packages worth more than \$200,000 to helicopter pilots and \$120,000 to aircraft mechanics. In Indonesia, a government-owned mining firm employed a retired U.S. Marine master sergeant as a transportation consultant at a rate of \$500 a day, plus living expenses. [2](#)

Many U.S. generals and admirals have profited from connections built during wartime by later working for Middle Eastern countries where they were once stationed. Records show that a few American officers even negotiated jobs with foreign governments while they were still on active duty.

Military officials redacted the pay packages for retired generals and admirals, as well as the names of lower-ranking personnel. In legal motions, U.S. officials

argued that releasing the information would violate former service members' privacy and could subject them to "embarrassment and harassment" and "unfairly harm their public reputation."

The Post identified some of the names and redacted details through reporting. It has continued to sue the armed forces and the State Department to obtain the rest of the information.

In September, U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta ruled largely in favor of The Post and ordered the government to release the pay packages and other withheld material.

In his order, Mehta called the government's privacy arguments "unconvincing." In particular, he added, "the public has a right to know if high-ranking military leaders are taking advantage of their stations — or might be perceived to be doing so — to create employment opportunities with foreign governments in retirement." <sup>3</sup>

An attorney for the Justice Department said it was considering an appeal of the judge's decision.

The Project On Government Oversight (POGO), a nonprofit watchdog group based in Washington, filed a similar public-records lawsuit against the State Department to learn more about how former U.S. service members are selling their military expertise to foreign powers. POGO shared the documents it received from the State Department with The Post.

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[Read the Project On Government Oversight's own investigation into the documents](#)

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Brandon Brockmyer, POGO's director of investigations and research, said retired senior military officers often testify before Congress and appear on television to debate national security, but rarely divulge whether they are on a foreign government's payroll.

"The public is working on the assumption that their sole loyalty is to the United States," he said. "The public has the right to know whether and how a foreign power has access to their expertise."

► Retired four-star general now works for Saudi crown prince

## Prohibited without permission

Under federal law, retired U.S. military personnel — generally defined as those who served at least 20 years in uniform and are entitled to a pension — are restricted from receiving anything of value from foreign governments that could compromise their sworn allegiance to the United States.

The prohibition stems from the foreign emoluments clause of the Constitution, which forbids federal officeholders to accept gifts, jobs or titles “from any King, Prince, or foreign State” without the consent of Congress. The law applies to military retirees because they can be recalled to active duty at any time. In 1977, Congress delegated the authority to approve veterans’ foreign work to the Pentagon and State Department.

Those approvals are necessary before the retirees can accept any compensation, even travel expenses, from a foreign government or state-owned company. Retirees may work only as civilians, not as uniformed personnel.

Those seeking authorization for foreign work must also pass a background check and counterintelligence review. The State Department and the armed forces have wide latitude to deny any application they think “would adversely affect the foreign relations of the United States.” But The Post investigation found that approval is almost automatic. Of the more than 500 requests submitted since 2015, about 95 percent were granted.

The armed forces rely on retired military personnel to self-report their intent to work for foreign governments. Many veterans don’t bother. The Post identified scores of retirees on LinkedIn who say they have taken military contracting jobs in the Persian Gulf, but for whom there is no record of federal approval.



There is no criminal penalty for violating the law. Enforcement is almost nonexistent.

The Defense Department can withhold retirement pay from those who ignore the rules. But the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, which administers military payrolls, has docked the pensions of “fewer than five” people, according to Steve Burghardt, an agency spokesman. He declined to identify the individuals, specify the time frame or provide other details, citing privacy concerns.

Documents show that one case involved retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, 63, who briefly served as national security adviser to President Donald Trump. An investigation by the Defense Department’s inspector general found that Flynn collected \$449,807 from Russian and Turkish interests in 2015, one year after he retired from the Army, but failed to clear his work with U.S. officials. <sup>4</sup>

ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES		
	ARMY, RETIRED	
	RANK ★★★ LT. GEN.	
	YEARS OF U.S. SERVICE 33	
	U.S. MILITARY RETIREMENT 2014	
MICHAEL FLYNN		
FOREIGN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT Speaker / RT television network, Russia		
U.S. GOVERNMENT SERVICE • White House national security adviser, 2017 • Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, 2012-2014		

Flynn’s unauthorized work for foreign governments came to light after he was photographed sitting next to Russian President Vladimir Putin at a 2015 gala in Moscow celebrating the 10th anniversary of Russia Today, or RT, a propaganda arm of the Kremlin. RT paid Flynn \$38,557 to travel to Moscow and speak at the event.

