

A Prolegomenon to a General Theory of Assassination

Ronald F. White, Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
College of Mount St. Joseph

Abstract

Although much has been written about particular assassinations, there is currently no well-defined “General Theory of Assassination”. One of the impediments for the development of such a theory is that the concept of “assassination” is largely socially constructed, vague, and surprisingly malleable. This essay will attempt to address the main sources of conceptual ambiguity that impede the development of such a theory. I will also argue that this General Theory will be enormously complex and that it requires reference to both biological and cultural evolution.

Introduction

Human nature certainly has its dark side. Throughout recorded history it is well documented that as a species we exhibit a propensity to kill ourselves, our enemies, our friends, criminals, competitors, spouses, and even our unruly children. A few demented serial killers kill strangers that they’ve never even met, apparently just for the fun of it. Scientists call this dark-sided class of human behavior “lethal aggression”.¹ Although, there is much research on the various instantiations of “lethal aggression”, there is very little written on the well-known fact that we frequently assassinate both our own leaders and the leaders of other regimes. Although historians and journalists rigorously document the details of individual assassinations, we know very little about the general phenomenon. While there are aspects of assassination behavior that are obviously contextual, highly variable, culturally relative, and change over time, there are also at least some universal truths. Some regimes are certainly more or less likely to assassinate their own leaders and/or the leaders of other regimes; and some regimes are more or less likely to be targeted by assassins than others. It is probably also true that individual leaders that engage in certain kinds of behaviors are more likely to be targeted than others.

Historians are often attracted to the identification and explanation of the first instances of significant human events. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the first human assassination is complicated by the fact that chimpanzees also kill their leaders. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that our Pleistocene forebears and their hominid ancestors also assassinated their leaders. We also know that the most ancient Chinese and Egyptian civilizations were marked by political assassinations. Modern forensic evidence suggests that King Tutankhamen, the most well-known of the Egyptian pharaohs, was probably assassinated about 3000 years ago. The Roman Empire was certainly a breeding

ground for assassination behavior, especially after 235 AD. We also know that, for generations, religiously-based political conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland produced epidemics of assassinations.

In the 1960s, the United States was actively engaged in the assassination of foreign leaders, including the numerous botched attempts by the CIA against Fidel Castro.² About that same time, the United States also weathered more than its own fair share of high profile assassinations, including John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. Gerald Ford survived two assassination attempts. In 1981, Ronald Reagan was seriously wounded by would-be assassin John Hinckley, an unusual case in which, as we shall discover, the motivation for his action may have been more personal than it was political.

Since the 1970s, assassination by agents of the United States has been proscribed by three consecutive executive orders. In 1976, President Ford issued Executive Order 11905, which prohibited assassinations executed by “any person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government”. In 1978 and 1981, similar executive orders were issued by President Carter (Executive Order 12036) and President Ford (Executive Order 12333).³ In recent years, these anti-assassination directives have been co-opted by the war on terror, as the United States continues to hunt down and kill terrorist leaders. There have been several attempts by legislators to reverse these executive orders, including the so-called proposed “Terrorist Elimination Act of 2001”. Defenders of assassination argue that anti-terrorist activities are actually excluded from this prohibition because terrorists are leaders of organizations and not real governmental entities. They prefer to call these acts “targeted killings”.

Since then, the moral proscription against political assassination has been weakened substantially. In 2005, Pat Robinson, the host of the Christian Broadcasting Network’s *700 Club* called for the assassination of Hugo Chavez, the President of Venezuela, and an avowed Marxist and a longtime critic of U.S. foreign policy and President Bush. That a Christian leader should advocate assassination raises the question of how such actions are to be reconciled with the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill!” When the word “kill” is translated as “murder”—construed as the deliberate killing of a human being that is illegal—the defense can be advanced that, in particular political contexts, at least, killing is not morally wrong and those legal impediments should not obtain. Assassination thus falls into a category comparable to soldiers in combat, police in the performance of their duties, and civilians in self-defense. The problem then becomes defining and justifying those “particular political contexts”, which, for Christians, raises the troublesome question, “Whom would Jesus assassinate?”⁴

No matter how we look at it, the mere threat of assassination has always played a pivotal role in the history of human politics. It has also had a profound socio-economic impact upon all nations. Today, political leaders all over the world are routinely protected from motivated and opportunistic assassins. Nations adapt to this threat by implementing defensive strategies, which require the expenditure of time, effort, and resources. Protecting world leaders from assassination

at home and abroad is enormously expensive. Today, the President of the United States travels in an armored vehicle with bullet-proof glass, guarded by an army of Secret Service agents. All local travel routes, including adjacent highways, waterways, and airways are literally shut down. Presidential political functions are closely monitored and security measures are extraordinarily tight. Metal detectors are standard equipment at all entrances.

