



**For Middle East Press**

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**AGC Studios**

And

**Image Nation Abu Dhabi**

**Presents**

**Original Title**

AL KAMEEN

**English Title**

The Ambush

**Written By**

Kurtis Birtell & Brandon Birtell

**Directed By**

Pierre Morel

**Produced By**

Derek Dauchy

Jennifer Roth

**Executive Producer**

Stuart Ford

**Cast**

*Marwan Abdulla Saleh* – Sergeant Ali Al Mismari

*Khalifa Al Jassem* – Warrent Officer Bilal Al Saadi

*Mohammed Ahmed* – Sergeant Ali Al Hindasi

*Abdulla Saeed Bin Haider* – Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Al Mazrouie

Saeed AlHarsh – Captain Saeed Al Shehhi

*Hassan Yousuf Alblooshi* – Abdullah Al Balooshi

*Khalifa AlBahri* – Ahmed Al Sayari

*Ghanim Nasser* – Opposition Leader

*Mansoor Alfeeli – Colonel Jamal Al Khatri*

**Director of Photography**

Thierry Arbogast, AFC

**Production Designer**

Nasser Zou'bi

**Edited By**

Frederic Thoraval

Shahnaz Dulaimy

**Music By**

Harry Gregson-Williams

**Supervising Sound Editor**

Frederic Dubois, MPSE

**Costume Designer**

Angela Schnoeke-Paasch

**Casting By**

Alwiya Thani

Ahmed Al Sayed

**Running Time**

109 minutes

**Country of Production**

UAE/France

## **Genre**

War, Action, Drama

## **Logline**

When three Emirati soldiers are ambushed in a hostile territory, their commander leads a daring mission to rescue them.

## **Short Synopsis**

During a routine patrol in a mountainous, a UAE army vehicle is ambushed by enemy combatants, as it travels through a narrow canyon. Trapped and under heavy fire from the armed militants, and now facing a desperate situation, their courageous unit commander attempts a daring mission to rescue his trapped soldiers.

## **Long Synopsis**

It is the winter of 2018, the men and women of the UAE military are deployed on an aid mission. At the Mocha Base, spirits are high as three Emirati soldiers anticipate an imminent return home.

While on their final routine patrol, the three soldiers, Ali, Bilal and Hindasi are ambushed by heavily armed militants on their route through a narrow canyon. Trapped, wounded, and out of communication range, the three soldiers realize the gravity of their situation. They are running out of options, munitions – and time.

Back at the base, their commander receives word and realises that the assault on the UAE army patrol was premeditated. A rescue mission is quickly put into action, but will air and land support reach the men in time; and will they survive?

Based on true events, *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* is a tension filled race to pull off a dangerous mission in an unforgiving landscape.

## **Character Profiles:**

### **Sergeant Ali Al Mismari**

Ali is an introspective, straight-talking man; uncompromising and not afraid to speak his mind. He adheres to strong values, a quality some find strict and slightly old-fashioned, and that causes

friction with other soldiers in his unit. He is a committed husband and father, who feels conflicted that he is not there when his family needs him.

### **Warrent Officer Bilal Al Saadi**

Dependable, calm, and level-headed, Bilal is Ali's long-time friend and confidant. He understands Ali's personality and tries to diffuse situations of conflict between him and other soldiers, despite finding himself at odds with Ali at times.

### **Sergeant Ali Al Hindasi**

Ali and Bilal's teammate and fellow soldier, Hindasi is friendly, easy-going and looks up to both Ali and Bilal. He is reassured by their presence, particularly in stressful situations.

### **Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Al Mazrouie**

Lieutenant Colonel Al Mazrouie is a brilliant military mind who leads from the front lines. Authentic, selfless, and forward planning, he chiefs a dangerous rescue mission to bring the trapped soldiers home.

### **Captain Saeed Al Shehhi**

Al Mazrouie's second in command who enjoys being on the front lines and will risk it all to save his brothers. A force not to be reckoned with on the battlefield.

### **Ahmed Al Sayari**

A young combat medic who is somewhat of an idealist. Initially, he is shaken by the intensity of the clashes but he quickly recovers and rises to the occasion.

### **Abdullah Al Balooshi**

An experienced combat medic whose sarcasm is a way of covering his anxiety. He constantly tries to stay focused and calm as he performs his duties.

### **Opposition Leader**

A cunning war monger, who is tasked by his superiors to trap and capture Emirati soldiers at any cost.

