

Two US Park Police officers charged in 2017 killing of Virginia motorist Bijan Ghaisar

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On Thursday, Fairfax County Commonwealth Attorney Steve Descano announced charges of manslaughter and reckless use of a firearm against United States Park Police officers Lucas Vinyard and Alejandro Amaya. The two federal police officers have been asked to turn themselves in to face charges in the state of Virginia for the 2017 shooting death of 25-year-old Bijan Ghaisar.

The officers face a maximum sentence of 15 years imprisonment: 10 years for manslaughter and 5 years for the reckless discharge of their weapons. Ghaisar's 2017 killing occurred after the 25-year-old accountant, who was unarmed, was involved in a minor traffic accident while driving on George Washington Memorial Parkway, a federally administered road in Northern Virginia.

Ghaisar's vehicle was struck from behind. The other driver was subsequently cited for failure to maintain proper control of his car. Ghaisar drove away from the scene without stopping.

For unclear reasons, Federal Park Police officers sought to pull over Ghaisar's vehicle, following him after a brief chase into a residential area. After stopping and starting several times, Ghaisar stopped at a crossing, where the officers leapt out of their cruisers with weapons drawn. The motorist once again pulled forward. At that point, officers Vinyard and Amaya fired 10 shots at Ghaisar.

The officers' bullets struck him on the side of the head four times and hit him in the wrist once. The 25-year-old died 10 days later from his injuries.

In announcing the charges, Descano stated that nothing Ghaisar did during the night of November 17, 2017 "should have led to his death" at the hands of federal police. In an interview with WTOP radio in

Washington DC, Descano said he did not bring murder charges against Vinyard and Amaya because "the intent that they had, when they did it, doesn't rise to the malice level that is required for murder." He continued: "A murder charge would have required us to prove malice, which is hatred, anger, vengeance, driven by bad thoughts and evil intent."

Descano made these statements despite police dashboard footage showing police officers striking Ghaisar's vehicle with their feet and weapons as he drove away after momentarily stopping. Lawmakers in Virginia and members of Ghaisar's family have called his death a murder.

"That it has taken nearly three years to bring charges against the two officers is mind-boggling evidence of the extent to which law enforcement officers so often elude justice," stated a *Washington Post* editorial on the charges against Vinyard and Amaya. "To suggest the officers were justified in firing their weapons 10 times into Ghaisar's vehicle, hitting him four times in the head, is to contend that police are beyond the scope of justice."

In 2019, the US Department of Justice refused to bring charges against the policemen, claiming they were unable to prove that the officers acted "with the specific intent to deprive [Ghaisar] of the right to be free from an unreasonable use of force." Efforts to bring charges against Ghaisar's killers at the state level also met with hurdles. The previous Fairfax County Commonwealth attorney, Raymond F. Morrogh, left office seemingly leaving the case cold.

The *Post* ludicrously called the charges against the two officers a "momentous step toward accountability and justice" against "trigger-happy law enforcement," while acknowledging that "the path ahead is unlikely to

be easy.” As the *Post* well knows, the percentage of killer cops in the United States who are prosecuted, let alone convicted, is negligible.

According to data accumulated by Mapping Police Violence, between 2013 and 2019 no charges were laid in 99 percent of police killings.

The charges come amid an upsurge of popular protests against police brutality and murder. Police in the US kill over 1,000 people a year. The charges also come less than a month after mass protests erupted in Louisville, Kentucky following the state attorney general’s refusal to charge two police officers who murdered Breonna Taylor, an unarmed 26-year-old paramedic, last winter.

US Park Police have increasingly been involved in acts of aggression and brutality against the public. Park Police took part in assaults on protesters who demonstrated in Washington DC during the spring and summer against the killing of George Floyd. They used military-style weapons against unarmed people.

They were also mobilized to attack peaceful protesters outside the White House on June 1, when Trump threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy active-duty troops against demonstrators across the country.



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