



[U.S. Expands Charges Against Ex-Twitter Employees Accused of Spying for Saudi Arabia](#)

After previously dismissing spying charges against two former Twitter employees and another person earlier this week, the U.S. government has unloaded a new superseding indictment which accuses all three individuals of even more offenses. The two ex-Twitter employees, Ahmad Abouammo and Ali Alzabarah, and the third man Ahmed Almutairi had originally been charged with fraudulently accessing private information and acting as illegal agents of a foreign government for spying on Twitter users who were critical of the Saudi royal family. However, with this new indictment, the individuals have now been charged with seven offenses instead of two. The updated list of seven charges include: acting as an agent for a foreign government without notice to the attorney general; wire fraud; money laundering; destruction, alteration, or falsification of records in federal investigations; and criminal forfeiture.

In the original complaint, the Department of Justice alleged that the former Twitter employees, Abouammo and Alzabarah, had accessed information such as telephone numbers, IP addresses, biographical information, browser information, and a log of Twitter actions completed by the user without authorization or consent from the tech giant. The new indictment has provided additional specifics on the actions taken by the rogue employees by shedding light on the individuals that were targeted. Among others, celebrities, journalists, and public interest organizations operating in the Middle East were all victimized by the information theft. In particular, Abouammo and Alzabarah were searching for comments critical of the Saudi royal family.

The new indictment has also shed light on the suspects' ties to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, by revealing a payment of \$200,000 from a Saudi official to a shell company and bank account in Lebanon which was operated by Abouammo. Abouammo is also accused of lying to FBI investigators over his connections to Saudi Arabia, after he provided a falsified, backdated receipt from a payment he received from Saudi Arabia for what he claimed was "media consulting services." Abouammo also reportedly lied about receiving a watch from Saudi officials, and his communication with them.

Investigators alleged as part of the initial complaint that up to 6,000 accounts could have been compromised, including the accounts of 33 people who were the subject of emergency disclosure requests from the Saudi government to Twitter. A security engineer for Twitter reportedly told investigators that the accused men would have had no "legitimate business purpose" to access the accounts and collect the data they did. When the plot was revealed, Ali Alzabarah was placed on administrative leave by Twitter while the company investigated. However, Alzabarah boarded a flight to Saudi Arabia with his family the following day and has not returned to the United States.

Saudi Arabia is no stranger to controversy over criticism of its royal family. In 2018, respected journalist and Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi was murdered by agents of the Saudi royal family in Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate. Criticism of the royal family is forbidden in Saudi Arabia, which has gone to great lengths to apply this policy to individuals living abroad as well.