### **Colonel Jamal Al Khatri**

Colonel Jamal Al Khatri is a wise and knowledgeable military commander, who is both risk adverse and calm in the face of challenges.

### **Warrent Officer Zakariya Al Falasi**

Zakariya admires Ali's integrity but is often frustrated by his strict nature which causes clashes between them. He finds Ali's uncompromising attitude difficult to understand and often more difficult to accept.

### **Director's Statement**

I have always wanted to direct a war movie, particularly one that is based on true events.

The story of *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* seems very specific to the UAE and the region, but it is also a universal story about brotherhood and sacrifice. I was very interested in exploring the emotional journey and the perspectives of these individuals, who were trapped and faced a great danger.

When you are adapting a true war story, you have a duty to show respect to those who have fought and suffered and must try to understand all aspects of the story and reflect on what actually happened in real life. In this regard, I was very fortunate to meet all the soldiers who were involved in the real ambush, and had lengthy conversations and discussions with them about the real ambush. This was hugely important for me to understand the details of what had happened, the thought process of the characters and what decisions had to be made in what was truly a life-or-death situation.

I started my career as a camera operator, and this is one film where I was keen to be very close to the action. This allowed me to be as hands-on as possible while working with the director of photography and it helped greatly in achieving the look and feel of the film and get through less takes to get what I wanted.

I found it interesting to shoot a movie in a country where I have never worked previously and knew little about the actors who I was being introduced to. It was also wonderful to see that some of the Emirati actors wanted to challenge themselves and step out of the comfort zone of their roles.

I can confidently say that *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* was the most diverse set that I have ever worked on. We had close to 400 cast and crew members who come from 48 nationalities; it was a wonderful mosaic of people, cultures and languages but everyone was creative in overcoming the language barriers. This diversity is such a strength because everyone has a different and interesting perspective. It is also testament to the power of film; real emotion transcends language. Audiences don't have to understand the words to sense the dilemma, pain and struggle or feel the pride.

Before directing *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*, I had visited the UAE a few times for very short periods. After the filming wrapped, I realized that I have learned so much more about the country and the people have been incredibly welcoming. I am hoping that *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* contributes to the creation of a new language of remembrance of these soldiers, and makes the people from the UAE proud of these heroes, who push themselves to their physical and emotional limits, and put their lives on the line for their country and its values

## **Production Notes**

An all-Emirati lead cast and an international ensemble of acclaimed filmmakers and crew members are behind *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*; a tale of bravery and comradeship set against a backdrop of the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

The film follows the fateful events that lead a group of Emirati soldiers into an ambush perpetuated by hostile militants. Trapped inside their armoured vehicle, the soldiers call for help and ponder their fate as enemy fire intensifies.

"We worked really hard with the writers on the script for at least 18 months; because we knew we needed to dig down into the characters to tell the stories of these men. We needed the viewers to get to know them in the first 20 minutes, and take this knowledge with them as the action started and the movie progressed." Says Derek Dauchy, Producer, *Al Kameen*.

Then came the search for a director who can handle these themes with grace, balancing the war context and the need to deliver a credible war drama with the realism of characters that makes *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* emotionally intense, yet compelling and poignant to watch. Acclaimed French Director Pierre Morel was chosen for the job after a short search.

"Every film starts with the director. Pierre Morel has a certain skill level and a clear vision, he knows exactly how to achieve what he wants and that's critical, particularly in a high production value film. He also does not do action for the sake of action, there is intensive character study behind it." Says Jennifer Roth, Producer, *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*.

During the development period in 2019, Kurtis and Brandon Birtell (scriptwriters) met with the Emirati soldiers who were involved in the real events. It was the first time these soldiers had met together in one place since the rescue mission in 2018.

An Emirati narrative team, led by Talal Al Asmani and Hana Kazim, was assembled in the early stages of pre production. Their role included immersing the scriptwriters and the director in local culture, taking them on tours, showing them documentaries, having endless conversations about Emirati qualities and mindset. As with every film, script and dialogue changes come up on the go. This was when Alia Al Qemzi, another member of the Emirati narrative team, stepped in to make sure any changes made sense in the Emirati language and stayed true to the original context of the script. She was also positioned on set to communicate between the Arabic-speaking cast and the Director.

*AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* is unique in the sense that it brings together a large local cast and a diverse international crew of close to 400 people from almost every corner of the world; the vehicles team came from the UK, the special effects team from France, the technicians from South Africa, the stunts team were Moroccan-French and auditioning was lead by Alwiya A Thani, an Emirati filmmaker and project manager with Image Nation Abu Dhabi, whose team conducted 300 auditions in under one month.

"We are making a film about Emiratis and with Emiratis; so we were keen to use as much local talent across all departments as possible, knowing that some key resources and crew members will be brought in from abroad. And when we started the casting our objective was to find enough good quality Emirati actors for all the lead roles to represent these men authentically. That process alone took three and a half months and then there was the gruelling physical and military training that they went through for months before we started filming." Continues Dauchy

Interestingly, all the extras in *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* are members of the UAE Armed Forces. The production team decided on this approach, in consultation with the relevant Government stakeholders, to ensure the greatest degree of authenticity in the action scenes. Image Nation Abu Dhabi had a dedicated Emirati Liaison executive to streamline communications with UAE Government bodies, including the UAE Armed Forces which supplied all vehicles and weaponry used in filming.

Morel maintained his vision for *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* by doing much of the camerawork himself. "I think you miss something when you just watch a monitor. I enjoy operating the camera and working with the actor on his performance at the same time. This way, I am closer to the performance and can adjust what I do not like immediately. This is particularly important in a war film, where we often do not have the luxury of many takes," he says.

Since stunts play a significant role in the war scenes, the filmmakers brought in an experienced team of SFX and stunts specialists from France & Morocco to join the cast.

"A team of 20 technicians and I spent a whole month planning the special effects; our work with explosives on site was particularly unusual as we wanted to create a life-like effect and did not want to depend on CGI. We used 600kg of explosives, 5,000 metres of detonating cord and 3,200 detonators, so this gives you an idea of the scale," says Georges Demetrau, SFX Artist, *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*.

"The actors and stuntmen rehearsed repeatedly, so that all the key war scenes were done full blast. Safety was a huge priority on set; it's a war movie, so we had lots of vehicles moving, explosives and guns firing and I wanted to make sure that there was no accidents during shooting and no injuries on set," Says Yann Cuinet, Assistant Director, *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*.

*AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* was shot in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE in a remote mountainous location that is a terrestrial match for the location of the real-life events in Yemen. To utilize the location and start production, a road stretching approximately 7 KM had to be built between base camp and filming location to facilitate shooting and access of armoured vehicles and other heavy weaponry and equipment into the site. The set was located in a steep valley that typically floods during the rainy season in the UAE from February to April. The entire set was washed away by heavy rain and reconstructed twice during filming. To add to the challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out at the start of filming and the entire cast and crew had to quarantine themselves throughout the filming duration of 58 days with little contact with the outside world.

"I am fairly certain that we were the last film on earth still filming during the pandemic; but there were strict precautions and it felt like we are doing our jobs, filming a normal film in an apocalyptic world," he concludes.

Ultimately, *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* is a story of resilience, a quality that applies to the film crew whose determination to complete principal photography was not hindered by a global pandemic outbreak, flash floods or the intense UAE heat in an open desert location "There was no stopping us; everyone wanted this film to see the light of day," says Dauchy.

### **Key production facts and stats**

- 58 shooting days
- 384 cast and crew came from 48 nationalities
- 14,515 meals were served on set
- 83 weather reports were reviewed to plan production
- 122 transport vehicles were used during filming
- 200 litres of hand sanitizer were used throughout the production period

### **War scenes facts and stats**

- 600kg of explosives were used
- 5,000 metres of detonating cord
- 3,200 detonators
- 9,000 spark balls
- 35,000 blank ammunition rounds
- 20,000 dust balls
- 830 black smoke cannisters
- 50 litres of fake human blood

### **Filmmakers' Biographies**

#### **Pierre Morel, Director**

French born director Pierre Morel is best known as the director of *Taken* starring Liam Neeson, the modestly budgeted French indie thriller that went on to gross nearly \$300M worldwide and spawned two sequels and a television series based off his original blockbuster, making it one of the rare indie film franchises in history to gross \$1B worldwide.

Prior to *Taken*, Morel helmed the French language Parkour actioner *District B13* which became a cult classic and spawned both a sequel and an English language remake, not to mention having inspired a generation of action films that followed including James Bond's *Casino Royale*.