In the United States the actual budgetary expenditures and the strategies employed are classified "Top Secret". As a consequence, there is virtually no external oversight over these budgets. It is unknown whether the Secret Service's expenditures, which fall under the guise of "presidential security", are subjected to any objective external scrutiny. Although these expenditures are rarely exposed, the "black box" of presidential security provides an almost unlimited opportunity for "pork barrel politics". Congressional leaders are also afforded similar protection, though at a much lower level of rigor. Even presidential candidates are now offered publicly-funded protection.

Despite the expenditure of unlimited resources and the use of increasingly sophisticated surveillance technologies, the most efficient and cost-effective strategy for the protection of modern leaders is to simply avoid public appearances. In most countries, motorcades through congested urban areas with their leaders riding in the back seat of convertibles are no longer a part of our political landscape. This trend toward "strategic isolation" extends not only to world leaders, but also their immediate families. That's why most political activity in the United States and Europe is now conducted through the mass media especially: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet. Consequently, the vast majority of Americans today will never speak to an American President, shake hands, or even attend a presidential event. Although many regimes have tried to reduce their vulnerability, none have completely eradicated the ominous threat of assassination.

Recorded history suggests that assassination has always been an occupational hazard for high-level political leaders. Despite these risks, there has never been a shortage of willing candidates. When individuals do aspire for positions of high leadership, we often question their motives, intelligence, and/or sanity. The threat of assassination may have an indirect influence on the quality of political leadership. Arnold Ludwig's survey of 1,941 world leaders (1900–2000) from 199 different countries suggests that national leadership does not necessarily attract the "cream of the crop". Says Ludwig: "No identifiable form of intelligence, talent, genius, or even experience seems necessary for ruling a country."⁵ Moreover, "Leaders need not be sane, rational, or even mentally competent to rule a country."⁶ Examples come readily to mind.

Leaders of nation states are obviously the most visible and newsworthy targets of assassination and, therefore, are typically afforded the most protection, the most scholarly research, and the most media exposure. But other leaders are also frequently targeted, including former Presidents, presidential candidates, and lower-level politicians. Even religious and cultural leaders such as Martin Luther King and the Pope have been targeted. In many parts of the world journalists are also fair game. Although we are reluctant to dignify gang-related vio-

lence by calling it “political activity”, many, if not most gang-related murders in major cities could be classified as political assassinations. In short, assassination has always been a part of the human political landscape. Unfortunately, we know very little about the general phenomenon.

A research vacuum

Despite its profound social, economic, and political significance, the social sciences have contributed little to our understanding of the general phenomenon of assassination. It is true that the 1970s and 1980s produced a modest flurry of psychological and sociological research on assassination behavior.⁷ Much of that work, however, viewed assassination as a form of deviance, and therefore focused on the psychological pathology of individual assassins, and/or the sociological pathology of individual regimes. Throughout this era the prevailing consensus was that political assassination could be best explained as unnatural behavior exhibited by psychotics, nihilists, and neurotics.⁸ Even today, the historical analysis of assassinations tends to focus upon the mental capacity of the assassins.⁹

In recent years there has been much written about the use of assassination as a war strategy. For example, there is a substantial body of research that explores the numerous assassinations that marked the revolutionary struggle in Northern Ireland, especially Sinn Fein’s strategic assassinations employed against Great Britain on “Bloody Sunday”.¹⁰ In the Israeli–Palestinian conflict there is a fairly robust body of literature that analyzes Israel’s long-standing policy of “targeted killings”, especially during the second Intifada.¹¹ At the 1972 Olympics, members of a Palestinian group known as Black September massacred eleven Israeli athletes. Israel responded by hunting down and killing more than a dozen of the alleged perpetrators. In 2005, public interest in these “targeted killings” was rekindled by the release of Steven Spielberg’s movie, *Munich*.