Flynn’s ties to Russian officials led to his downfall. In 2017, he pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States. Trump pardoned him three years later.

An image from a Dec. 10, 2015, video shows retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, right, reaching out to shake hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin at a Russia Today anniversary gala in Moscow. (Ruptly/AP)

The inspector general opened an investigation into Flynn’s work for foreign governments in 2017, but the case took five years to resolve. In May, the Army ordered him to forfeit the \$38,557 that he received from the Moscow trip. But Army officials decided, without explanation, not to penalize him for the remaining \$411,250 he collected from Russia and Turkey. <sup>5</sup>

Flynn’s work for Russia helped prompt Congress to pass legislation in 2019 and 2020 requiring the Pentagon to submit annual reports to lawmakers about retired generals and admirals who work for foreign powers. Since then, the Pentagon has complied, but its reports include only a few lines of information and do not name the generals and admirals.

Of the 500 cases reported to the armed forces and State Department since 2015, only one involved Russia. In that instance, a retired Air Force colonel sought — and received — permission in March 2020 to take a \$300,000 job as an executive with a satellite-launch company based in the United States but majority-owned by the Russian government. <sup>6</sup>

The documents released in response to The Post’s lawsuits include no other instances of retired military personnel seeking to work for nations that the U.S. government categorizes as “foreign adversaries,” such as China, North Korea, Iran, Cuba or Venezuela.

## ‘We did real, serious, detailed work’

Almost two-thirds of the jobs taken by U.S. veterans have been in the Middle East and North Africa, where governments pay top dollar for American military expertise honed by two decades of war and counterterrorism operations in the Arab world.

Documents show that 25 retirees from the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps were granted permission to take jobs in Saudi Arabia. Most were high-ranking officers who received job offers to serve as consultants to the Saudi Defense Ministry.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at an investment conference in Riyadh on Oct. 24, 2018. Journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul three weeks earlier. (Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images)

Since 2015, the ministry has been ruled by Prince Mohammed, whose leadership has upended the status quo in the Middle East.

Two months after Mohammed became defense minister at age 29, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of regional forces — with intelligence, refueling and logistical support from the United States — that intervened militarily in Yemen’s civil war. The move further destabilized the kingdom’s much poorer neighbor, and an estimated 375,000 people have died in the fighting or of hunger.

In June 2017, Mohammed amassed even more power when his father, 82-year-old King Salman, shook up the Saudi line of succession and named him crown prince, or heir apparent. Mohammed quickly seized control of the kingdom’s institutions and sidelined potential competitors to the throne, arresting more than 200 princes and other prominent Saudis.

He also cracked down on dissenters outside the kingdom.

In October 2018, a team of Saudi assassins flew from Riyadh to Istanbul to silence Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi-born journalist who had criticized the crown prince in opinion columns in *The Post*. Khashoggi was lured into the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, where the hit squad killed him and dismembered his corpse with a bone saw, according to a Turkish government investigation.

Saudi officials first denied any knowledge of what happened to Khashoggi. Later, they admitted that Saudi agents were responsible and blamed them for carrying out a “rogue operation” without the crown prince’s knowledge. But U.S. intelligence agencies concluded Mohammed had ordered the killing and noted that seven members of the hit squad served on his personal security detail.

A prominent beneficiary of Mohammed’s reign has been 78-year-old James L. Jones, the retired general who served as Obama’s national security adviser and had been commandant of the Marine Corps. Jones owns two Virginia-based consulting firms — Ironhand Security LLC and Jones Group International LLC — that have held contracts to advise the Saudi Defense Ministry.

Jones applied for authorization to work for the Saudis in November 2016 and received U.S. approval four months later, documents show. In an interview, Jones said he was approached by Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister, who asked him to meet with Mohammed during the prince’s visit to the United States that year to discuss the possibility of consulting for the Defense Ministry. <sup>7</sup>

“The crown prince basically said that he was concerned about the amount of money that Saudi Arabia was spending on military hardware and equipment, as opposed to capabilities,” Jones said. “[He] was wondering if there was something that we could do to help them in transforming their Ministry of Defense and the armed forces into something that would be more useful and less expensive.”

