

# ‘It’s A Sad Day For Human Rights’ — Washington Post Slammed For Its Latest Columnist Hire



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Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered last year. His old employer is now under fire ... [+] MOHAMMED AL-SHAIKH/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The *Washington Post* is under fire after [hiring](#) a columnist who was recently named senior advisor for one of the best-known Android and iPhone surveillance providers in the world: \$1 billion-valued NSO Group.

The appointment of Juliette Kayyem seemed particularly perverse to critics who noted that NSO Group software was linked to hacks of associates of Jamal Khashoggi, a *Washington Post* columnist and critic of Saudi Arabia who was murdered in 2018. NSO has denied that its surveillance tech was used to monitor Khashoggi prior to his killing inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. But *Forbes* and other publications [found at least two Saudi activists, and contacts of Khashoggi, had their devices infected](#) with the Israeli

firm's spyware. NSO didn't confirm or deny those technical links at the time and didn't comment Wednesday.

“It is a sad day for human rights, a deeply disturbing irony in the wake of Khashoggi's execution, and a public relations victory for NSO Group, to have the *Washington Post* hire someone sitting on their advisory board,” said Ron Deibert, director of the University of Toronto-based Citizen Lab. Deibert's organization has been tracking attacks on the civil rights, journalist and legal community by NSO software. Most recently, a prominent Moroccan activist, Maati Monjib, [claimed his iPhone had been targeted with NSO tools](#) as part of a persistent surveillance campaign on him, which he believes is being perpetrated by the Moroccan government, which is yet to comment.

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The *Washington Post* defended its move, saying Kayyem was only employed by NSO to “implement a governance framework to ensure the company was in alignment with UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These principles are part of an international effort to ensure that companies—particularly those in intelligence and cyber spaces—perform due diligence and have standards of review.”

“She has no involvement with day-to-day management of the company. Her work is limited to providing guidance on the compliance principles.”

But Deibert was skeptical that the *Washington Post* had verified NSO's claims of improved ethical standards "before effectively parroting their statements publicly."

A spokesperson for NSO said it sought Kayyem's guidance "to help the company enhance its policies and guidelines that would balance the vital needs of governments to counter terrorism and crime while protecting other fundamental human rights, such as freedom of expression. With Juliette's counsel, we established new human rights governance, whistleblower and transparency standards."

Kayyem had not responded to a request for comment and had not issued a public statement at the time of publication. Outside of the NSO stint, she's been a high-profile voice in the security world. Previously, she was President Barack Obama's assistant secretary for intergovernmental affairs in the Department of Homeland Security. She's currently a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

NSO also brought in other big names like former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge, the first U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, and Gérard Araud, former French ambassador to the U.S., to help guide its human rights policy.

**UPDATE:** On Friday October 25, Kayyem announced she was backing down from the role voluntarily, saying she didn't want to be a distraction for the paper.

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