In 2004, forensic scientists determined that Viktor Yushchenko, the leading candidate for the presidency of the Ukraine, had fallen ill, not because of a natural disease process, but dioxin poisoning. It is highly unlikely that this ingestion was accidental. Therefore we might logically infer that he was the target of an unsuccessful assassination. Although forensic investigations rarely expose deep conspiracies, many observers suspect Russia may have been behind the attempt. There is indeed a growing body of contemporary research by Russian journalists documenting the resurgence of strategic assassination activity allegedly orchestrated by Vladimir Putin.

In July, 2006, the Russian Parliament passed a law introduced by Putin, which legalized the assassination of “enemies of the Russian Regime”. Today there is concern that Russia has indeed been actively targeting its “enemies”. At least 24 journalists and government officials critical of Vladimir Putin have died under suspicious circumstances, both at home and abroad. One of the more recent killings involved the mysterious death of a former spy Alexander Litvinenko.¹² In this case the poison used was Polonium 210, a highly toxic radioactive isotope

that is both extremely rare (and relatively easy to trace) and enormously expensive.

In summary, while there is a lot of research on particular assassinations and their specific contexts, there has been very little progress on what I call a General Theory of Assassination that might shed light on the timeless universality of that phenomenon. To be fair, a recent essay by Zaryab Iqbal and Christopher Zorn takes us a long way toward that goal. They argue that there are three key traits of leaders that tend to precipitate assassination behavior: “the means by which they come to power, the extent of that power, and repressiveness of the regime they lead.”¹³ While their research provides an important contribution toward a General Theory, it fails to take into account the larger philosophical and the epistemic barriers that haunt any such theory.

This essay will attempt to clear the way for a more General Theory, by elucidating some of the philosophical ambiguities that underlie of the concept of assassination. I will argue that assassination among humans is universal behavior that transcends time and place and that it haunts all levels of political activity. Therefore, I will suggest that the concept of “assassination” is best understood in the broad context of political leadership, at multiple levels, and that when we arbitrarily limit its scope to the killing of leaders of nation states, we will underestimate its larger role in human affairs and ultimately overlook its natural foundations. Finally, I will propose that assassination behavior has been shaped by both biological and cultural evolution.

A philosophical minefield

Despite the fact that assassination appears to be a universal human behavior, we actually know very little about it. In fact, the overwhelming majority of research on assassination has been conducted by journalists and amateur historians, and most of that has addressed specific assassinations, most notably, of course, the Lincoln and Kennedy assassinations. So why are there so few scholars working on that General Theory of Assassination? One reason might be that it is a philosophical minefield.

The first obstacle to be confronted in the formulation of a General Theory is scholarly debate over what we expect to gain from a general theory. In this regard, I think, there is an overlapping consensus that theories serve three main functions: *explanation*, *prediction*, and *control* of events. But there is debate within each of these components. Obviously, there is a lot of interpretation that goes into the idea of what constitutes a “good explanation”. Many philosophers argue that a “good explanation” is based entirely on the logical relationship between our old beliefs and new beliefs. Hence, a good explanation is matter of consistency between widely held cultural beliefs of a specific community at a particular time and place. Hence, some religious communities “explain” natural disasters in terms of divine punishment for human wrongdoing.

For that community, divine causation serves as the ultimate explanation of everything. But the interpretation of divine intent is invariably relative to specific

religions. So while divine causation may be psychologically satisfying within many religious cultures, it fails miserably in terms of its capacity to predict and control future events. The explanatory power of appeals to an unknowable entity (God) using unspecified means (His will) to intervene in human affairs is a subjective phenomenon that can vary from person to person and from time to time. Although meteorological forecasts, for example, are notoriously imperfect, they are more reliable than the ruminations of astrologers, diviners, and mystics.

The difference appears to be that, while imperfectly known, there are at least vague and general laws that relate specific meteorological conditions (temperature, pressure, and the like) to specific meteorological effects (hurricanes, tornadoes, and lesser events). Although most empiricists acknowledge that the proliferation of socially constructed, non-scientific explanations is probably inevitable, the hallmark of scientific explanations is that their (implicit or explicit) invocation of laws renders them testable; that is to say, they can be disconfirmed or even falsified based on their capacity to predict and perhaps control future events. Hence, a good explanation would require not only consistency with old beliefs, or tradition, but would also increase our ability to predict and/or control future events. In short, a good theory must be “useful”.