Saudi Arabia spends more on its military than any other nonnuclear power in the world. In 2021, its defense budget exceeded \$50 billion — roughly the same as in Britain, a country with nuclear arms.

Jones said he agreed to conduct an organizational assessment of the Saudi armed forces for Prince Mohammed starting in 2017, but only after checking with officials at the White House, State Department and Defense Department and obtaining their support. “Had that not been the case, I would not have done it,” he added.

To carry out the project, Jones assembled a team of about a dozen former senior Pentagon officials, including William S. Cohen, who served as secretary of defense in the Clinton administration. A spokesman for Cohen said he worked on the team for about a year.









Documents show that four retired generals obtained U.S. permission in 2017 to work with Jones’s team in Riyadh: Charles Wald, a four-star Air Force general; Michael Barbero, a three-star Army general; Arnold Punaro, a two-star Marine general; and John Doucette, a one-star Air Force general. <sup>8</sup>

## Others mentioned in the story



ARMED FORCES OF THE  
UNITED STATES

ARMED FORCES OF THE  
UNITED STATES

	AIR FORCE, RETIRED			ARMY, RETIRED		
	RANK ★★★★ <b>GEN.</b>	YEARS OF U.S. SERVICE <b>35</b>		RANK ★★★ <b>LT. GEN.</b>	YEARS OF U.S. SERVICE <b>38</b>	
<b>CHARLES WALD</b>	U.S. MILITARY RETIREMENT <b>2006</b>	<b>MICHAEL BARBERO</b>	U.S. MILITARY RETIREMENT <b>2013</b>	<b>ARNOLD PUNARO</b>		
FOREIGN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT Security consultant, Ironhand Security / <b>Saudi Defense Ministry</b> Principal adviser, Jones Group Intl. / <b>Government of Libya</b>		FOREIGN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT Security consultant, Ironhand Security / <b>Saudi Defense Ministry</b> Principal adviser, Jones Group Intl. / <b>Government of Libya</b>  <div style="text-align: center;"> <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 15px; padding: 2px 10px;">+ Show all</span> </div>		FOREIGN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT Security consultant, Ironhand Security / <b>Saudi Defense Ministry</b> Principal adviser, Jones Group Intl. / <b>Government of Libya</b>		
U.S. GOVERNMENT SERVICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy commander, U.S. European Command, 2002-2006</li> <li>Commander, U.S. Central Command Air Forces, 2000-2001</li> </ul>		U.S. GOVERNMENT SERVICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Director, Joint IED Defeat Organization, 2011-2013</li> <li>Commander, NATO Training Mission - Iraq, 2009-2011</li> </ul>		U.S. GOVERNMENT SERVICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff director,</li> <li>Director of Re</li> </ul>		

Barbero and Doucette did not respond to requests for comment. Punaro, 76, a longtime Pentagon adviser and former congressional staffer, said he worked for Jones as a consultant from April 2017 to April 2018, traveling to Riyadh every month or two.

“We did real, serious, detailed work,” Punaro said, adding that the group briefed U.S. officials on their progress. He declined to say how much he was paid, citing a confidentiality clause in his contract with Ironhand Security. <sup>9</sup>

Wald, 74, spent 35 years in the Air Force, including as deputy commander of U.S. forces in Europe and as a forward air controller and F-16 pilot who flew in combat in Vietnam and Bosnia. He headed Jones Group International's business in the Middle East until last year. In an interview, he said he felt it was important to help the Saudis improve their military so the United States didn't have to act as their primary protector. "It's time for the U.S. not to be doing all the defense of the Middle East," he said. <sup>10</sup>

Though the U.S. military has refused to disclose the compensation packages earned by retired generals, other public records show that the Saudis pay their consultants generously. Four lower-ranking retired officers working for Jones — two Marine colonels, an Army colonel and a Navy captain — earned salaries ranging from \$200,000 to \$300,000 to advise the Saudi Defense Ministry. Military officials redacted those officers' identities, asserting that the public had no right to the information. <sup>11</sup>

Jones's companies continue to advise the Saudis on how to reorganize their military command structure so that the armed forces can operate jointly instead of as separate fiefdoms, documents show. Traditionally, the primary mission of the Saudi military and security services has been to guarantee the protection and survival of the al-Saud family, with different princes controlling different branches as competing power centers.

