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Suit: Santa Clara cops mistreated Muslim customs agent in raid

By **Henry K. Lee** Updated 4:30 pm, Monday, May 4, 2015



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Muhammad Moneeb, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer, said his house was trashed by Santa Clara police as they searched for a camera.

Santa Clara police trashed the home of a Muslim federal customs agent, leaving his Quran and religious writings strewn about, while searching for a \$300 camera that he knew nothing about, according to a federal civil rights lawsuit filed Monday.

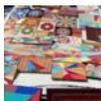
Muhammad Moneeb, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent, said police, acting on a “baseless accusation,” were armed with assault rifles and accompanied by dogs when they used a battering ram on March 27, 2014, to break down the door of the home on Lincoln Street he shared with his parents.

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During the “military-style” raid, police left the family’s copy of the Quran and other religious writings on the floor, took pictures of framed religious calligraphy prints written in Arabic and squeezed out toiletries, said the suit filed in U.S. District Court in San Jose.

“They went out of their way to destroy this particular house,” said the family’s attorney, **Michael Haddad**. “They’re looking for a camera, and they squeezed out all the toothpaste from the tube and removed all the wax from the deodorant. No one’s hiding a camera in there. This whole law enforcement response was overkill and made no sense.”

Santa Clara police Lt. Kurt Clarke declined to comment Monday, citing the pending litigation. The suit, which seeks unspecified damages, named the city, Police Chief **Michael Sellers** and 15 officers.

Moneeb; his father, **Muhammad Ikram** (an agricultural specialist with the customs agency); and mother, Hazakat Ikram, said they were mistreated because they are Muslim Pakistani Americans.

The police visit centered around the whereabouts of a dashboard camera that had last been in the possession of Moneeb’s uncle, Aftab Choudry. Choudry had leased a Prius to drive for Uber and got into a car crash on Feb. 8, 2014, Haddad said. Choudry removed the contents of the car, including the dashboard camera, before he had the car towed to Moneeb’s driveway, believing it would be safe there, the suit said.

The camera got lost, and police went to Moneeb’s house two days after the crash to look for it, according to the suit. Moneeb told officers that he didn’t know where the camera was, repeatedly told them to leave and insisted that the home couldn’t be searched without a warrant.

“Ultimately, I worry that Mr. Haddad’s allegations that such action was taken because Mr. Moneeb was a Pakistani American Muslim who asserted his rights when law enforcement officers entered his home in the middle of the night, over his objection without a warrant, are true,” said Brice Hamack, an attorney with the Council on American-Islamic Relations in San Francisco.

Prosecutors charged Moneeb with possession of stolen property even though the camera was never found, Haddad said. The case was later dismissed, but for a time Moneeb was placed on restricted duty and had his gun removed, the attorney said.

Moneeb's uncle later agreed to a civil settlement with the camera owner, agreeing to donate \$400 to charity.

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