Scientists also distinguish between *proximate explanations* and *ultimate explanations*. There is a growing consensus that the *ultimate explanation* for all human behavior, including assassination behavior, is substantially rooted in evolutionary biology: that is to say, that human behavior is ultimately caused by neuronal brain activity shaped over millions of years by variation and natural selection, which predispose the species toward the acquisition of specific forms of behavior under specific environmental conditions. There are also multiple layers of lower level *proximate explanations* for assassination behavior, including our natural propensity to employ lethal violence in pursuit of our individual and collective goals. Although proximate explanations can be reduced to evolutionary biology when those behaviors are the genetic legacy of very human being, proximate explanations tend to be more useful. And this form of behavior appears to be heavily affected by environmental variables.

So what would a “General Theory of Assassination” look like? Well, first of all, in order to fulfill the empirical requirements of a scientific explanation, it would have to be testable. This would entail the capacity to make accurate predictions of past and future events, at least statistically, and with greater reliability as more relevant factors are taken into consideration. For example, a useful theory ought to predict the relative frequency of assassination behavior in different cultural environments; what kinds of regimes are more likely to exhibit assassination behavior; what kinds of leaders are most likely to be assassinated; and what kinds of individuals are most likely to become assassins. However, we must be wary of the possibility that the variables associated with assassination behavior may be so complex that prediction and control are practically impossible. In other words, a General Theory of Assassination may very well not be as deterministic as the laws of macro-physics. If and when all the values of all the relevant variables are known those laws may turn out to be probabilistic at best.

The ability to predict future events does not necessarily lead to our ability to control those events. Today, within very strict limits, meteorologists can accurately predict the formation, strength, and path of hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. But, to the best of our public knowledge, they cannot also control them, whether or not the government has that capability.¹⁴ Even more significantly, we can predict traffic jams leading out of those areas, but we tend to be unable to control them. Therefore, it may be the case that a General Theory of Assassination may resemble a General Theory of Hurricanes. We may be able to explain assassination in terms of what we know about human nature and human culture, and we might be able to predict the likelihood of assassination behavior in specific contexts, but we may or may not ever be able to control it.

Assassins are not only interested in becoming more efficient at killing their intended targets; they are often also concerned with controlling the forensic interpretation of their actions. Political regimes are of course intensely interested in controlling assassination behavior and the subsequent interpretation of assassinations from both within and outside of their own regimes. Hence, a good General Theory of Assassination might lead to not only more efficient techniques for protecting political leaders but also more efficient techniques for successfully assassinating them and ever more efficient strategies for controlling the subsequent interpretation of assassinations and attempted assassinations.

But before we can explore the possibilities of developing this General Theory, we will have to address a number of conceptual ambiguities that currently impede the development of a scientific theory. At first glance, the meaning of the term “assassination” seems fairly straightforward and painfully obvious, but, upon close philosophical analysis, the concept is, in fact, a minefield of highly malleable social construction, rife with ambiguity. Before social scientists (and evolutionary biologists) can do much with it, they must agree on what qualifies as *assassination behavior*, and how it relates to other forms of lethal aggression such as murder, suicide, execution, and even accidental death.

The targets

The English term “assassin” and its various derivations in other languages has been traced, etymologically, to an Arabic word “hashsash” and its plural form “hashshashin”, which originally designated a members of a eleventh century Islamic sect of “hashish smokers” that systematically murdered its enemies—usually, the Western Crusaders. Subsequently, the English term “assassin” was apparently transported from Syria to Europe by the Crusaders, where it took on its current meaning(s). Most definitions converge on the supposition that an assassin is “one who murders a politically important person either for hire or from fanatical motives”.¹⁵ However, the semantics underlying that definition turn out to be surprisingly elastic, and, therefore, raise categorization ambiguity on the margins. What does political importance signify? How important must that leader be? And so on. In the absence of specificity, this means that any scientific research on assassination will, invariably, invoke highly variable definitions. Therefore, I shall argue that the first step in clarifying these ambiguities

is to acknowledge that assassination involves a complex equation involving two sets of interacting variables: *targets* (leaders) and *assassins* (motivated killers).

Assassination is a form of lethal aggression. Hence, we humans deliberately assassinate “politically important persons” and murder and/or execute everyone else. But what does it mean for a leader to be “politically important?” A narrow interpretation of the term “politically important” would stipulate those leaders serve in a legal capacity within a legitimate governmental institution. We might, therefore, be tempted to restrict our interpretation of assassination to the killing of official heads of nation states.