Officials with the Saudi Embassy in Washington did not respond to requests for an interview.

Because of Saudi Arabia's vast oil deposits, U.S. presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt have pledged to help defend the kingdom militarily. Saudi Arabia buys more U.S. weapons than any other country in the world by far. More than 200 active-duty American troops are stationed in Saudi Arabia as trainers and advisers.

But Washington has long struggled to reconcile its robust security partnership with Saudi Arabia and the kingdom's troubling record on human rights.

The U.S.-Saudi security partnership came under severe strain after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks — 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals — and again over the war in Yemen, and then again after Khashoggi's assassination. During his 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden promised to make Saudi Arabia "pay the price and make them, in fact, the pariah they are."

Yet, less than two years later, President Biden traveled to Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, and exchanged a fist bump with Prince Mohammed to reaffirm the relationship. During their meeting at the Al Salam Royal Palace, the two leaders addressed a range of issues, including oil production and human rights.

Since then, the relationship has again hit the skids. On Oct. 5, Saudi Arabia, Russia and other members of the OPEC Plus cartel announced they would slash oil production to raise prices. The decision infuriated the Biden administration.

It accused the Saudis of siding with Moscow, whose oil is under Western sanctions because of the war in Ukraine. Biden warned that the Saudi government will face “consequences,” but didn’t say how.



President Biden meets with Prince Mohammed at Al Salam Royal Palace in Jiddah on July 15. Upon Biden's arrival, the two men fist-bumped. (Bandar Algaloud/Saudi Royal Court/Reuters)

## **After Khashoggi, business as usual**

Another high-profile senior officer who has done business with Saudi Arabia is Keith Alexander, 70, who served as director of the National Security Agency as well as the first head of the U.S. Cyber Command.

In July 2018, Alexander’s consulting firm, IronNet Cybersecurity, signed a partnership agreement with the Saudis to develop a new institution: the Prince Mohammed bin Salman College of Cyber Security. The college billed itself as the kingdom’s first training program for cyberwarfare and was established under the direction of Saud al-Qahtani, an influential aide to the crown prince. <sup>12</sup>



ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES	
	ARMY, RETIRED
	RANK ★★★★★ GEN.
	YEARS OF U.S. SERVICE 40
	U.S. MILITARY RETIREMENT 2014
<b>KEITH ALEXANDER</b>	
FOREIGN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT [REDACTED]	
<input type="button" value="+ Show all"/>	
U.S. GOVERNMENT SERVICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director, National Security Agency, 2005-2014</li> <li>• Commander, U.S. Cyber Command, 2010-2014</li> </ul>	

Qahtani also oversaw a network of computer hacking and surveillance operations that targeted the crown prince’s critics and enemies around the world, including Khashoggi. U.S. officials have accused him of managing the plot against the Post contributor. In November 2018, the Treasury Department imposed [sanctions](#) on Qahtani, declaring that he “was part of the planning and execution of the operation that led to the killing.”

Yet two months later, during the Trump administration, the State Department approved Alexander’s request to help develop the cyberwarfare college and serve on its board of advisers, documents show. U.S. officials redacted details on how much money Alexander stood to earn. <sup>13</sup>

Alexander, who is the founder, chief executive and chairman of IronNet, declined to comment. Bridget Bell, a spokeswoman for IronNet, said that the firm’s contract with the Saudis “focused on the development of the college’s educational efforts” and that the arrangement lasted until 2020.

Alexander was originally supposed to serve on the college’s board of advisers, but he never attended any meetings “nor worked directly on the company’s contract,” Bell said. She added that Alexander and IronNet did not “have any interaction” with Qahtani.



Army Gen. Keith Alexander, seen here in 2013, retired from the military in March 2014. He soon founded IronNet Cybersecurity, which went on to receive U.S. approval — weeks after Khashoggi's killing — to help the Saudis develop a cyberwarfare college. (Win McNamee/Getty Images)

Alexander has also served as a cybersecurity consultant to other foreign governments. Since 2017, he has sought U.S. approval for four separate deals to advise the governments of Singapore and Japan. <sup>14</sup>

Many U.S. companies ceased doing business with Saudi Arabia in the weeks after Khashoggi's murder, including lobbyists and public relations firms that had represented the kingdom in Washington. At the time, a spokesperson for Jones [told the Daily Beast](#) that the retired Marine general was “disturbed” and “horrified” by Khashoggi's death, and downplayed his firms' work in Riyadh, saying one contract with the Saudis had recently ended and a second was scheduled to expire soon.

