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**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
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 FAX : 24835620/1  
 CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
 ACCOUNTS : 24835619  
 COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
 E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net  
 Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Focus

## KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MINNESOTA OFFICER'S MANSLAUGHTER TRIAL

By Amy Forliti and Steve Karnowski

The manslaughter trial of a Minnesota police officer who shot and killed a black motorist last summer will resume Monday with closing arguments. Officer Jeronimo Yanez shot and killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop last July in the Minneapolis suburb of Falcon Heights. Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, streamed the immediate aftermath live on Facebook, which brought the case extra attention. Here are some highlights of the case:

### What happened

Yanez killed Castile after pulling him over for a broken taillight July 6. After Yanez approached the car, Castile informed him that he was carrying a gun. Squad car video shows him saying, "Sir, I have to tell you, I do have a firearm on me." Things escalated quickly from there, with Yanez opening fire five seconds later and striking the 32-year-old cafeteria worker with five of the seven shots he fired. Reynolds then pulled out her phone and began livestreaming and narrating. Yanez, who is Latino, is charged with second-degree manslaughter, which is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, and two lesser counts of endangering the safety of Reynolds and her daughter for firing his gun into the car near them.

### Trial themes

Prosecutors called several witnesses to try to show Yanez acted recklessly and unreasonably. They repeatedly played the squad car video and pointed out that Yanez never told Castile to "freeze" or stop moving. Prosecution experts testified that if they were told a driver had a gun, they would order him to put his hands on the steering wheel or dashboard, which Yanez did not do. Jeffrey Noble, a use-of-force expert, testified there was "absolutely no reason" to believe Castile was a threat.

The defense said that Yanez, 29, reacted to the presence of a gun and was trained to preserve his own life in the face of imminent danger, pointing out that traffic stops are dangerous and officers need to think quickly. They also suggested that Castile was partly to blame for his death because he was high on marijuana, which prosecutors dispute, and that he disobeyed Yanez's instructions. The defense's own use-of-force experts said they think Yanez was right to shoot.

