

## Electronic trail leads to crown prince

New evidence reveals that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman communicated repeatedly with a key aide around the time that a team believed to have been under the aide's command assassinated Jamal Khashoggi. And **Legalbrief** reports that there has been another significant development in the case with an Israeli cybersecurity firm facing a lawsuit over claims that the Saudi Government used its spyware to hack Khashoggi's cellphone and access sensitive conversations. Khashoggi was killed in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul on 2 October by members of a 15-man team from Saudi Arabia. Saud al-Qahtani has emerged as a key suspect in the chilling murder. **The New York Times** reports that US intelligence agencies have evidence that Prince Salman and Qahtani had 11 exchanges that roughly coincided with the hit team's advance into the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, where Khashoggi was murdered. The report says the exchanges are a key piece of information that helped solidify the CIA's assessment that the crown prince ordered the killing of Khashoggi, a columnist for *The Washington Post* who had been critical of the Saudi Government. **'This is the smoking gun, or at least the smoking phone call,'** said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA official. 'There is only one thing they could possibly be talking about.' The existence of the intercepts was first reported by *The Wall Street Journal*, which reviewed a highly classified document on the CIA assessment of Khashoggi's killing.

*Canada-based Saudi activist Omar Abdulaziz has filed a lawsuit against the NSO Group* in Tel Aviv, alleging that the Saudi Government used the firm's spyware to hack his cellphone and access conversations he conducted with Khashoggi. The opposition activist has said he learned that his phone had been hacked in August, some two months after he clicked on an infected link. **The Washington Post** reports that the Citizen Lab, a University of Toronto project that investigates digital espionage aimed at civil society, concluded with 'high confidence' that the Saudi Government targeted the instrument using Pegasus spyware created by NSO. **The sophisticated software enables the operator to access all information stored on a target's phone and to secretly film or record audio.** 'The details of this collaboration were known to the authorities in the kingdom through the Pegasus system,' the court papers say. **The New York Times** reports that the lawsuit puts new pressure on the NSO Group and the Israeli Government which licenses the company's sales to foreign governments of its spyware. More broadly, the suit also calls new attention to Israel's increasingly open alliance with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf monarchies. The lawsuit follows parallel suits by journalists, activists and others charging that the NSO Group improperly helped the governments of Mexico and the UAE spy on their smartphones even though the individuals had no criminal records and posed no threat of violence. Amnesty International has also recently accused the NSO Group of helping Saudi Arabia spy on a member of the organisation's staff. Amnesty said last week it was considering legal action after the Israeli Defence Ministry rejected a request to revoke the NSO Group's licence to export its spyware.

*In his public writings, Khashoggi's criticism of Saudi Arabia and bin Salman was measured.* In private, he didn't hold back. In more than 400 WhatsApp messages sent to Abdulaziz in the year before he was killed, Khashoggi describes bin Salman as a 'beast' and a 'pac-man' who would devour all in his path. **CNN** has been granted exclusive access to the correspondence between the two. The messages shared by Abdulaziz, which include voice recordings, photos and videos, paint a picture of a man deeply troubled by what he regarded as the petulance of his kingdom's powerful young prince. **'The more victims he eats, the more he wants,'** says Khashoggi in one message sent in May, just after a group of Saudi activists had been rounded up. 'I will not be surprised if the oppression will reach even those who are cheering him on.' The exchanges reveal a progression from talk to action – the pair had begun planning an online youth movement that would hold the Saudi state to account. The digital offensive, dubbed the 'cyber bees,' had emerged from earlier discussions about creating a portal for documenting human rights abuses in their homeland as well an initiative to produce short films for mobile distribution. 'We have no Parliament; we just have Twitter,' said Abdulaziz, adding that Twitter is also the Saudi's Government's strongest weapon. However, when Khashoggi believed their conversations may have been intercepted by Saudi authorities in August, he wrote 'God help us'. Two months later, he was dead.

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