Morel began his career as a camera operator and cinematographer working with Luc Besson on *Taxi*, Louis Letterier on *Transporter*, Nancy Meyers on *Something's Gotta Give* and Jonathan Demme on *The Truth About Charlie*.

His feature work includes the French actioner *From Paris With Love* starring John Travolta, the international spy drama *The Gunman* starring Oscar winners Sean Penn, Javier Bardem and Mark Rylance, and the female driven action/thriller *Peppermint*.

### **Brandon Birtell and Kurtis Birtell – Scriptwriters**

Brandon Birtell and Kurtis Birtell have been creating stories together since preschool.

They are a writing team with over a decade of experience. In addition to *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*, they have worked on award winning projects such as *Medal of Honor* produced by Robert Zemeckis for Netflix.

Notable works:

- Medal of Honor (TV series documentary) (4 Episodes) 2018
- Shelter (video documentary short) 2009

### **Producers Biography**

#### **Derek Dauchy**

Derek Dauchy is an independent Producer and Consultant for Image Nation Abu Dhabi. In addition to *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)*, he also assists in the development and production of an array of Arabic language film projects for INAD, as well as produces and oversees a slate of genre films for a joint venture between INAD and Spooky Pictures. The first film from that endeavor, *Watcher*, starring Maika Monroe and Karl Glusman, is expected for release in early 2022.

A veteran of more than two decades in the entertainment industry, Dauchy has been involved in the production of more than 50 feature films that have grossed in excess of \$2 billion worldwide. During his previous posts as both President of Production at Davis Entertainment, and Senior Executive at Revolution Studios, he oversaw the development and production of a diverse slate of projects for nearly every major studio in Hollywood. His previous featured projects include the *XXX* franchise with Vin Diesel, *Anger Management* starring Adam Sandler and Jack Nicholson, *Daddy Day Care* starring Eddie Murphy, *Mr. Popper's Penguins* with Jim Carrey, Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* and Julie Taymor's *Across The Universe*.

Dauchy began his career working with esteemed filmmakers Barry Levinson and Paula Weinstein at their Baltimore/Spring Creek Pictures, where he helped oversee hits such as *The Perfect Storm* and *Analyze This*.

#### **Jennifer Roth**

Jennifer Roth is a feature film producer with almost 30 years of experience in the film business. In addition to *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* her producing credits include: *Montana Story* directed by Scott

McGehee and David Siegel which wrapped in late 2020. *Guava Island*, directed by Hiro Murai, which premiered at Coachella and launched on Amazon in the spring of 2019, and *Jimmy P.*, directed by Arnaud Desplechin, which premiered in competition at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.

Her executive/line producing credits include *Black Swan*, *Blood Father*, *Mudbound*, *The Wrestler*, *Land of Steady Habits*, *What Maisie Knew*, *Your Sister's Sister*, *World's Greatest Dad*, *The Squid and the Whale* and Image Nation's *From A to B* filmed in the UAE.

From 2013 – 2016, Ms. Roth was a member of the NYUAD film faculty. She also holds the prestigious Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from France for her work with French directors.

### **Cast Biographies**

#### **Marwan Abdulla Saleh – Sergeant Ali Al Mismari**

Marwan Abdullah Saleh began his artistic career at an early age by acting on stage when he was seven years old. His constant presence with his father, artist Abdullah Saleh, on stage and in filming locations, boosted his confidence, familiarity with the audience, and developed his spontaneous performance in front of the camera. His first work was a children's play called "Fate".

Marwan is a prolific actor and has worked in theatre, TV dramas and cinema. He also presented TV programs and won many awards as Best Actor and Best Director in many theatrical festivals in the UAE, the Gulf and the Arab world.

#### **Khalifa Al Jassem – Warrent Officer Bilal Al Saadi**

Khalifa Al Jassem is a 28 year old Emirati actor who started his acting career in 2012. Besides his diploma in music, Khalifa acts in both theatre and TV. The movie *AL KAMEEN (The Ambush)* is his start on the big screen through a major role.

#### **Mohammed Ahmed – Sergeant Ali Al Hindasi**

Mohammed Ahmed was born on July 5, 1989 Dubai (UAE), and graduated from Higher Colleges of Technology in 2012. In 2013, he joined Sharjah Art Institute and studied theater. He made his cinematic debut in *Abdullah*, which received its world premiere at the Dubai International Film Festival 2015. In 2016, he studied filmmaking at the New York Film Academy. In 2017 he made his short film *The Remaining Time* which was screened internationally. In 2018, his second feature film *Musk* won best film in Al Ain film festival in 2019 and finally his short film *Maryam* screened internationally.

