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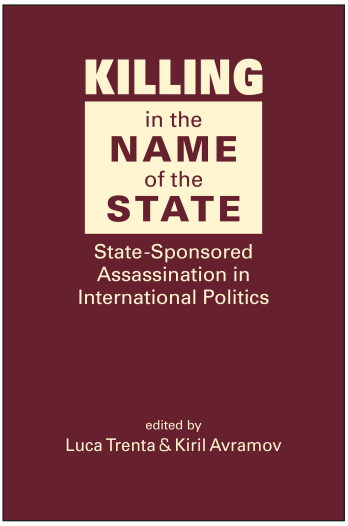
Killing in the Name of the State: State-Sponsored Assassination in International Politics



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In September 2023, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of assassinating a Sikh separatist on Canadian soil.[1] The US government made similar accusations.[2] In January 2024, the US and UK governments imposed sanctions on a network of individuals that included Iranian intelligence officials, drug traffickers, and members of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. They were accused of plotting the assassination of Iranian dissidents via a car bomb.[3] In February, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny died in suspicious circumstances in a Russian prison, having survived two previous assassination attempts.[4] A few months later, the US Justice Department revealed that it had foiled another four assassination attempts on US soil since 2022.[5] In April 2024, Indian intelligence operatives admitted to having conducted a campaign of assassination in Pakistan and abroad against separatists and suspected terrorists. These operations, the officials stated, were modeled on those of the Israeli Mossad, the Russian intelligence services, and Saudi Arabia's brazen 2018 assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.[6] In the spring and summer of 2024, as Israel's offensive on Gaza escalated, so did the assassination of leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as members and affiliates.[7] In July 2024, US intelligence officials revealed the foiling of a Russian assassination plot targeting Armin Papperger, CEO of German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall, a key supplier of weapons to Ukraine.[8] In November, the US government charged an Afghan national in connection with an Iranian plot to assassinate then–presidential candidate Donald Trump.[9]

State-sponsored assassinations have become a regular occurrence in international politics. States have shown a willingness to rely on

assassination as a tool of statecraft, often denying that such activities amount to assassination.[10] At the same time, they have also shown an increased willingness to expose and denounce assassination and assassination plots conducted by others. State-sponsored assassinations, though, remain understudied, especially when compared with other aspects of intelligence and covert action. They are often more the remit of investigative journalists and commentators than of academic research. To be sure, scholarly literature on state-sponsored assassinations exists, but it is frequently divided and siloed into disciplinary straightjackets. In this chapter, we review the existing literature on state-sponsored assassinations and provide our definition of this controversial and contested phenomenon. We highlight key themes explored in the volume before giving an overview of the chapters' contents.

State-Sponsored Assassination: The State of the Art

Works on (state-sponsored) assassination feature within history, international relations (IR), intelligence studies, and international law. Historians have, at various times, tried to trace a world history of assassination. General histories of assassination abound, some more rigorous than others. Franklin Ford's seminal *Political Murder* looks at political killings from biblical times to the 1980s. His account often conflates different types of killings, placing under the same label the activities of states and those of individuals.[11] More recent takes from Michael Burleigh and John Withington follow a similar pattern.[12]

More often, though, histories of assassination have focused on a single state or have looked at regional experiences and dynamics. In the former case, Kevin O'Brien explores the history of assassination as a domestic and foreign policy practice during the apartheid regime in South Africa.[13] Similarly, Nielsen examines the history and consequences of political assassinations conducted by Yugoslavia during the Tito regime.[14] Long-term single-country histories have also been the remit of investigative journalists, looking at countries such as Israel,[15] the United States,[16] Russia,[17] and France.[18] In this context, some accounts deal with contemporary history, such as the case of Rwanda,[19] or with recent famous episodes, such as Saudi Arabia's assassination of Jamal Khashoggi.[20] Beyond a single case study, scholars have recognized how assassination has, at various times, been prominent in specific geographical regions. John Green, for example, explores how, in Latin America, assassination has primarily targeted agents of change (journalists,

activists, academics, religious figures, and reformist politicians).[21] Several contributors to the volume *When States Kill* also explore Latin American governments' use of assassination as a tool of state violence.[22]

Legal scholarship on state-sponsored assassinations has often worked to distinguish the controversial practice of assassination from the more aseptic practice of "targeted killing." US and Israeli legal scholars authored an essential segment of this scholarship.[23] These works—before and after 9/11—tend to propose a definition of assassination and/or targeted killing and then assess whether and how US and/or Israeli practices meet such standards. In the US context, this has also intersected with debates surrounding the domestic ban on assassination, first included in Executive Order 11905 in 1975.[24] This scholarship has played a significant role in explaining, justifying, and legitimating state practices that amount to assassination in all but name. A minor yet substantial part of legal scholarship, with a greater geographical diversity of authors, focuses instead on establishing the inherent illegality of targeted killings, save in exceptional and particular circumstances.[25] Except for those US and Israeli authors still attempting to argue in favor of legality, legal scholarship considers the legal status of targeted killings to be a settled matter, and assassination has stopped being a significant research topic for lawyers. Consequently, literature examining the implications for international law of the continued recourse to assassination, and of the transition from "assassination" to "targeted killing" in language and practice, can be found primarily in IR scholarship.

