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## **Dangerous tools**

The Khashoggi story is a lesson in how U.S.-supported intelligence and special-operations capabilities can be misused by other countries. That's the starkest conclusion that emerged from this reporting. Among these previously undisclosed findings:

- Some members of the Saudi Rapid Intervention Group that was sent to Istanbul received training in the United States, according to U.S. and Saudi sources. The CIA has cautioned other government agencies that some of this special-operations training might have been conducted by Tier 1 Group, an Arkansas-based company, under a State Department license. The training occurred before the Khashoggi incident, as part of ongoing liaison with the Saudis, and it hasn't been resumed.

- A U.S. plan to train and modernize the Saudi intelligence service is also on hold, pending State Department approval of a license. This project was developed by Culpeper National Security Solutions, a unit of DynCorp, with help from some prominent former CIA officials. No work on the project has been done.

- One of the Saudi contacts involved in planning the Culpeper training project was Maj. Gen. Ahmed al-Assiri, the Saudi deputy chief of intelligence, who Saudi officials say is under investigation because of his alleged involvement in the Istanbul operation.

- Michael Morell, former acting director of the CIA, was [publicly identified](#) as Culpeper's chairman of the board in 2017, but he no longer holds that position, according to a source familiar with the company. A second source said Morell withdrew from the project within days of Khashoggi's murder because of his concern about the direction Saudi Arabia was heading. Morell declined to comment.

Tier 1 Group and DynCorp are both owned by affiliates of Cerberus Capital Management, a privately owned investment group based in New York. The company wouldn't confirm or deny whether any of the 17 perpetrators of the Khashoggi killing who were [sanctioned by the](#)

[Treasury Department](#) had been trained under the Tier 1 contract. But a source close to Cerberus said, “We know that this horrendous incident occurred” and that “companies must emphasize rigorous ethical evaluation policies” in light of such an event.

- Stephen Feinberg, [the co-chief executive of Cerberus](#), is also chairman of the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board, which provides independent counsel on intelligence matters. When he was appointed, critics argued there might be conflicts of interest. The source familiar with Cerberus’s business activities said that when Feinberg assumed the PIAB post, he divested his interest in all companies in the Cerberus portfolio that were involved in defense and intelligence matters, including Tier 1 Group and DynCorp. The divestment occurred before Khashoggi’s death and was unrelated, the source close to the company said. A Cerberus spokesman declined a request for comment by Feinberg.

- NSO Group, an Israeli-founded company that provides sophisticated tools for hacking mobile phones, has reviewed and modified its relationship with Saudi Arabia, according to a Saudi source. The company, which was recently acquired by a London-based private equity firm called Novalpina Capital LLP, concluded after an internal review that its surveillance technology didn’t directly contribute to tracking Khashoggi on his way to his death. But the company has frozen new requests from the kingdom, according to the Saudi source, because of concerns that its technology might have been misused. The company declined to discuss any specific clients and wouldn’t confirm or deny this account.

As these corporate examples illustrate, the murder of a Post columnist has affected the contour of the U.S.-Saudi relationship. This partnership has been beneficial for both countries’ security, and it’s especially important now, at a time when the Trump administration is challenging Iranian meddling in the region. But many current and former U.S. officials believe that without clearer rules and accountability, the partnership might be unsustainable, given vocal opposition from many members of Congress.