

Call for papers: state-sponsored assassinations in international politics, history, and law

This is a call for papers and contributions for an interdisciplinary hybrid conference and workshop exploring the role of state-sponsored assassinations in international politics, history, and law. The conference and workshop are organised by and held at Swansea University, UK, **on 16-17 May, 2023**.

Kim Jong-Nam, Sergei Skripal, Qassem Soleimani, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh are only some of the latest names who have been subject to state-sponsored assassination or attempted assassination. Assassination, as a form of intelligence-led active measure, has long played a prominent role in the foreign policies of smaller and greater powers, from the United States and Russia/Soviet Union to Chile, South Africa, and North Korea. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is also characterised by accusations and counter-accusations that Russian and Ukrainian government agencies are plotting and carrying out assassinations.

Over the years, assassinations have targeted foreign officials, dissidents, leaders of non-state groups, investigative journalists, lawyers, and other prominent political figures. They have emerged as stand-alone (covert) operations or as part of broader state activities such as counter-insurgency, counterterrorism, hybrid warfare, and regime preservation/change. The role of state agencies in these operations is often surrounded by secrecy and (im)plausible deniability. Agencies of different governments can find themselves cooperating or colluding with other state and non-state actors to carry out assassinations, adding a layer of complexity.

The aim of the conference is to explore the past, present, and future of state-sponsored assassinations. To this end it will bring together scholars interested in the topic from different disciplines, including but not limited to International Relations, international law, history, sociology/criminology, and (forensic) toxicology.

It aims to answer questions such as:

- Under what conditions do states engage in assassination?
- What targets are selected for assassination? How and why are they chosen?
- Who gives the green light or orders?
- How do states deny or justify the use of such a controversial tool?
- What methods do state agencies use and what are their implications?
- Under what conditions do states outsource assassination to private and/or local actors?
- What weapons are deployed and with what implications?
- What is the place of state-sponsored assassinations in international law?
- To what extent do state-sponsored assassinations challenge international law as well as international and domestic norms?
- To what extent has the practice of state-sponsored assassination changed over time? How - and why?
- What is the effect of state-sponsored assassinations on the target country, its region, and internationally?
- How have modern technologies made state-sponsored assassinations easier to carry out but harder to keep secret?

Possible topics include:

- Secrecy, plausible deniability, and state-sponsored assassination,
- Intelligence cooperation, collusion, and assassination,
- Assassination and international/domestic law and norms,
- Assassinations and hybrid/covert/grey warfare,
- State-sponsored assassinations in history: Cold War to the Present,
- (New) Technologies, weaponry, and assassination,
- Assassination and (forensic) toxicology.

The list is by no means exhaustive.

The aim of the workshop is to identify a group of scholars to work towards a joint grant application. Due to the tight turn-around, we welcome full papers, short presentations, and round-table contributions.

To express your interest, please send a 200 words abstract detailing your contribution and a 1 (or max 2) page CV to Dr Luca Trenta (l.trenta@swansea.ac.uk), Swansea University, UK, by **Friday 31st of March**, 2pm UK time.

Please also specify if you would be interested in attending both the conference and the follow-up grant-writing workshop.

Travel and accommodation will be covered for the UK/EU speakers and contributors. Two bursaries up to £800 each (for travel and accommodation) are also available for ECR and academics from underprivileged backgrounds. It is generally expected that international speakers will contribute via Zoom or Teams.