In fact, Jones's firms not only remained in Saudi Arabia but expanded their partnership with the Defense Ministry after Khashoggi's slaying.

In his interview with The Post, Jones said he was “very shocked and surprised at what evidently happened” to Khashoggi. But he said Jones Group International applied for, and accepted, more work from the Saudi Defense Ministry in 2019 because “we received encouragement” from the Trump administration to do so. He said his companies now hold four Saudi contracts and employ 53 Americans in Riyadh. Of those, eight are retired generals and admirals, and 32 are lower-ranking military retirees.

“Nobody ever came to us and said, ‘Hey, we think you ought to pull out,’” Jones added. “I don't know what the alternative would have been if we had pulled away. I was worried that [the Saudis] would possibly drift off to other relationships with the Chinese and the Russians, and I didn't think that would be very good.”

But Wald, the retired four-star Air Force general, said he and other Jones Group consultants debated whether to stop working with the Saudis after Khashoggi's assassination. "We discussed that almost every day," he recalled. "We asked ourselves, are we basically turning a blind eye toward immorality? Or supporting a legitimate government?" In the end, they decided to stay.

Wald said Saudi Arabia had made "measurable progress" on reforming its military by the time he stopped working for Jones Group in September 2021. Yet he said he was glad to leave Riyadh. "I certainly don't regret that I'm not there anymore," he added. "The Saudis aren't always easy to work with."

In recent years, Jones Group International has expanded into other foreign markets. In 2019, Jones, Wald and two retired Army lieutenant generals working for the company — Michael Barbero and Douglas Lute — applied for and obtained U.S. approval to advise the Libyan government on the disarmament and reintegration of militia fighters, documents show. <sup>15</sup>

Jones Group was hired by the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli at the time. U.S. military officials redacted information on how much money Libyan officials paid the retired generals. But a retired Army colonel who applied for federal approval to work for Libya with Jones Group reported that he expected to earn \$10,000 a month. <sup>16</sup>

In his application, Wald noted that when he was an Air Force colonel, he planned Operation El Dorado Canyon, the 1986 U.S. airstrikes on Libya that nearly killed then-ruler Moammar Gaddafi. Wald told The Post that Jones Group worked in Libya for only a few months. <sup>17</sup>

“Libya is a nut case,” he said. “Their government is ineffective. Their military is ineffective. ... Their military is basically a ragtag group of militias.”

Jones said his company stopped working in Libya at the State Department’s request because of the country’s political instability. Lute, who served under Jones in the Obama White House as a deputy national security adviser, declined to comment. Barbero, an infantry officer who held senior command positions in Iraq and retired from the Army in 2013, did not respond to requests for an interview.

## Rubber-stamping the requests

Officials from the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps declined interview requests about their approval processes for foreign employment. But records show they rarely reject a job request.

R. Philip Deavel, a lawyer who oversaw the Air Force program from 2012 to 2016, said in an interview that he denied a small number of applications by retired personnel to work for “Third World countries with a reputation for brutality in conflict.” He declined to name the countries.

Overall, however, Deavel said he viewed most of the job opportunities as supportive of U.S. foreign policy. He said the countries involved were almost always friendly to Washington and looking for American expertise to make their militaries more professional. “If you embed with another military as trainers, it may not make that country into Switzerland, but it won’t make it worse,” he said.

Once the armed forces approve employment requests, the State Department’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs performs a final review. But records produced by the government suggest that the bureau functions as little more than a rubber stamp, authorizing all but five cases since 2015.

State Department officials declined interview requests from The Post to discuss their criteria for approving applications from retired military personnel to work for the Saudis and other foreign governments. But in a written response to questions, the department said it took human rights considerations into account and was “confident” that security cooperation with the Saudis “will serve to elevate respect for human rights.”