Constructivist international relations scholarship has examined norm development, norm erosion, and norm contestation. In a pathbreaking article, Ward Thomas identified, even before 9/11, a weakening of the international norm against assassination.[26] This weakening morphed into a decline after 9/11 and the inception of the "war on terror."[27] For Großklaus, the friction and contradictions emerging in norms prohibiting assassination reflected broader changes surrounding sovereignty and liberal standards that govern international life.[28] Analyzing state practice since 9/11, Jose suggested that a new norm in favor of "targeted killings" has progressively replaced a norm against assassination.[29] Scholars have also highlighted how this process has been the subject of international protests and challenges by both state and non-state actors.[30]

Remaining within the realm of norms, scholars have looked at the contestation of the US ban on assassination and at the US role in setting international legal standards.[31] Starting in the 1980s, a process of reinterpretation of the ban has allowed US administrations to retain, under different guises, assassination as an available policy option.[32] For some,

this process escalated under the Obama administration when "quasi-secrecy," through leaks and national security speeches, permitted the administration to justify its foreign policy conduct—the use of targeted killing—while only partially revealing its legal justifications.[33] Pratt has provided a comprehensive account of the emergence of targeted killing, as well as torture and the use of mercenaries, in post-9/11 US foreign policy through an analysis of both norm contestation and the institutional and technological changes that accompanied it.[34]

More generally, IR scholarship has looked at how controversial practices have featured and been justified within international society. Keating has explored how assassination and debates surrounding assassination showcase that a state's membership in international society protects state officials against assassination or, at a minimum, causes more outcry when it happens.[35] Sanders provided an account of how controversial, illegal, and immoral state practices (like assassination) have, over time, been justified through different legal cultures. Since 9/11, according to Sanders, the dominant legal culture has been one of "plausible legality,"[36] in which states will conduct controversial activities if a plausible legal cover can be identified.

Within IR, decision-making-oriented research has explored the calculus behind the use of assassination.[37] This has also been a keen interest for literature at the crossroads of international relations and comparative politics, such as the literature on transnational repression. As in other areas, some scholars have explored assassination within the context of regional and transnational agreements. Assassination features prominently in works exploring Operation Condor and the system of interregional repression within Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. This scholarship has often examined this system's international aspects, including assassination squads.[38]

Scholars looking at current practices of transnational repression tend to see assassination as an extreme option in authoritarian states' arsenal. For example, in a recent database, Alexander Dukalskis found that (attempted) assassination occurred in eighty-three cases, out of more than 1,177 acts of transnational repression.[39] Here, regime security and signaling tend to be central among the many rationales for assassination. Scholars and think tanks tracking the phenomenon suggest that assassination tends to be reserved for individuals who pose a severe threat to the regime due to their prominence, leadership position, or access to sensitive information, often to send a particularly brutal signal.[40]

Signaling has also been at the heart of intelligence studies scholarship on assassination—a scholarship that has tended to pay particular

attention to the gray areas in which states operate.[41] So far, the scholarship on assassination and signaling has been primarily concerned with Putin's Russia. Hänni and Grossmann, as well as Gioe, Goodman, and Frey, have conceived of Russia's assassinations conducted as a weapon deployed in a "theatrical" manner to warn domestic populations, potential dissidents, and foreign enemies alike.[42] Beyond the debate on signaling, something many authors will expand upon in this volume, several scholars have paid particular attention to the methods used in the assassination. Here, scholarship at the intersection of intelligence studies and non-proliferation literature has explored the history of various states' chemical, biological, or radiological (CBR) programs, the reliance on such programs as strategies of regime security,[43] and their use of CBRs in assassination.[44]

Killing in the Name of the State: Definition, Arguments, and Contributions

This rich and ever-expanding scholarship has made essential contributions to studying state-sponsored assassination. As editors, though, we felt that what was missing was a go-to text, a primer on the topic that would provide both an introduction to state-sponsored assassination and an opportunity to identify key themes and avenues for further research. *Killing in the Name of the State* is the first systematic academic analysis of state-sponsored assassination in international politics.[45]

The aim of the volume is twofold. First, we aim to approach the topic in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner, bringing together historians, IR scholars, international lawyers, and experts. This is achieved by deploying methods ranging from historical analysis (often based on available primary sources—declassified and open-source data) to mixed-method approaches. We deliberately adopt a theoretically and methodologically diverse approach to demonstrate the variety of the existing methods and related ambiguities and challenges. These approaches also permit us to showcase not only the practice of state-sponsored assassination but also its functions, its effects on international legal frameworks, and existing avenues to moderate the detrimental consequences of such an extreme policy option.