If we were to adopt this most narrow interpretation, the number of assassinations worldwide is certainly noteworthy. According to Iqbal and Zorn, since World War II there have been about 78 successful assassinations of heads of state, including high-profile leaders such as: John F. Kennedy (United States), Anwar Sadat (Egypt), Indira Gandhi (India) and Yitzhak Rabin (Israel).¹⁶ Although limiting the use of the word “assassination” to the successful killing of leaders of nation states makes social science research a lot easier, it also tends to grossly understate both the frequency and cultural significance of political killings. If we were to extend the term “politically important” to the holders of lower political offices, such as Huey Long, Robert Kennedy, or the countless number of lower-level politicians assassinated in the ongoing War in Iraq, the number of worldwide assassinations would increase exponentially. Some scholars have convincingly argued that the death of Senator Paul Wellstone in a plane crash was no accident, but an assassination.¹⁷ And if we were to expand the pool of targets to include former heads of state, that number would increase and include recent leaders like Rajiv Gandhi (India) and Rafik Hariri (Lebanon).

We might also expand the meaning of “politically important” to include cultural leaders that influence politics from outside of political institutions. By this broader interpretation, one might argue that “culturally important” leaders such as Martin Luther King, and perhaps Dian Fossey,¹⁸ were “politically important”, and, therefore, may have been targets of assassination. We might also argue that Pope John Paul II survived an assassination attempt; and that Princess Diana may have been assassinated. In Iraq, large numbers of university professors, journalists, and translators have been targeted, not to mention lawyers associated with the trial of Saddam Hussein.¹⁹

If we were to include “unsuccessful” assassinations in calculating the frequency of assassination behavior, then that number would certainly grow substantially, as the vast majority of assassination attempts are indeed unsuccessful. In fact, many world leaders have, apparently, survived numerous such attempts. Fidel Castro may be the modern record holder, with as many as 612 reported attempts against his life, which include at least 24 attempts by the CIA in the 1960s.²⁰

Many assassinations have been “botched” by incompetent assassins, while others have been effectively “thwarted” by vigilant regimes. Unfortunately, it is not always forensically clear whether any given assassination was botched or thwarted. Some targets apparently survive well-planned assassination attempts

because they were “lucky”, and others were successfully assassinated because they were unlucky.

Regardless of whether a leader is either successfully assassinated or survives an assassination attempt, there is usually a sympathetic public response and a corresponding increase in political capital. The assassination of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy certainly enhanced their historical reputations, and the attempted assassinations of Presidents Ford and Reagan definitely increased their subsequent popularity.²¹ Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that, worldwide, a certain percentage of thwarted assassination attempts that are reported to the media, are, in fact, *imaginary assassinations* staged for propaganda purposes. After all, thwarted and/or unsuccessful assassination attempts can serve multiple political purposes. Not only do they increase political capital of the intended targets by eliciting feelings of sympathy among followers, but they also send the precautionary message to future would-be assassins that their leaders are well protected. Feigned (or staged) assassinations are easily disguised through the use of *scapegoats*, who are often killed at the scene or summarily tried, convicted, and executed.

Of course, we’d all like to believe that the difference between real and imaginary assassination attempts can be definitively unmasked by competent fact-finding commissions and highly-skilled historians. But it is never easy for forensic investigators to discern between real assassination attempts and imaginary ones, especially when access to information is controlled by internal or external political regimes with well-oiled propaganda apparatus. Moreover, there is always the very real possibility that the fact-finding commissions themselves are either incompetent or part of a larger conspiracy. The stark reality is that assassination behavior is grounded in the bedrock of human deception, and therefore we cannot know, with any degree of certainty, exactly how many reported assassination attempts are imaginary, how many alleged assassins are actually scapegoats, and whether or not the forensic investigations have been politically manipulated. It is also important to acknowledge that this web of deception, which shrouds particular assassinations, inspires endless cycles of historical revisionism within and between generations.