“The President has made it clear that the rule of law and respect for human rights are front and center in U.S. foreign policy. We will continue decades of U.S. partnership to help strengthen Saudi Arabia’s defenses through security cooperation, defense trade, training, and exercises, but we are also clear-eyed about the challenges ahead,” it said. <sup>18</sup>

One of the few cases denied by the State Department concerned a retired Navy commander who landed a \$291,000-a-year job with Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI), a state-owned arms supplier, as its director for weapons systems. The Navy approved the request in August 2020, but the State Department overruled the decision four months later, concluding that the arrangement would “adversely affect the foreign relations of the United States.” No further explanation was given. <sup>19</sup>

SAMI was founded by the Saudi government in 2017. It is wholly owned by the Public Investment Fund, a \$620 billion sovereign wealth fund controlled by Prince Mohammed. SAMI’s mission is to help the kingdom create a domestic arms industry and reduce its dependence on the United States and other foreign suppliers. <sup>20</sup>

In August 2020, the Navy gave preliminary approval to another retired officer — Timothy Carter, a former executive with Northrop Grumman — to take a job with SAMI as its executive vice president for weapons and missiles. Carter’s annual compensation was even more lucrative: \$514,200 in salary and living expenses, plus a yearly bonus worth up to \$330,000.

What happened to Carter’s application after that is unclear. A Navy spokeswoman said the service has been waiting more than two years for the State Department to make a final determination. The State Department did not respond to questions about the case. Carter did not respond to requests for comment.

Regardless, Carter didn’t wait for a green light from U.S. officials before he began working for the Saudis. SAMI announced his hiring on Sept. 4, 2019, almost a full year before he received tentative approval from the Navy. Documents show Navy officials were aware he had already taken the job. <sup>21</sup>

Under federal law, the Defense Department can force retirees to pay back any foreign money they receive before their applications are approved. But there is no evidence the armed forces have ever imposed penalties in such cases.

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#### **POST REPORTS: THE RETIRED MILITARY CASHING IN WITH REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS**

A new Washington Post investigation has uncovered the fact that hundreds of veterans have taken lucrative foreign jobs — often for countries with known human rights abuses. U.S. officials approved these contracts — but fought to keep them secret.

 **Listen** 22 min [Transcript](#)

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## **Working without approval**

The Post found that many military retirees take foreign jobs or gifts without notifying the U.S. government at all. The armed forces and the State Department have no mechanism to identify such cases. Unless rulebreakers come to public

attention — as did Flynn — or someone reports them, they have no reason to fear getting in trouble.

Karl Eikenberry, 70, is a retired three-star Army general who commanded U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan and later served as the U.S. ambassador in Kabul. Since 2021, Eikenberry has also described himself in multiple online [biographies](#) as a [senior adviser](#) to the Saudi Defense Ministry. But there is no record of his seeking clearance for the job from the Army or State Department. He did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Retired Gen. Karl Eikenberry, then U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, at the July 2011 funeral for a slain brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. In years since, Eikenberry has described himself as a senior adviser to the Saudi Defense Ministry. (Massoud Hossaini/AFP/Getty Images)

By examining LinkedIn profiles and other publicly available sources, The Post identified 20 other retired officers — including four generals and admirals — who reported working for Jones Group International or Ironhand Security as advisers to the Saudi military but for whom there is no record of federal approval.

Among them are Edward Cashman, a retired Navy rear admiral; Sean Jenkins, a retired Army major general; and Cathal O'Connor, a retired Navy rear admiral. All began working for Jones Group in 2021, within weeks of their retirement from the U.S. military.

None of the three responded to requests for comment. Jones said his employees are instructed to “complete all of the requirements that they need to do” before working with the Saudis.

Other generals have moved to Saudi Arabia for employment after they were forced to retire from the U.S. military for misconduct.

Bradley Becker, a retired Army three-star general, was hired by Jones Group International in September 2020 as a project manager in Riyadh. Becker’s military career [ended in 2019](#) after the Army relieved him of command for engaging in “an inappropriate relationship with a woman” while he was separated from his wife. Becker did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Last year he told Task & Purpose, a news site that covers the military, that he did not commit adultery and was merely communicating with a woman while going through a divorce.

The rules about what foreign jobs require U.S. government approval are fuzzy and open to interpretation. The armed forces have said authorization is necessary if veterans work directly for a foreign government, or if foreign officials can exert control over their employment or compensation by a private firm.

