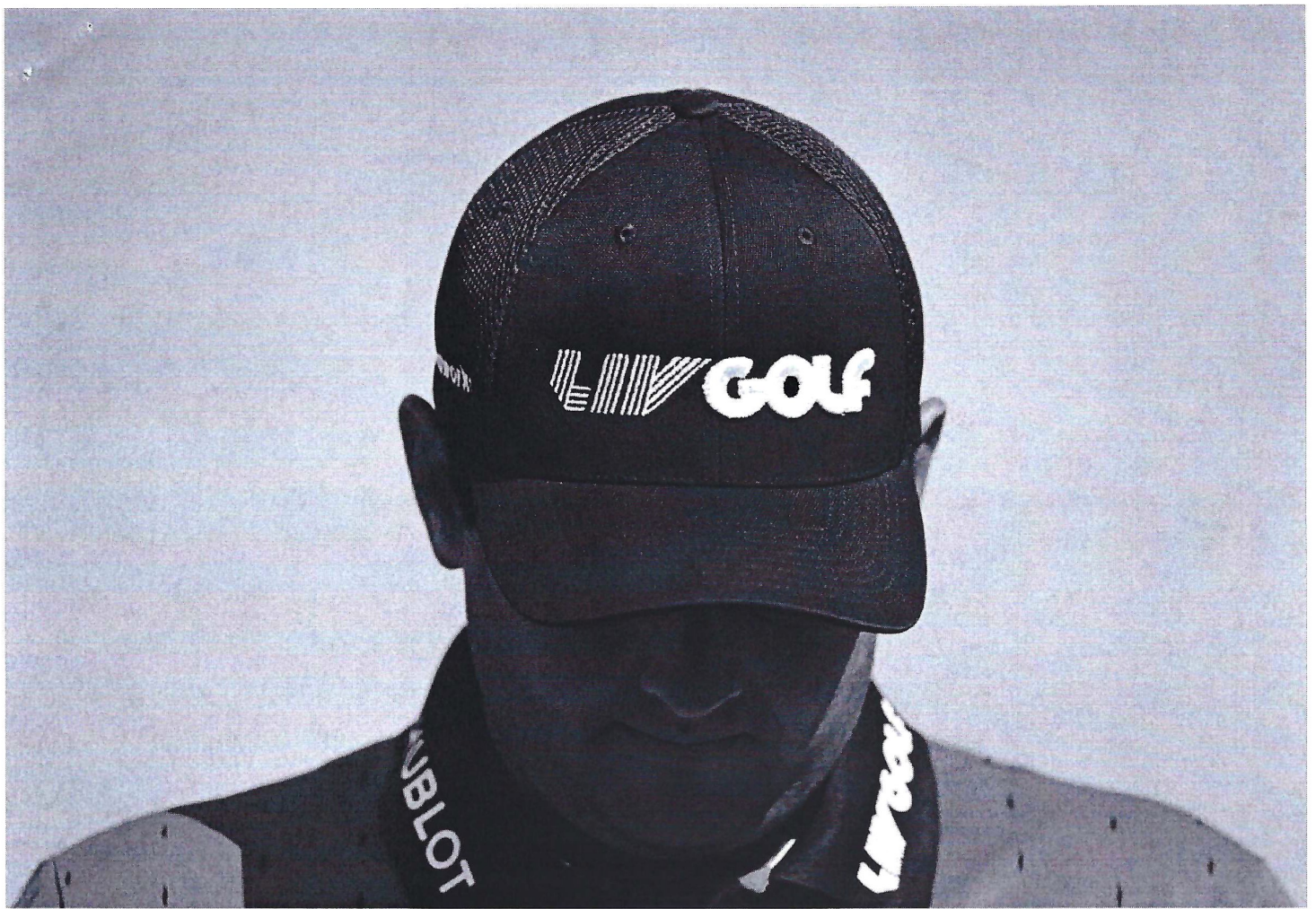


# **Saudi-Backed LIV Golf Is Using PGA Suit to Get Data on 9/11 Families, Court Told**

- PGA's PR firm says Saudis seek documents on unrelated clients
- LIV argues PGA used PR firm to coordinate 9/11 group protests



*Photographer: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty Images*

By Erik Larson

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Saudi Arabia-financed LIV Golf and its feud with PGA Tour Inc. has divided fans, tested players' allegiances and sparked legal battles.