### Girlfriend a key witness

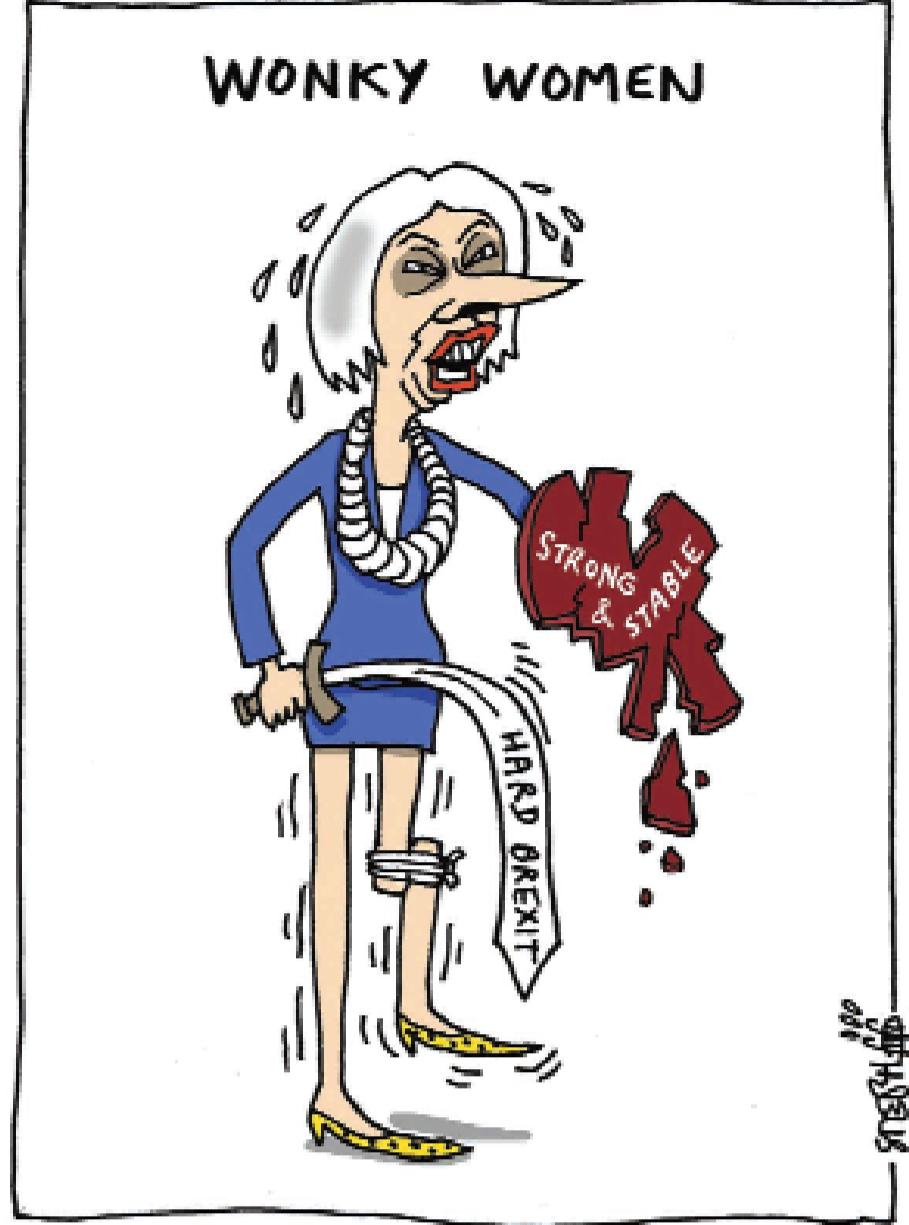
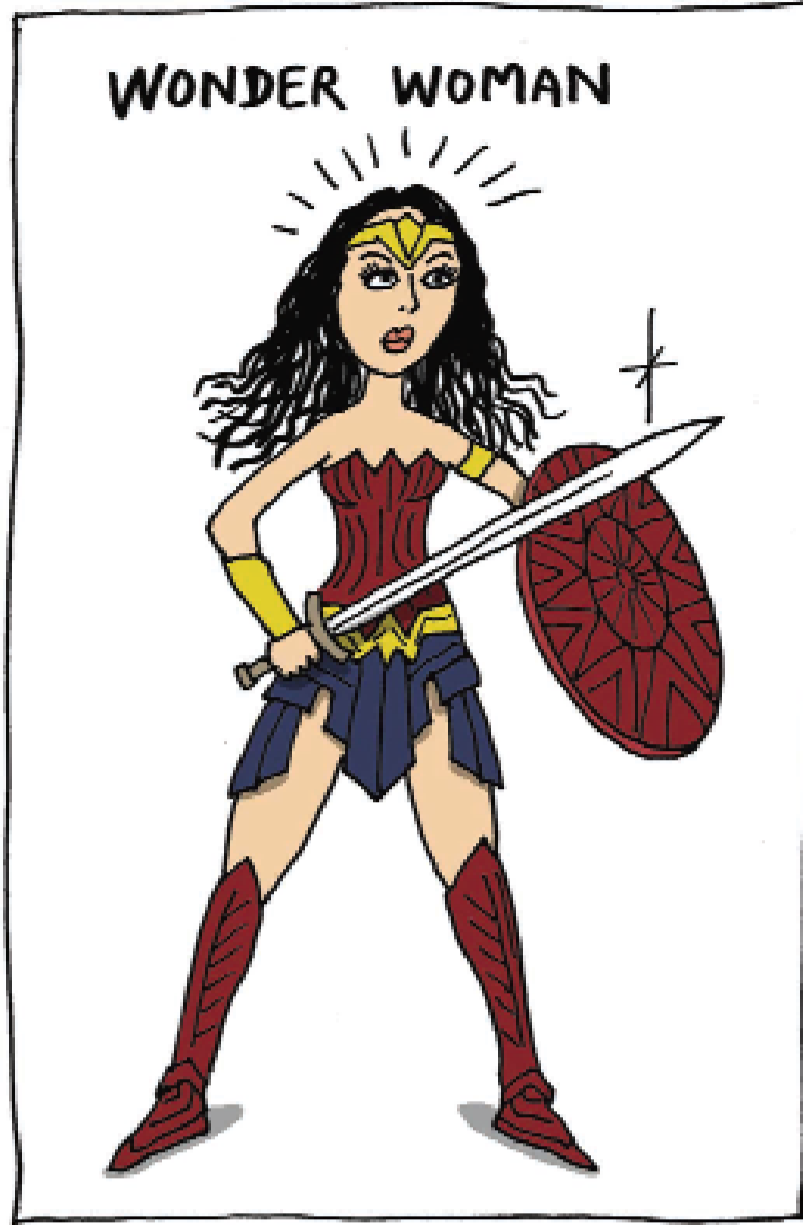
Reynolds testified that she began recording the aftermath because she feared for her life and wanted to make sure the truth was known. Defense attorneys highlighted inconsistencies in what is said on her video and in statements later to police. Was Castile putting his hands up, like she said in her video, or was it just one hand? Was he reaching for his wallet or unbuckling his seat belt? And was that wallet in his right or left back pocket? She also told several different stories about marijuana in the car, first saying it was hers, later saying in an interview that she and Castile bought it earlier that day, and finally testifying that it was Castile who bought it, not her.