Second, we aim to move the study of state-sponsored assassination beyond the single-state accounts often adopted by the existing scholarship and, where possible, beyond a narrow focus frequently found in intelligence studies on the Anglosphere and/or "usual suspects" in the study of covert operations (e.g., Israel). Throughout the book, we

aim to explore a host of relevant questions, including but not limited to the following:

- How do governments approach and understand assassination?
- What methods have been deployed historically, and how do they differ from current practice?
- What are the consequences of assassination for international politics, diplomacy, and international law?
- Under what circumstances do governments engage in such a controversial and potentially risky practice?
- How do governments interact secretly when it comes to assassinations?
- What strategic objectives do assassinations serve?
- How is assassination decided upon, deployed, and in some cases (publicly) justified?

Before proceeding, it is essential to discuss what we mean by "state-sponsored assassination." We recognize that an accepted definition does not currently exist in the academic literature.[46] This lack of consensus is due partly to the disciplinary siloing detailed above and partly to an effort to change and update definitions of assassination to justify state practice. While these definitional debates feature in some contributions, we have worked toward defining the phenomenon. We contend that *state-sponsored assassination* can be understood as the killing (or attempted physical elimination) of a *prominent individual(s)*, previously selected, precisely identified, and targeted for distinct political reasons, in the absence of a declared war (peacetime). These assassinations can occur within and/or outside the perpetrating state's territory. *They can be perpetrated by various (intelligence/security/military) agencies of the state(s) and/or by proxies and agents acting on behalf of the sponsoring state(s)*.

Several dimensions of the definition are highlighted here. First, the focus on "state-sponsored assassination" permits us to distinguish discrete events depending on their (alleged) attribution. In this volume, state-sponsored assassination is considered a phenomenon distinct from broader killings and/or (political) murders carried out by individuals not affiliated with or supported by a state. Second, we understand "sponsored" to include a broad spectrum of state activity ranging from direct planning and implementation by the state and its agencies to various forms of collaboration with third parties acting on behalf of the state.[47] Third, we understand "assassination" as a political act geared to achieve

specific objectives of the perpetrating state. As the literature discussed above and the chapters in this volume show, these objectives and the rationale behind assassination can vary, and the same assassination can serve multiple purposes. Specific assassinations, particularly of state leaders and officials, aim at regime change. Others are used as a method of "regime security,"[48] such as eliminating dissidents and/or individuals possessing information that can undermine the regime.[49] Fourth, we highlight the prominence of the targeted individual. While some differences in state practices are inevitable, we aim to steer clear of the killing of foot soldiers and low-level targets. Victims of (attempted) state-sponsored assassinations are targeted for their uniqueness,[50] their organizational status, and/or their (hierarchical) prominence within their respective political, religious, or social domains.[51] Finally, we pay attention to the assassination's international (legal) context. We are keen to focus on assassination in peacetime without discounting the relevance and existence of multiple gray areas (e.g., low-intensity conflict), often created by states to justify their conduct.

While we understand this volume as a primer on state-sponsored assassination, several key themes and arguments are embedded in the book. Looking at state practice, we make the argument that state-sponsored assassinations are a prominent, frequent, and increasingly transparent feature of international politics. An essential theme of the book is exploring the modalities (i.e., actors involved) and methods (i.e., weapons used) of assassination. We argue that these have important implications for the practice of assassination. These implications can be understood in terms of visibility, observability (i.e., the degrees of their secrecy, overt or covert nature), and (im)plausible deniability. In other words, the modalities and methods used speak to the extent of a state's interest in hiding and/or denying its conduct. As scholarship on CBR programs shows, certain weapons are (more) easily attributable to a state. More importantly, the reliance on third parties, including criminal actors, can be adopted by states to distance themselves strategically, legally, morally, and politically from such controversial practices.[52] Such distance also provides states with an opportunity to violate and undermine norms without giving the appearance of doing so.[53] The effect occurs when states rely on "secret law" and collaborate/collude with other governments and their intelligence agencies to pursue covert foreign policies[54] and/or state terror.[55] The same is true, as explored in this volume, when states collaborate with or hire criminals and criminal networks.