It's now taken a more sinister turn.

LIV, backed by the \$676 billion Saudi sovereign wealth fund, was accused on Tuesday of using its US lawsuit against PGA to “build an intelligence file” on families of 9/11 victims who have been critical of the kingdom and its new professional golf circuit. The upstart has countered that the PGA is secretly running a “smear campaign” to take it down.

At the heart of the matter is PGA's public-relations firm, Clout Public Affairs. Led by an ex-chief of staff to US Senator Ted Cruz, one of its other clients is 9/11 Justice, which is involved in a separate suit against Saudi Arabia related to the 2001 terror attacks and other atrocities, including the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Now Clout is also challenging a subpoena issued by LIV and accusing the tour of tapping a third-party firm to track the 9/11 group.

“LIV has brazenly hired a firm in the United States to track and monitor the activities of these 9/11 victims and families, while simultaneously, through the underlying lawsuit, using antitrust discovery to now sift Clout's communications with these families, even if they have nothing to do with LIV, golf, or golfers,” Clout said in the filing.

LIV's lawyer, Keith Frost of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

The legal wrangling marks a dramatic escalation in the fight between the two competing golf circuits, which until now has largely centered around the Saudi project luring some of the sport's biggest stars, including Phil Mickelson and Cameron Smith, with huge paychecks and unconventional tournaments.

### **'Sportswash' Accusations**

LIV critics have argued Saudi Arabia is using its splashy golf events – including two hosted at properties owned by former President Donald Trump – to “sportswash” the kingdom's well-documented human-rights abuses. When PGA began suspending players who left for LIV, the Saudi tour sued, calling the PGA an “entrenched monopolist” that was trying to choke off its supply of star

golfers.

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As part of the evidence-gathering process, LIV demanded that Clout hand over its communications with the PGA and any internal documents about the US tour. LIV last month sued to enforce the subpoena, arguing that the US golf tour had hired Clout in part to arrange for 9/11 families to protest at LIV events. LIV said it didn't buy the PGA's claim that it needed to protect US golf from the "taint" of Saudi Arabia.

"As it turns out, the PGA Tour itself has been secretly fomenting the very anti-Saudi sentiment that it now uses to justify its illegal conduct," LIV said in a motion to force Clout to comply with the subpoena.

LIV has said the PGA turned over evidence in the antitrust case demonstrating that it "organized and likely funded" the 9/11 families' protests.

Clout is balking at LIV's demands, contending it violates the First Amendment privilege between Clout and its client. It blasted the upstart for suggesting that the PGA needed to coordinate anti-Saudi sentiment in the US, accusing LIV of being in a "dream world."

"LIV's casual assumption that it is a simple golf league that was suddenly smeared with an unexpected political attack is utterly false," Clout said. "LIV

was conceived as a PR vehicle by Kingdom consultants as a last-ditch effort to dull the massive public backlash from the Khashoggi murder and other current events.”

## [Read More: Saudi Wealth Fund Claims Immunity in PGA-LIV Golf US Court Fight](#)

Clout’s president is David Polyansky, who, along with serving as Cruz’s chief of staff, was a senior adviser to Scott Walker’s 2016 presidential campaign. Chief Operating Officer Samantha Dravis worked at the Environmental Protection Agency during the Trump administration.

Clout said the firm and 9/11 Justice have a “reasonable fear” that disclosure of their internal communications “will provoke retaliation.”

It said the subpoena could reveal phone numbers, individual names and email addresses, or information about plans to continue criticizing Saudi Arabia – all of which “could well lead to hacking or other retaliation.”

The case is LIV Golf v. Clout Public Affairs, 22-mc-00126, US District Court, District of Columbia (Washington, DC).

*(Updates throughout with details on the allegations.)*