In recent years, another semantic puzzle has emerged in the context of the “War on Terrorism”. What we call “Terrorist Groups”, especially those in the Middle East, are actually highly decentralized social and political organizations. Although the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas are certainly “politically important”, their influence is often exercised outside of the legally sanctioned political order. Therefore, one might argue that there is a semantic difference between the “targeted killing” of terrorist leaders, as practiced by Israel and the United States, and the “assassination” of legitimate political leaders. One might also argue that leaders of terrorist organizations are, in fact, criminal enterprises, and that killing terrorists is more akin to execution than assassination. And if we view terrorist activity through the lens of warfare, terrorist leaders may be interpreted as either enemy combatants, and therefore legitimate targets, or non-combatant civilians. Hence, we might disagree over whether the killing by the United States of Saddam Hussein’s sons, Uday and Qusay, were assassinations, successful

military operations, or the non-judicial execution or murder of civilian non-combatants.

Given the diffuse nature of political power in terrorist regimes, one might also question the relative “importance” of the leaders of decentralized movements, and the strategic value of these “targeted killings”. Is it really worth the expenditure of the vast military resources required to locate and kill these relatively powerless leaders? Would killing Osama bin Laden really advance the West’s efforts in the War on Terrorism? Or, would it merely inspire more ideology and more motivated terrorists?

In summary, there is a lot ambiguity on the “target” side of the assassination equation, especially in terms of the precise meaning of “political significance”. And it is also very difficult to forensically differentiate “real” assassination attempts and “imaginary” assassination attempts. It is also tricky to distinguish between “botched” and “thwarted” assassination attempts. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the definition of a “target” is highly malleable and therefore subject to endless cycles of reinterpretation. But what about the “assassin” side of the equation?

The assassins

In order to qualify as an assassination, the killing (or attempted killing) must be judged to be both deliberate (not accidental or natural), and politically motivated (not personally motivated). In the case of the death of Princess Diana, the ongoing factual debate has been over whether her death was intentional or accidental, and whether it was “politically motivated”. Although we usually suppose that John Hinckley attempted to “assassinate” President Reagan, subsequent investigations concluded (correctly or incorrectly) that the act was primarily motivated by the would-be assassin’s neurotic desire to impress actress Jodie Foster, and therefore that it was something short of “politically motivated”. But the forensic determination of motivation in the context of assassination behavior is notoriously obscure and easily manipulated by self-interested regimes and profit-seeking news organizations.

Political assassinations are significant social events, and therefore assassins are subsequently lionized by some political constituencies and reviled by others. Some assassins admit their guilt and bask in the glory or notoriety of their actions, while others vociferously proclaim their innocence all the way to the gallows. Given the global media coverage of assassinations (and assassination attempts), it is probably true that at least some confessed assassins were actually innocent glory seekers, if not innocent scapegoats framed by governments.

Another issue that will haunt any General Theory of Assassination is that although some assassins act alone, others are assisted by co-conspirators. Conspiracies can involve a wide range of covert assistance, including the provision of information (intelligence), weapons, transportation, alibis, and even subsequent sanctuary. *In-group assassinations* are planned and executed by disgruntled individuals and/or coalitions from within the leader’s own regime (Julius

Caesar). *Out-group assassinations* involve killings that are planned and executed by individuals and/or coalitions from neighboring regimes (Archduke Ferdinand). Sometimes assistance is provided by individuals and groups from within the targeted regime, and sometimes by individuals, groups, and regimes from the outside. And sometimes both are involved. Given the highly variable modes and levels of assassination assistance, clandestine internal and external conspiracies are notoriously difficult to unravel. In the case of the JFK assassination, the most controversial issue has been whether Lee Oswald acted unassisted as a “lone gunman” or as part of a larger conspiracy involving Cuba, the Mafia, Texas Oilmen, shadowy agents of the United States Government, or another interpreted party.

When a leader is killed by a member(s) of his/her own regime there can be forensic disagreement over whether the killing is to be interpreted as an assassination or a legal “execution”, as perhaps might have been the case with Julius Caesar. Sometimes in-group assassins act in collaboration with external regimes, which are usually regarded as “acts of war”. Today, most out-group assassinations conducted by the United States and Israel are referred to as “targeted killings”, in order to avoid the longstanding moral and legal stigmas associated with the term “assassination”.

Some assassinations have been attempted or carried out by individuals and coalitions of individuals, spontaneously, without much planning or forethought, while others seem to have been well-orchestrated, well-financed, clandestine operations. Although many assassinations have been successful, most have been either thwarted by vigilant regimes, or botched by incompetent assassins. (Unfortunately, as stated earlier, the difference between “botched” and “thwarted” is difficult to forensically determine.) Many assassins, would-be assassins, and co-conspirators have been subsequently identified, captured, and punished by governments, while others have no doubt escaped. Given the inevitable complexities associated with assassination, it is also highly probable that, through the course of human history, many regimes have inadvertently or deliberately identified and/or executed a number of innocent non-assassins.