In addition, several of our contributing authors, such as Haas and Avramov, suggest that certain states deploy individual approaches to

state-sponsored assassinations according to a calculus of escalation. Here, states are influenced by perceptions regarding their own security at home and abroad and their long-term stability. Different models of a state's "vengeance logics" dictate the process of targeting and how fast a target can travel from harassment to physical elimination. This is particularly applicable in the case of post-Soviet Russia under the Putin regime, where the deployment of state-sponsored assassinations is shaped by the ever-elastic interpretation of "extremism." In essence, a state does not select individuals for targeting based on public policy decisions, nor does it use random selection methods. Instead, the political rationale for targeting and eliminating political dissidents arises from the perceived threats these individuals represent to the ruling regime and its leadership. These threats may be viewed as immediate and can result from individuals' associations or abilities to undermine or overthrow the government through political, economic, or military actions. State-sponsored assassinations can be analyzed and modeled through the lens of escalation ladders, where the speed and manner of target prioritization (i.e., the upward or downward movement along the rungs of escalation) are correlated with the respective governing elites' threat perception.

Beyond modalities and methods, a key argument throughout the book is that assassination is presently—and has been historically—a weapon deployed by both democratic and authoritarian states. In line with findings in intelligence studies and transnational repression scholarship, we argue that states see assassination as a risky but increasingly acceptable option in international politics. For authoritarian regimes, it provides an opportunity to strengthen the regime by killing its (alleged) opponents, to send signals to a plethora of audiences, and to exact revenge. For democratic states, assassination has, historically, been a controversial option—one to carry out covertly and in a plausibly deniable manner. More recently, as several scholars have suggested, the language of the law has been deployed to permit practices that have amounted to assassination. As chapters in this book will show, a (plausible) legal justification has often acted as a contributing factor in convincing democratic states to escalate to assassination and has frequently featured in their quasi-secret and public justifications. For both democratic and authoritarian states, assassinations speak of a state's reach and capability, ruthlessness, resolve, and ability, often due to the state's position within the international community, to act with impunity.

This last point is connected to a fourth theme running through the volume. The recurrence of state-sponsored assassinations impacts—and

should impact—states' policies and postures. On a more technical level, states need to be better prepared to deal with and respond to assassinations, from the collection of evidence and forensics to sanctions and respect for human rights. But they should also be more attuned to the consequences of their conduct. This has both a practical dimension and discursive and legal ones. On the practical side, an accumulation of evidence suggests that states learn from each other. The Indian government officials quoted at the start of the volume and (former) Rwandan officials attest to how the practices of one state—and at times its strategic predicament—influence those of others.[56] The same is true for democratic states, with Israel setting early precedents for the proliferation of targeted killings, initially to the United States and more broadly.[57]

The impact of assassination extends to both states' practices and to the language used to justify them—the case of Israel is instructive here. As Michael Boyle noted, Israel launched an international legal campaign to push a broader acceptance of targeted killing in international fora, a campaign the United States adopted and eventually expanded.[58] In other words, states must become more aware of the consequences of their legitimating practices over international law and the norms of international society. States often invoke their interpretations of international law, as well as domestic law provisions, to justify and/or relabel assassinations. Here, we touch upon the role of private justification and public legitimation, as well as debates regarding self-defense and other ethical and legal standards (i.e., assassination vs. targeted killings).[59] This is particularly true for democratic states, which tend to justify their conduct in legal terms, sometimes contradicting, undermining, or violating the letter and spirit of international and domestic norms. Here, too, states learn from each other and exploit each other's (legal or quasi-legal) precedents.

Our book does not include a specific section on the ethics of state-sponsored assassinations; however, the material scrutinized in Part One could be read as auxiliary to the debates that focus on ethics and the moral permissibility of assassination outside the boundaries of an armed conflict, especially in the cases of figures of political prominence.[60] It is important to note that the notions of legality, morality, and ethics are intertwined[61] and acknowledged by the contributing authors. The book is also an academic attempt to dispel some of the myths propelled by states and their respective intelligence and security communities and to demonstrate the nature of this strategic political instrument.

The volume is divided into two main parts. Part One, Issues, introduces various academic approaches and theoretical issues that frame

the study of state-sponsored assassinations as a separate phenomenon that deserves scholarly scrutiny and attention. Part Two, Cases, provides an in-depth overview and empirical illustration of different states' approaches to assassination. In this second part, we have aimed to provide a globally representative picture of state-sponsored assassinations. We have tried to focus on states that have relied extensively on assassination as a foreign policy practice, but we fully understand that some important cases are missing. Several elements come into play here. First, considering the topic's sensitive nature, we have prioritized contributors' safety and accepted their views regarding the nature and content of some of the chapters. Second, in some cases, the availability of sources has limited the number of country case studies we could include.