### The officer's own words

After he shot Castile, Yanez is heard on squad car video telling a supervisor variously that he didn't know where Castile's gun was, then that he told Castile to get his hand off it. He told investigators he saw Castile's hand form a C-shaped grip of the sort to grab a thick-gripped pistol. Yanez's backup testified that Yanez told him he saw a gun. Yanez testified Friday that he clearly saw a gun and that Castile ignored his commands to stop pulling it out of his pocket.

His voice choked with emotion as he talked of being "scared to death" and thinking of his wife and baby daughter in the split-second before he fired. As for the recording in which he said he didn't know where the gun was, he explained, "What I meant by that was I didn't know where the gun was up until I saw it in his right thigh area." Defense attorneys also argued that Castile was high on marijuana. But a prosecution expert testified there's no way to tell when Castile last smoked marijuana or whether he was high. — AP

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## QATAR'S TIES WITH IRAN AND ISLAMIST GROUPS

By Aya Batrawy and Sarah El Deeb

The political crisis engulfing Qatar stems from accusations by its Arab neighbors that it supports terrorism. Qatar denies the allegations, but its ties with Iran and embrace of various Islamist groups have brought intense scrutiny, made it a regional outlier and created enough smoke to suggest a fire. Last week, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain severed ties with Qatar amid a slew of punitive measures. On Friday, the four Arab states upped the pressure by naming 59 people and several charities linked to Qatar on a terrorist list.

Governments across the region routinely cite terrorism as justification to clamp down on political opposition and rights activists. Some groups Qatar has backed - such as the Muslim Brotherhood - are seen by many as a legitimate political force. Others, including some hard-line Sunni rebel factions in Syria, are not that different ideologically from groups that Saudi Arabia backs there. Here's a look at the various groups Qatar's accused of supporting and its relationship with them:

### Qaeda and Islamic State

Qatar's Arab neighbors have accused it of backing Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group's ideology across the region, from Syria to the Sinai Peninsula. Experts and groups in Syria say Qatari finances have indirectly propped up militant groups. Similar accusations were leveled at Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in the early days of Syria's 2011 uprising, but experts say these governments amended their official stances and financing laws.