#### **Abdulla Saeed Bin Haider – Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Al Mazrouie**

Abdullah is an Emirati actor born in 1976 and started his career in 1999. He is an active TV, cinema, and theater actor and director, he is also a TV anchor. Abdullah is a member for Khourfakan theater Group as both, an actor and a director. In 2009, he directed his first play *No Kids Allowed*.

Abdullah's most important roles in theater are *Live & See*, *The Trick*, and *The Refugee*. In TV, he had the chance to participate in roles in *Calm Waves*, *Our Days*, *The North Wind*, and *Dubai-London-Dubai*. On the big screen he was also present since 2004 with his short movie *The Well*. As an anchor he has a rich and various participations through different shows such as the 3 seasons of social comedy show *What Are You Doing?!* on OSN TV, *The Journey of The Word & the Tone* on Emirates TV, and recently *The Direction*.

#### **Saeed AlHarsh – Captain Saeed Al Shehhi**

Saeed Mohammed Al Mesmari (Known as Saeed AlHarsh) is an Emirati theater actor, who started in Fujairah Theater in 1998. He won several awards in directing, scenography and he is a theater, TV, and film actor.

#### **Hassan Yousuf AlBlooshi – Abdullah Al Balooshi**

Hassan is an Emirati actor as well as a theater director who started his career in 1993. Hassan won many awards for performing on theater (acting and directing) in many International and local festivals . He worked as an actor in local and GCC drama, most notably in the TV series *Another Face*, *The North Wind*, *The Neighbors*, *Dreams on Paper*, and *Obsessions*. Hassan's talent in theater showed in several plays including, *Seriousness & Silliness*, *Amber*, and *Ali Jinnah al-Tabrizi*. He also directed many plays such as *Lear Malak the Sculptor*, *Time*, and *Silence of the Graves*. On radio, he participated in different series such as *Boswilem Stories*. On the big screen, he participated in *Khorfakkan* and *Bani Adam*.

#### **Khalifa AlBahri – Ahmed Al Sayari**

Khalifa is an Emirati actor, born in July 1992 in Abu Dhabi, UAE. He started his journey in school theater since childhood and in 2010 he joined the professional theater and started the children's theater with top Emirati directors. Khalifah then started his career in film and television in 2016 through participating in *Justice* series, produced by Image Nation, *Ali and Alia* movie on Netflix, *Then.. After You* and *Khorfakkan*.

#### **Ghanim Nasser - Opposition Leader**

Ghanim started his acting career in 1999. In theatre, the kickoff point was in the year 2000, and since then he has participated in approximately 40 plays . Ghanim's first series *Almqayed* on Dubai Channel was in 2005. He also participated in *Hannah and Rana*, *Proverbs and Proverbs*, *The North Wind*, *Dakka al-Farij*, *Qalb al-Adala (Justice)*, *Wadima and Halima parts 1&2*, *Time of al-Taybeen*, *Faat al-Fuot*, and *Qabl Al awan*. He also participated in several films, including *Rayhaan*, *Hubbub*, and the movie *Stay in Line* which won the Best Director, Best Screenplay and the Best Actor Awards. He also participated in *Ahmed* in 2011 which won the Sheikh Majid bin Mohammed Prize for Creativity.

**Mansoor AlFeeli - Colonel Jamal Al Khatri**

Mansoor AlFeeli is an Emirati actor who was born in 1964. He started acting in 1989 through a group of Emirati and GCC radio and television shows. Mansour featured in Emirati, Arab, and international short and long films, in addition to many Emirati and GCC theatre plays. His latest projects include *The Misfits 2021*, *Daughters of Masoud* on TV, and *Weird & Strange* on stage.

**Abdullah AlRashdi – Warrent Officer Zakariya Al Falasi**

Abdullah Al Rushdi is an Emirati artist, born in the Emirate of Fujairah – UAE. He started his artistic career in 1985. He joined many acting and directing workshops to hone his talent, which enabled him to participate in local and Arab theatrical, television and cinematic projects. Abdullah is a member of the Fujairah National Theatre and the UAE Theatrical Association. In *Al Kameen*, he plays the role of Warrent Officer Zakariya Al Falasi.