Part One opens with Adrian O'Connor's revisit of the topic of assassinations-as-politics. In Chapter 2, O'Connor contends that assassinations are dramatic and attention-grabbing affairs, often appearing to change political courses, but are an ill-defined phenomenon, a porous concept that means different things at different times and to different people. Part of this stems from the tendency of states and state-like actors to employ euphemisms or obfuscations when discussing assassination policies. But part of the confusion stems from an incomplete examination of assassinations as *political killings*—a phrase with which most authors indicate the killing of politically prominent figures for political motives. Less attention is paid to the assassination's character as a political action. Unlike other forms of political action, assassinations do not invite responses, rebuttals, or counterarguments. In this, assassinations are a sort of anti-political instrument of politics. O'Connor explores the question of what assassinations represent as a form of political action and what distinguishes assassinations from other kinds of killing.

In Chapter 3, Sophie Duroy assesses the effects of state-sponsored assassinations on international law. Duroy delves into the sponsoring state's increased need for justification and legitimation, and shows how international law can be a powerful legitimizing tool. Sponsoring states—particularly democracies—use international law (rhetoric) to justify and legitimate (some of) their assassinations. As their legal reasoning is necessarily instrumental and self-interested, it becomes crucial to evaluate whether and how their use of international law shapes the content of that law. In her chapter, Duroy distinguishes three situations: (1) where the assassinations remain secret and unacknowledged; (2) where the assassinations are exposed but remain unacknowledged or are justified only in extra-legal terms; and (3) where the assassinations are both

exposed and justified in the rhetoric of international law. All situations might affect international law through different mechanisms. While a lack of publicity and acknowledgment can still have insidious effects on international law, extra-legal justifications undermine international law more directly (e.g., by implying its lack of applicability). Finally, a rationale in the rhetoric of international law can change the scope and/or content of the legal norm invoked.

Continuing the analysis of normative and legal instrumentation and effects, in Chapter 4, Arturo Jimenez-Bacardi unpacks the role of so-called secret international agreements (SIAs). These are "international agreements in which contracting parties have agreed, either in the treaty instrument or separately, to conceal their existence or at least their substance from other States and the public."[62] The use of SIAs by states appears to be on the rise in governing intelligence and security cooperation, including joint assassination campaigns. In his analysis, Jimenez-Bacardi offers a typology and case-study illustration of the different types of SIAs that states have created intending to assassinate an individual. These case studies include South America's Operation Condor, the US–Israeli agreement to kill Imad Fayez Mughniyeh in Syria, the US–Colombian agreement to kill members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and the secret agreements between France and several Sahel states to kill members of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.

Chapter 5, authored by Glenn Cross and Richard Beedham, provides an analysis of states' use of CBR weapons in alleged cases of assassination in the form of a comprehensive historical review covering the period from 1946 to 2000. The authors demonstrate that states, both democratic and authoritarian, have resorted to the use of chemical and, more rarely, biological agents in assassinations. CBR agents share several functional characteristics in assassinations. They can often result in deaths that mimic natural causes, including heart attacks, strokes, and disease. If detected, an apparent death by natural causes hides the hand of the perpetrator, complicating attribution. Discovery of a deliberate use of a CBR agent is often delayed, allowing the assassins to escape. Plausible deniability can also make CBR use in assassinations attractive to some states. CBR use may be necessary if the target of the assassination is inaccessible by other means or is living in a nonpermissive operating environment. Lastly, in cases where CBR use has been detected and correctly attributed to a state actor, CBR may be used by the perpetrator as messaging to other regime opponents, dissidents, or potential defectors about the dangers of challenging the state's authority.

In Chapter 6, Dan Kaszeta focuses on states' uses of CBR material and explores the challenges these materials pose to the target state (i.e., where the assassination occurred). Kaszeta argues that using these materials engenders a set of questions that need to be answered before any response can be crafted. Governments need to make sure that an attack—an assassination attempt—has taken place. They need to be able to circumscribe the crime scene and collect the relevant evidence. Due to the nature of the weapons used, states must also be aware of the risks of evidence loss, decay, or destruction. Finally, intelligence collection, storage, and use can prove challenging for governments. Kaszeta concludes by analyzing "forensic failures" and how to avoid them. The capabilities of the state, Kaszeta suggests, strongly influence the occurrence of—and the state's ability to deal with—state-sponsored assassinations.

Chapter 7 explores the theme of assassinations as a form of "lethal signaling," messaging, and communication. Adrian Hänni and Christopher Nehring explore the communicative function of state-sponsored assassinations by focusing on the types of messages sent and their target audiences, as well as the reasons for and conditions under which states and their intelligence services use assassinations for signaling. Furthermore, they analyze whether (and how) this signaling is intelligible, the effects of signaling on secrecy, and the relation between signaling and remoteness by utilizing empirical case studies across different regions and periods. This includes prominent cases such as the assassination of Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov by the Bulgarian foreign intelligence service in London in September 1978 and the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, Sergei Skripal, and Alexei Navalny, as well as the shooting of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in 2019 in Berlin. Other case studies include (alleged) Mossad assassinations, attempted assassinations by the East German Ministry of State Security, and the slaughter of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 in Istanbul.

