

Notes on police violence

Unarmed 25-year-old shot nine times at close range by US Park Police

By Harvey Simpkins
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US Park Police gunned down Bijan Ghaisar in his vehicle after he was the victim in a minor traffic incident on November 17 of last year. Ghaisar was unarmed. Police dashcam video of the incident was not made available until last Wednesday, January 24.

Ghaisar was initially hit from behind by another vehicle in a minor car accident, with little property damage and no injuries. The accident occurred in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington. Ghaisar drove away from the accident.

Approximately 10 minutes after driving away, video recorded by a Fairfax County police officer's dashcam starts. In the video, Park Police are seen following Ghaisar's vehicle in a marked SUV, with lights and sirens on. After Ghaisar stopped his car in the right lane, the police stopped alongside him. Immediately, an officer jumped out of the passenger side of the police vehicle with a gun drawn and reached for Ghaisar's door handle.

Likely frightened by an extremely over-aggressive response, Ghaisar drove off at a normal speed. As he did so, the police officer who had leapt out of his car slammed his gun against Ghaisar's rear driver side window. Both the Fairfax and Park Police vehicles then followed Ghaisar for about a minute and 35 seconds before Ghaisar made a right turn at a stop sign and then stopped his vehicle a second time.

Immediately, two Park Police officers approached the vehicle with guns drawn, and aimed at Ghaisar. Again, after seeing the guns drawn, Ghaisar drove off. In response, one of the Park Police officers kicked Ghaisar's rear passenger side tire.

Ghaisar drove for about another minute, again with both the Fairfax and Park Police in pursuit. As he

stopped for a third time, the Park Police pulled up in front of Ghaisar, perpendicular to his vehicle. An officer immediately emerged with his gun raised at Ghaisar's passenger side window. As Ghaisar slowly began to drive off, the officer immediately shot him four times before a second officer emerged, at which point another shot was fired. As Ghaisar's car lurched forward, one of the officers fired off two more shots. Then, as the car slowly rolled into a stop sign, with Ghaisar obviously incapacitated and unable to control the vehicle, an officer fired off two more shots.

After the release of the video, Thomas Connolly, one of the Ghaisar family lawyers, and a former federal prosecutor, told the *Washington Post* that "No reasonable officer could have understood that Bijan had committed a violent act which would justify the pursuit here."

After being shot four times in the head, and suffering severe brain damage, Ghaisar survived 10 days in the hospital before dying on November 27. The two Park Police officers have been on administrative leave since the shooting. Neither the US Park Police nor the FBI, which is now handling the investigation, have provided any explanation for the use of deadly force, nor why the police were chasing a car that had been rear-ended in a minor car accident.

Bijan's family recently issued a statement on Facebook stating, "We know that Bijan was shot by U.S. Park Police on November 17th, and we know little else. We have not received any explanation from the authorities about why the reaction to a minor car accident, where Bijan was the person hit, was a police pursuit ending in Bijan's killing. We do not know the names of the police officers who killed my son."

In the wake of the shooting, Ghaisar's mother told the *Post*, "It's not right that one side of this situation, the FBI and the authorities, has all the information and we don't have access to anything. Where in the world do we live? How can somebody's child be killed in this country in this century and nobody comes to talk to you? What is that?"

On December 7, about 1,000 people attended a vigil held for Ghaisar on the National Mall. In the wake of the release of the dashcam video, and the lack of a response from the police, Ghaisar's family also organized a demonstration on Friday outside the Department of Interior, which governs the US Park Police.

Los Angeles police drag and arrest Metro passenger for having foot up on a second seat

On January 22, a Los Angeles police officer forcefully dragged 18-year-old Bethany Nava from a Metro subway train after she refused his command to leave the train for having her foot up on a second seat.

In video of the incident, the police officer says, "You're getting off the train right now. I already told you what to do, and you disobeyed me. Come on. Get ready to walk."

The police officer then pulled Nava's arm, saying "Come on, stand up." As he pulled her off the train, Nava looped her elbow around a handhold bar, afraid that she would lose her bag and cellphone. "I paid to be on this train, asshole. Stop!," the young woman exclaimed as the officer yanked on her arm.

After violently removing her from the train, the officer proceeded to arrest her. The officer then repeated, "I told you what to do." Nava can be seen on the video visibly shaken by the officer's extreme behavior. The police detained Nava and absurdly gave her a citation for "engaging in boisterous or unruly behavior," before releasing her.

Even more outrageous, police arrested and jailed 22-year-old Selina Lechuga, who can be seen in the video coming to Nava's defense after she was pulled off the train. At one point, Lechuga says to the officer, "You're going to take her to jail for putting her foot on the seat? Are you fucking kidding me? You really have nothing to do."

Lechuga was detained in jail for 24 hours for alleged "battery" of a police officer before posting \$20,000 bail.

The killing of Ghaisar and the arrests of Nava and Lechuga show yet again the police resorting to the most extreme measures against the population, without even the pretext of suspicion that a crime, however minor, was committed. Police in the United States see the population as a potentially hostile force, with the use of excessive, and often lethal force, the first and best option no matter the situation.

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