And finally, some in-group assassinations are executed in other countries, where their targets may not be well-protected, and where it is easier for the assassins to escape. It may be the case that it is easier for motivated assassins to gain access to their targets while they are residing in Western democracies. Sometimes in-group assassinations are assisted by the host government, and other governments, and sometimes not. As noted above, some Russian journalists argue that Putin has been actively engaged in the assassination of dissidents both at home and abroad, as may have been the case in the recent death of the Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko while he was living in England.

In order to qualify as an assassination, the killing must be deliberate. Therefore, assassins can be analyzed in terms of two complex variables: *motivation* and *opportunity*.

The matter of motivation

The motivation for human behavior is notoriously complex, perhaps even forensically impenetrable. Many researchers view human motivation through the lens of rationality. Among humans, the use of lethal aggression (in general) and assassination (in particular) are often viewed as deliberate, forward-looking *strategies* intended to bring about certain desired ends, goals, or purposes. Some strategies are regarded as functional or effective, and therefore are judged to be rationally justified, while nonfunctional strategies that do not achieve the desired goals are judged to be irrational.

Assassinations are, by definition, political events; therefore it is important to differentiate between political and nonpolitical motivation. Sometimes individual assassins are politically motivated to kill leaders, but at least some are also motivated by individual self-interest. Professional assassins get paid to kill leaders,²² while others may be motivated by the glory or notoriety afforded high profile assassins. In recent years, many assassins have been religiously motivated “suicide bombers”, in pursuit of rewards provided in the afterlife (by God), and the social and financial rewards that are bestowed upon their surviving relatives (by their conspiratorial sponsors). Some religiously motivated assassins intend to advance the collective interests of their religious denomination or sect, as is the case in Iraq, where Sunnis and Shiites have been engaged in a power struggle.

These *strategic assassinations* are often conducted in the context of intra-group warfare and inter-group warfare; that is, killing leaders is often seen as a useful war strategy. The strategic value of assassination and its basis in rationality seems to offer a promising portal into understanding assassination behavior. But it may be the case that many, if not most, assassinations are not strategically motivated behaviors, but rather emotional responses to past events. Many scholars argue that most acts of lethal aggression among humans are irrational or non-rational. Irrational human behavior is often attributed to emotional causation, which can be traced to brain activity regulated by hormones. The most prolific irrational motivation for all forms of lethal violence in general and perhaps assassination in particular, may be *retribution* for personal or collective wrongdoing.

Although there is very little quantitative research on the subject, many if not most assassinations are probably at least partially retributive: executed by disgruntled individuals and/or groups that believe (rightly or wrongly) that they have been harmed by a specific leader or regime. We know that retribution is as deeply rooted in our genetic heritage as it is in other primates, especially chimpanzees.²³ Therefore, we may be predisposed by our genes to “get even”. Retributive assassinations, therefore, are backward-looking, and not necessarily intended to influence future events. Hence, we might say that retributive assassinations are non-strategic. However, at least in the Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian moral traditions, retribution is bounded by the Principle of Proportionality, or “an eye for an eye”. Thus, one might argue that morally justified retributive assassinations should be limited to retribution for acts of lethal violence wrought by leaders against others.

Human beings tend to associate themselves with *in-groups*, which are often based on racial, tribal, ethnic, religious, and/or national identification. These *in-groups* tend to be biased against *out-groups*. And of course, individual human beings have notoriously long memories. But when *in-groups* are wronged, collective memories can be culturally transmitted across generations as cultural artifacts embedded in tradition. Many if not most assassinations may be classified as impersonal, retributive, political payback for these longstanding inter-generational vendettas.

Collective retribution, driven by bias against *out-groups*, is sought by coalitions of like-minded cohorts. Some retributive assassinations are committed by insurgencies within *in-groups*. Organized insurgencies, like all groups, are also held together by *in-group* bias. *In-group* cohesion is forged by a combination of information control and physical coercion. The common quest for retribution within a group, alone, can be a powerful motivating factor that binds together insurgent coalitions. Retributive assassinations are non-strategic to the extent that their primary motivation is getting even for past wrongdoing. But given the ubiquitous nature of human motivation, many assassinations, if not most, are probably both strategic and forward-looking, and retributive and backward-looking. And, of course, at least some assassinations may be irrational acts that are neither strategic nor retributive.