In Chapter 8, Felix Shihundu explores the role of the media in framing and shaping states' assassination policies. Looking primarily at states within the African continent, Shihundu understands assassination as a strategy of regime security. He suggests that the role of the media depends on the degree of freedom the regimes allow. A freer media environment is likelier to act as a watchdog on states' conduct, particularly regarding state repression. In these cases, assassinations become a rarer occurrence and/or are pushed further underground in the hope that they won't be revealed. Alternatively, regimes can stigmatize their enemies in a more controlled media environment and justify their targeting and elimination. Shihundu also suggests that new technologies and new

media are making it hard for regimes to control the media environment and thus to operate in secrecy.

Part One concludes with Chapter 9, where Jessica Davis explores states' use of criminal intermediaries to carry out covert operations, including foreign interference and state-sponsored assassinations. Davis explores how collaborations between states and criminal networks manifest and how criminals are recruited to execute assassinations, transnational repression, and other destabilizing activities like cyberattacks on behalf of state sponsors. Davis also considers the tangible benefits that make such partnerships appealing to both parties. States benefit from criminal networks' operational capabilities and the plausible deniability they provide. Criminal networks benefit from the logistical and financial advantages provided by the state. Finally, Davis outlines the critical steps needed to counter this growing threat and emphasizes the role of intelligence and law enforcement in disrupting these dangerous alliances and safeguarding international security.

In Part Two, Chapter 10, Karine Ramondy examines how General de Gaulle's arrival in power led to the reorganization of the French secret services and a new African policy. She also identifies the extent to which operations Arma and Homo, state-sponsored assassinations, reflected this transition. Ramondy analyzes two case studies. First, the actions taken to destabilize Sékou Touré's Guinea from 1958 onward have already been well studied by historian Jean-Pierre Bat. Then, thanks to Swiss federal archives and those recently declassified in France, Ramondy offers a precise and up-to-date study of the assassination of Union des populations du Cameroun leader Félix-Roland Moumié in Geneva and the role of agent William Bechtel, whose career path reveals the changes then underway within France's External Documentation and Counterespionage Service (SDECE).

Chapter 11 starts with Dheeraj Paramesha-Chaya's exploration of Canada's 2023 allegations regarding the Indian government's responsibility for the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and the US government's accusatory claims surrounding attempted Indian assassinations on its territory. Paramesha-Chaya assesses the extent to which India has deployed assassinations as an instrument of its security policies. The changing security landscape that witnessed the emergence of substate conflicts with state sponsorship from Pakistan compelled the development of a unique counterinsurgency/counterterrorism doctrine that allowed space for the adoption of targeted killings. Consequently, Paramesha-Chaya argues that India has a peculiar relationship with state-sponsored assassinations wherein the state exhibits a principled

character. In contrast, the intelligence bureaucracies facilitate the killings in a divide-and-conquer strategy that allows the bureaucracies to maintain deniability while the political leadership sustains its peaceful Gandhian-Nehruvian image.

In Chapter 12 Matthew Levitt explores the Iranian government's use of state-sponsored assassination. Levitt argues that, over the past forty-plus years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has targeted dissidents, Western opponents, Israelis, and Jews in assassination plots, abduction plots, and surveillance operations that facilitate both. Levitt highlights how features of the target country don't necessarily influence Iranian operations. Iran has carried out such external operations around the world, in countries with both strong and weak law enforcement agencies, border crossings, and intelligence services. It has done so consistently over the years, including at times and in places where carrying out such operations could undermine key Iranian diplomatic efforts, such as negotiations over the country's nuclear program. Based on an original dataset of Iranian plots from 1979 through 2021, the study presented in this chapter maps out key trends in Iranian external operations plotting. It showcases the modalities and methods used in assassination, including the increasing reliance on third parties, such as criminal organizations.

In Chapter 13 Avner Barnea reflects on the Israeli government's experience with state-sponsored assassinations as tools of statecraft. Contrary to most existing scholarship that has dealt with assassinations abroad and with the conduct of the Mossad, Barnea focuses on the Israeli Security Agency (ISA) and its use of assassinations—known as targeted killings—in fighting terrorism within Israel's occupied territories. Barnea focuses on the use of this tool from its initial stage, starting from 1967, when Israel occupied Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip in the Six-Day War, until the end of the Second Intifada in 2005. Barnea reviews the evolution of this practice and raises other important issues, including critical decisions on targeted killings that have influenced the future of this method, the criteria for its use, and the operational aspects of how these actions are carried out. Barnea discusses the future of this modus operandi and questions the practice's effectiveness and its increase.

