



Retired U.S. Military Taking Lucrative Jobs With Repressive Governments

Since 2015, more than 500 retired U.S. military personnel, including generals and admirals, reportedly have taken lucrative jobs with foreign governments known for human-rights abuses and political repression, according to a *Washington Post* [report](#).

“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 *Washington Post* contributing columnist, as part of a brutal crackdown on dissent,” said the *Post* [article](#).



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Paid advisors for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 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 under the Freedom of Information Act.”

The *Post* investigation found that other military consultants continued to work for the Saudis since Khashoggi’s murder, including a retired four-star Air Force general and a former commanding general of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

The majority of the retired military personnel have worked as civilian contractors for Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Persian Gulf monarchies, assisting in upgrading their militaries. The contractor’s work has supported the gulf countries’ security forces, which have been involved in committing human-rights abuses, not only at home but beyond their borders as well.

“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,” the *Post* reported.

For many years, foreign governments paid Americans as lobbyists, lawyers, political consultants, think-tank analysts, and public-relations advisors to help promote their interests in Washington. It’s only been in the past decade that oil-rich gulf monarchies have splurged on defense spending and strengthened their security partnerships with the Pentagon with the hiring of retired U.S. military personnel.

Congress allows retired troops as well as reservists to work for foreign governments as civilian consultants if they first obtain approval from their branch of the armed forces and the U.S. State



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Department. But as the *Post* investigation revealed, “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.”

The secret hirings fueled the *Post* investigation in May of 2020 to sue the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the State Department in federal court under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). It took two years and an additional [lawsuit](#) in April of 2021 before the *Post* obtained more than 4,000 pages of documents, including case files for about 450 retired military personnel.

The released documents found 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.”

According to the *Post*, “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.”

While retired brass can make the most money, former enlisted personnel also are getting 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,” stated the *Post* article. “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.”

Via the lawsuit, the *Post* sought to uncover redacted pay packages for the retired military personnel, after learning through records that a few American officers even negotiated jobs with foreign governments while they were still on active duty. However, U.S. officials argued in court that releasing the information would violate former service members’ privacy and could subject them to “embarrassment and harassment” and “unfairly harm their public reputation.”

Last month, 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.

The *Post* reported, “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.’”

Many Americans, including this writer, believe that former U.S. service members should not be allowed to sell their military expertise to foreign powers. The retired military personnel should remain loyal and uphold their oaths to serve and protect the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic. But it seems that greed comes before loyalty to these profiteers.

Under federal law, retired U.S. military personnel “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.”



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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 also applies to retired military personnel because they can be recalled to active duty at any time.

Approvals for these retirees are necessary before they can accept any compensation, even travel expenses, from a foreign government or state-owned company. And retirees may work only as civilians, not as uniformed personnel. Plus, those seeking foreign work must pass a background check and counterintelligence review. The *Post* investigation found that approval is almost automatic. Of the more than 500 requests submitted since 2015, about 95 percent were granted.

Surprisingly, retired military personnel are to self-report their intent to work for foreign governments. Many 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,” the report noted. There is no criminal penalty for violating the law. Enforcement is almost nonexistent.

The *Post* investigation delves deeper into the intricacies of our federal government’s partnerships with Saudi Arabia and other human-rights abusers and repressive foreign governments. Clearly the investigation has revealed the hypocrisy and disloyalty acted out by our government and those retired military personnel receiving benefits for what could very well be construed as an act of treason.



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