Retirees who are assigned by large U.S. companies — such as Lockheed Martin or General Dynamics — to work with foreign governments are generally exempt. The distinction is that foreign governments cannot hire or fire those individuals, and that their employers can reassign them to other jobs if they fall out of favor with their foreign clients.

For example, retired Navy Rear Adm. Steven G. Smith worked in Riyadh from 2017 to 2020 as an adviser to the Defense Ministry under a contract with Booz Allen Hamilton, a major international consulting firm. Smith did not seek approval for the work from the Navy and the State Department. He told The Post he did not need it because he worked directly for Booz Allen “and was not involved in any contract issues with the Saudis.”

The military services have at times applied inconsistent standards on what qualifies as foreign control. The Marines, for example, have concluded that retirees who work for U.S. subsidiaries of firms owned by foreign governments do not need U.S. approval. Other services have said they do.

In May 2020, the Army denied an application by a retired officer who had a \$300,000-a-year job lined up with Jones Group International to serve as a consultant to the Saudi Defense Ministry. It cited disciplinary problems in his military record.

At the same time, the Army said it was “unclear” whether the officer needed U.S. authorization because he was working for Jones Group International, an American company. The Army informed the officer that if the Saudi government had “control over your activities,” then he could not take the job. <sup>22</sup>

The Army redacted the name of the officer from the documents, but details of his service record match the biography of David Haight, another general who left the U.S. military under a cloud. Haight was demoted three ranks — from major general to lieutenant colonel — and forced to retire in 2016 over a personal misconduct scandal.

An Army investigation determined that Haight, a married Army Ranger who had served as a brigade commander in Afghanistan, embraced a “swinger lifestyle” and carried on an 11-year affair with a female government employee. Adultery is a punishable offense under military law, and Army officials said Haight’s sexual escapades put him at risk of blackmail. <sup>23</sup>

Haight began work in Riyadh as a consultant to the Saudis in July 2019, eight months before the Army handed down its decision on his application, according

to his LinkedIn profile. In a brief phone interview, Haight said he left the job in December 2021. He added that while he worked in an advisory capacity for the Saudi Defense Ministry, his contract was with Jones Group International.

Asked if he had any concerns about the Saudi government's human rights record, Haight said Jones Group "was always very careful that our efforts were consistent with U.S. policy to bring stability to the Middle East" and to professionalize the Saudi military.

The distinction between state-controlled firms and independent ones is often blurry in nondemocratic countries, especially absolute monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, where the royal family dominates commerce and there is little transparency in the business sector.

In February, for example, a brand-new Saudi defense contractor — Scopa Industries Corp. LLC — opened for business with an ambitious agenda.

Describing itself as the kingdom's "preeminent defense company," Scopa said its purpose was "to meet the guidance" of Prince Mohammed by contributing to "the defense revolutionary process" and creating domestic jobs. The firm is owned by the Ajlan family, a conglomerate run by three billionaire brothers. In practice, however, Saudi companies cannot operate in the defense sector without the blessing of the crown prince.

Scopa Industries' website features five American senior advisers: Barbero, retired Navy Vice Adm. Rich Brown, retired Rear Adm. Michael A. Brown, retired Army Col. Dominic Caraccilo and retired Air Force Col. Todd Harmer.

Harmer said in an email that his activities for Scopa Industries "are in full compliance with US laws and regulations," but declined to comment further. The other American advisers to Scopa Industries did not respond to interview requests.

Another Saudi defense contractor, Vinnell Arabia LLC, employs hundreds of Americans to train the Saudi Arabian national guard. Vinnell Arabia is a joint venture of Northrop Grumman, the giant U.S. defense firm headquartered in Falls Church, Va., and Arab Builders for Trading, a Riyadh firm owned by a brother-in-law of the kingdom's late King Abdullah IV.

As of 2015, a Northrop Grumman subsidiary owned 51 percent of Vinnell Arabia, according to court papers the company filed in response to a federal lawsuit in Virginia. But the Riyadh-based firm also submitted a declaration stating that it was subject only to Saudi law and that "no American employer — including Northrop Grumman — exerts any control over Vinnell Arabia."

Documents show that none of Vinnell's American employees have applied for permission from U.S. officials to train Saudi forces since at least 2015. Vinnell Arabia did not respond to a request for comment.

#### **About this story**

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