In Chapter 14 Victor Hernández Ojeda explores the role of assassination in the Mexican government's "war on drugs." As Ojeda makes clear, such a war encompassed the militarization of Mexican law enforcement, its politics, and its society. This process also contributed to an increase rather than a decline in the country's overall crime and violence levels. Far from moderating the violence, militarization acted as a catalyst for it, often due to the impunity and obfuscations of state

authorities. Assassination, Ojeda argues, is prohibited by the Mexican constitution. This prohibition notwithstanding, the assassination of low-, medium-, and high-level targets has featured in confrontations with criminal and drug organizations. Going beyond the official denials, Ojeda exposes the existence of the practice of state-sponsored assassinations and argues that, like most of the government's repressive actions in the war on drugs, state-sponsored assassinations have failed to bring about peace, justice, and actual change.

In Chapter 15 Kiril Avramov, Erica Buckland, Adam Hanzel, and Jon Mitchell analyze the rise in high-profile cases of alleged state-sponsored killings as a form of targeted retribution in post-Soviet Russia. The cases have drawn global attention to the resurgence of the Kremlin's state-sponsored assassination program, in particular speculation about the nature of the Putin regime's political signaling, specifically employing assassination in response to perceived transgressions against the stability of his regime. The contributors argue that Russian state-sponsored assassinations have little to do with political messaging or geopolitical posturing. Instead, Russian state-sponsored assassinations are primarily retaliatory. To support their retaliation argument, the authors systematically compiled and analyzed ninety-nine documented cases of alleged post-Soviet state-sponsored assassinations attributable to Russian intelligence services and their proxies. Based on the well-known intelligence analysis method, known as analysis of competing hypotheses, which includes nuanced subjective Bayesian resampling, they argue that these attacks have distinct characteristics that can be attributed to the mode of operation of post-Soviet intelligence services and their proxies. The authors contend that these retributive killings are characterized by type and have categorical distinctions: The attacker's method and weapon are dictated by the target's prior ethnic, social, economic, and political affiliations; likewise, the weapon used is highly dependent on the target's physical location.

In Chapter 16, Melinda Haas examines what the investigations of the Church Committee[63] elucidate about the conditions under which the United States chose to pursue state-sponsored assassinations during the early Cold War. Haas examines the Church Committee's report on assassinations to determine which factors were most important in escalating US foreign policy toward assassination. She considers factors including the danger of Communist spillover to nearby states, availability of intelligence assets in the target country, availability of friendly replacement if the targeted leader is extinguished, and strength of domestic opposition groups. Relying on extensive archival and primary

sources, Haas reviews the early Cold War cases of Patrice Lumumba and Fidel Castro. Haas then applies these historical findings to the so-called global war on terror and the killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani during the Trump administration. It finds that anti-Communist motivations gave way to the importance of plausible legality in planning modern assassinations.

In Chapter 17, the conclusion, we summarize the main findings and themes of the book and identify essential avenues for further research. Among these, first, more research is needed on the methods of assassination and their consequences. Here, a promising avenue for future research is the attempt to introduce formal logic to states' so-called vengeance patterns. It merits analyzing further the existing practices and models of authoritarian and democratic states when it comes to their targeted assassination programs, as deliberate responses to perceived, intensified threats to the regime's stability, strength, and overall ability to govern. Finally, throughout the book, various contributors point to a close relationship between the practice of assassination and the language used to justify it. Further research is needed to explore the extent to which the routinization of assassination—that is, its increased availability and use—and states' efforts to legitimate their practices contribute to making state-sponsored assassination *a new normal*. Have we entered a new age of "open assassination"?[64]

Notes

1. Tasker, "Trudeau Accuses India's Government."
2. Kirchgaessner et al., "US Accuses Indian Agent of Directing Plot."
3. Chiacu and Psaledakis, "US, UK Impose Sanctions on Network That Targeted Iran Dissidents."
4. Papachristou, "What We Know About Alexei Navalny's Death in Arctic Prison."
5. Lucas and Dixon, "When a Foreign Government Is Trying to Kill You on U.S. Soil."
6. Ellis-Petersen et al., "Indian Government Ordered Killings in Pakistan."
7. Dettmer, "Revealed: Israel's Plan"; Bergman et al., "Israel Says It Killed Hezbollah Commander."
8. Lillis et al., "Exclusive: US and Germany Foiled Russian Plot."
9. Halpert, "US Charges Man over Alleged Iranian Plot to Kill Trump."
10. Schweiger, "'Targeted Killing' and the Lack of Acquiescence."
11. Ford, *Political Murder*.
12. Burleigh, *Day of the Assassins*; Withington, *Assassins' Deeds*.
13. O'Brien, "The Use of Assassination as a Tool (Part I)," and "(Part II)."
14. Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations*.
15. Bergman, *Rise and Kill First*.
16. Jacobsen, *Surprise, Kill, Vanish*.