Some express concern that the row between Saudi Arabia and Qatar could undermine all finances to the Syrian opposition - where, on the ground, the lines are blurred over which groups cooperate with radicals. Hassan Hassan, a Syria expert, said Qatar has never supported Al-Qaeda or IS directly. However, he said Qatar has supported Ahrar Al-Sham, whose founders are linked to Al-Qaeda. For its part, Saudi Arabia once hosted members of Ahrar Al-Sham at a Syrian opposition conference in its capital.

### Muslim Brotherhood

The Islamist Sunni group remains one of the region's most polarizing. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt view it as a direct threat to their rule and deem it a destabilizing force. However, the Brotherhood's offshoots remain active in Jordan and Tunisia. The Brotherhood was elected to power in Egypt after protests toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and Qatar aided the Brotherhood-led government in Cairo with billions of dollars. It was a key supporter of the group's offshoots in Syria and Libya. Qatar argues it supported Egypt as a whole, and not one particular faction, when the Brotherhood was in power. Egypt's military ousted the Brotherhood and unleashed a lethal crackdown against its members amid mass protests in 2013. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt outlawed the group and branded it a terrorist organization, accusing it of plotting attacks. Brotherhood affiliates in the Gulf have been arrested. Gulf monarchies also accuse Qatar of providing financial support, a safe haven and even citizenship to Islamist opposition figures from their countries.

### Hamas, the ruler of Gaza

The Palestinian group, an offshoot of Egypt's Brotherhood, is considered a terrorist organization by Israel and its Western allies. The group, which rules the Gaza Strip, has fought three wars with Israel and is seen by some in the Arab world as an armed resistance force against Israeli occupation. Saudi Arabia says Qatar must sever ties with Hamas. Qatar has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in roads, housing and a major hospital in the Gaza Strip offering a lifeline for jobs in the devastated area that is under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade. Its support for the territory makes Qatar one of its few foreign backers. Qatar says its work in Gaza is "purely humanitarian" and its engagement with the group has been in the context of internationally backed peace talks.

### Hostages for ransom

A deal negotiated recently to release kidnapped members of Qatar's ruling family has been a source of anxiety for Gulf leaders, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which views

Iran as its top adversary. Qatar reportedly paid hundreds of millions of dollars to an Iranian-backed Shiite militia that had kidnapped the 26 hostages on Dec. 16, 2015 from a desert camp for falcon hunters in southern Iraq. Egypt has asked the UN Security Council to investigate reports that Qatar "paid up to \$1 billion to a terrorist group active in Iraq" to free the hostages, which would violate UN sanctions.

Qatar says it only supported the Iraqi government financially for its efforts in the release of hostages, and that it did not deal with armed groups there. The deal also allegedly resulted in the evacuation of residents of predominantly Shiite villages in Syria, where Iran's proxies hold sway. Several people close to the negotiations say Qatar also paid a hefty sum to Islamist groups in Syria, including one linked to al-Qaeda, for the evacuation of the residents. They told The Associated Press that the talks were probably the region's most complex and sensitive hostage deal.

### Iran, Shiite powerhouse

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain accuse Qatar of supporting Shiite militant groups in both countries. Violence has increased in recent weeks between militants and Saudi security forces in a predominantly Shiite town in the country's east. In Bahrain, the Sunni-led monarchy crushed an uprising by majority Shiites there in 2011 and continues to crack down on peaceful dissent. Bahraini security forces have since been targeted by local Shiite militants.

Saudi Arabia has also accused Qatar of backing Iranian-allied rebels in Yemen, known as Houthis. However, Qatar was a member of a Saudi-led coalition bombing the Houthis in Yemen. Experts say there is no evidence to support the claims, but that the accusations appear to stem from negotiations for a transfer of power in Yemen in 2012. Qatar and Saudi Arabia were in disagreement over how to go about it, and Qatar was accused of trying to sabotage a Saudi-led initiative by working with Houthis. Qatar's ambassador in Washington Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani has said that while the country has ties with Iran and shares with it a vast underwater natural gas field its stance is similar to that of other Gulf Arab states. — AP

## SLOVENIA HIDEOUTS SPILL COLD WAR SECRETS

By Ismet Hajdari

Almost three decades after the end of the Cold War, secrets from the era of espionage and power games are now resurfacing in Slovenia. In Kocevje, a forested region in the south, authorities have opened a massive 1950s bunker - complete with tunnels, narrow passages and chunky blast-resistant steel doors - to the public this month for the first time. Until recently, the existence of the 800-sq-m labyrinth had still been a secret, albeit not a very good one.