17. Several books have been written on Russia and assassination, especially under Putin. See, for example, Blake, *From Russia with Blood*.

18. Nouzille, *Les tueurs de la République*.

19. Wrong, *Do Not Disturb*.

20. Rugman, *The Killing in the Consulate*.

21. Green, *A History of Political Murder in Latin America*.

22. Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*.

23. Brandenburg, "The Legality of Assassination," 696; Sofaer, "Terrorism, the Law, and National Self-Defense," 89; Schmitt, "State-Sponsored Assassination"; Reisman, "Some Reflections on International Law and Assassination"; Guiora, "Targeted Killing as Active Self-Defense"; Gross, *Moral Dilemmas of Modern War*.

24. For example, Schmitt, "State-Sponsored Assassination"; and Wiebe, "Assassination in Domestic and International Law."

25. Melzer, *Targeted Killing in International Law*; Otto, *Targeted Killings and International Law*; Alston, "The CIA and Targeted Killings Beyond Borders."

26. Thomas, "Norms and Security."

27. Thomas, "The New Age of Assassination."

28. Großklaus, "Friction, Not Erosion."

29. Jose, "Bin Laden's Targeted Killing and Emerging Norms."

30. Bob, "Rival Networks and the Conflict."

31. Schmidt and Trenta, "Changes in the Law of Self-Defence?"

32. Trenta, "Death by Reinterpretation"; Trenta, *President's Kill List*.

33. Banka and Quinn, "Killing Norms Softly."

34. Pratt, *Normative Transformation and the War on Terrorism*.

35. Keating, "Membership Has Its Privileges."

36. Sanders, *Plausible Legality*.

37. Schilling and Schilling, "Decision Making in Using Assassinations." Some economics scholarship has also looked at the effects of assassination on political stability, but this scholarship has tended to conflate different types of assassination, including state-sponsored assassination and political murder, and is, as such, beyond the remit of this volume. Jones and Olken, "Hit or Miss?"

38. Lessa, *The Condor Trials*; McSherry, *Predatory States*.

39. Dukalskis, *Making the World Safe for Dictatorship*.

40. Moss, "Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of the Arab Spring"; Dukalskis et al., "The Long Arm and the Iron Fist"; Dukalskis, *Making the World Safe for Dictatorship*; Gorokhovskaia et al., "Still Not Safe."

41. Scholars have touched upon assassination when exploring more broadly the rationale behind covert operations. See, for example, Cormac and Aldrich, "Grey Is the New Black." To be sure, assassination also featured as a method of covert regime change. O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*.

42. Hänni and Grossmann, "Death to Traitors?"; Gioe et al., "Unforgiven."

43. Koblentz, "Regime Security."

44. Shpiro, "Poisoned Chalice"; Dewey, "Pinochet's Poisons"; Dewey, "Poisonous Affairs." Here, of interest is also literature on toxicology exploring the use of "criminal poisonings" as well as their detection and treatment. See Brunka et al., "Selected Political Criminal Poisonings"; and Nakagawa and Tu, "Murders with VX."

45. The volume emerged from a conference on state-sponsored assassination organized by Luca Trenta at Swansea University in May 2023. Most of the contributors to the volume took part in the conference.

46. In 2005, a review of the literature identified at least ten definitions. These often include the type of individual targeted, the means used to target them, the

covert or overt nature of the operation, as well as the degree of intention and premeditation; see Kasher and Yadlin, "Assassination and Preventive Killing."

47. Biberman, "Violence by Proxy"; Richterová, *Watching the Jackals*.

48. Koblentz, "Regime Security."

49. Goldfarb and Litvinenko, *Death of a Dissident*.

50. Schilling and Schilling, "Decision Making in Using Assassinations," 506.

51. Abrahms and Mierau, "Leadership Matters"; Frankel, "The ABCs of HVT."

52. Jamieson and McEvoy, "State Crime by Proxy and Juridical Othering"; McSherry, *Predatory States*.

53. Sanders, "Norm Proxy War and Resistance."

54. Dinges, *The Condor Years*.

55. Blakeley, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism*.

56. Wrong, *Do Not Disturb*, 280–281.

57. Boyle, *The Drone Age*, 65.

58. Boyle, *The Drone Age*, 309; Schmidt and Trenta, "Changes in the Law of Self-Defence?"

59. Gunneflo, *Targeted Killing*.

60. Altman and Wellman, "From Humanitarian Intervention to Assassination."

61. Koven and Perez, "Ethics of Targeted Killings and Assassinations."

62. Dörr and Schmalenbach, *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*.

63. The United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities was tasked with investigating the conduct of US intelligence agencies in the mid-1970s. It was known as the Church Committee from the name of its chair, Senator Frank Church of Idaho.

64. Kurth Cronin, "The Age of Open Assassination."