"There have always been rumors about it" among locals because of its location on a sealed-off military base, newly-appointed bunker guide Mihael Petrovic said. For the underground tour, visitors are taken from the town of Kocevje to the Skrilje bunker in small vans and asked to leave their mobile phones at the entrance. Those wishing to get a more authentic taste of life under the communist regime can choose to be blindfolded during the 15-minute ride to the hideout.

A portrait of Yugoslav strongman Josip Broz, nicknamed "Tito", sternly watches over streams of tourists as they amble between dusted-off outdated machines, switchboards and screens. Although it is smaller than other bunkers, its mint condition provides an excellent insight into Slovenia's communist past, said Petrovic. "People now have the opportunity to learn about a period of our history that is far too little known," he added.

### Communist elite shelters

Tito ruled over the former Yugoslavia from 1945 until his death in 1980 in Ljubljana, having been named president for life. He oversaw a Socialist regime that

was far from democratic but nevertheless much softer than behind the Iron Curtain. The leader is admired notably for driving out the Nazi German occupying forces in World War II with his partisan fighters and standing up to Russian leader Joseph Stalin. But critics accuse him of being responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of political dissidents.

The traces of his controversial reign remain visible throughout countries that once belonged to the republic, which collapsed in 1990. Up to 50 secret military bunkers were built across Yugoslavia during

the Cold War, according to retired Slovenian army officer Marijan Kranj, who wrote a book on the topic. Tito ordered their construction after he survived a German airborne attack in May 1944 while hiding in a bunker in the Bosnian town of Drvar.

The concrete structures were not only shelters for the communist elite, but also served as arms and ammunition factories, storage rooms and underground air bases. The expertise of Yugoslav engineers was even exported to non-aligned countries including Iraq and Libya, which today still harbor bunkers dating back to communist times.

### Room with a spying view

But other relics from the communist past are surfacing too. An hour's drive west of Kocevje, a fully-equipped surveillance facility was discovered in March at the renowned Hotel Jama, next to Slovenia's famous Postojna cave, where Tito used to regularly stay and host guests. During renovation works, hotel owner Marjan Batagelj noticed a locked iron door at the back of the building. "We couldn't find a key so I had the lock destroyed. We thought we would find a storage room but instead a brand new world emerged, a space that didn't appear on any of the hotel plans," said the 55-year-old, who bought the place six years ago.

Behind the white door were three connected wiretapping rooms featuring dusty 1970s listening equipment and desks with stacks of papers showing city names and numbers. Empty boxes of audio tapes lay piled up inside a cupboard. Batagelj speculated that the rooms were probably built in the late 1960s when the hotel was under construction. "Experts believe it was a key information gathering place for civil and military affairs," he said. "This was one of the most important hotels in former Yugoslavia. Tito liked to bring his guests to the Postojna cave and many of them spent the night in Hotel Jama."

Batagelj said he realized many of his older employees had known about the room for years - agents had to cross the hotel to access it - but never mentioned it. "They were either afraid or too blinded by ideology to speak about it. Even today many think it would have been better not to speak about it at all," he added. Batagelj now hopes to turn the space into a "spying museum". "This is a slice of history and there's no longer any need to hide behind ideological considerations." — AFP



KOCEVJE: A man walks inside of the Skrilje bunker located in a forest 90 meters below the ground on a sealed-off military base near town of Kocevje, Slovenia. — AFP