Modern nation states certainly provide ample motivation for both *in-group* and *out-group* assassinations. Some regimes are more likely to motivate *in-group* assassinations, while other regimes are more likely to inspire *out-group* assassins. Obviously, in terms of sheer probability, large regimes with long lethal aggressive histories are probably more likely to inspire both strategic and retributive assassinations. Relatively homogenous religious societies, such as Japan, are probably less likely to generate motivated *in-group* assassins than more heterogeneous societies such as the Iraq, Lebanon, or the United States. However, even decisive numerical *in-group* majorities must employ a degree of coercive power to remain in power. Regimes that employ higher levels of coercive force, either at home or abroad, are also more likely to inspire retributive assassinations. And finally, it might be the case that regimes that have an unequal internal distribution of wealth are more likely to inspire assassins than other societies.

In the West, there is still that longstanding tradition of explaining the behavior of assassins and regimes in pathological terms; that is to say, that assassination is still interpreted as aberrant or abnormal behavior on the part of individuals or regimes. Again, this interpretive framework tends to reduce assassination behavior to the pathology of groups and the pathology of the assassins.²⁴ But invoking medico-legal terminology in the context of assassinations also offers the political advantage of allowing regimes to dismiss these events as “random acts of violence by a madman”. Thus, at least some assassins or would-be assassins end up in mental health facilities. This approach has the added bonus of silencing assassins by reducing their subsequent testimony to maniacal blathering. And, given the ever-expanding lexicon of “mental diseases”, there is always a ready stockpile of diagnoses that can be forensically applied to assassins and would-be assassins. Hence, the courts subsequently determined that

John Hinckley was mentally ill, and, therefore, sent him to a mental institution rather than prison. This cultural blending of assassination with forensic psychiatry also has a tendency to deflect inquiry away from conspiracies. After all, madmen are not generally considered to be very cooperative.

Our propensity to label assassins in psychiatric terms, therefore, serves an important political function. Psychiatric diagnoses can serve as a convenient way to end forensic inquiry and cut off further investigation into deep conspiracies. And, of course, psychiatric labeling also provides a way to explain assassinations that might otherwise be regarded as inexplicable. Psychiatry also reminds us that political leaders tend to have a “grandiose sense of invulnerability”,²⁵ and therefore they do not always do much to protect themselves from would-be assassins, let alone avail themselves of the newest technologies. This sense of invulnerability is nourished by the gross asymmetry between attempted assassinations and successful ones. As stated earlier, surviving an assassination attempt is widely regarded as a “badge of honor”, which can have great propaganda value. The ability of regimes to interpret assassinations and assassination attempts is enhanced by mass media. However, as access to the media becomes increasingly decentralized, it becomes that much more difficult for subsequent interpreters to differentiate between real and imaginary assassination attempts.

So the forensic interpretation of assassination behavior is more malleable than we care to admit, and therefore our knowledge of particular assassinations is both highly contextual and eminently fallible. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a fairly well-defined set of variables that might suggest the broad outlines of a General Theory of Assassination. First of all, we cannot proceed without acknowledging the obvious fact that, throughout human history at all times and places, the overwhelming majority of political leaders and the overwhelming majority of assassins (not to mention murderers, sex criminals, and bank robbers) have always been males. This suggests that there may be some sort of a sex-based, biological predisposition for both political leadership and assassination. We must also admit that assassinations can require a lot of planning and cooperation, not only on the part of the assassin(s) but also on the part of the regimes that are attempting to protect their leaders from assassination. Assassination obviously requires a highly developed cerebral cortex!

In summary, it is relatively easy to motivate would-be assassins. Professional assassins do it for money, while others do it in order to gain entry into the after-life. Some do it in order to bring about regime change, while others are motivated by personal or collective retribution. Some assassins are motivated by the lure of either a glorious or notorious legacy, while others simply act on irrational motives. Therefore, any defensive strategy that relies exclusively on reducing the motivation to assassinate leaders is probably doomed to failure. That’s why most regimes also attempt to protect their leaders by reducing an assassin’s opportunity to successfully assassinate.

Opportunity

Once an assassin (and/or a coalition of co-conspirators) is motivated to act, the probability of a successful assassination is contingent upon other variables, most notably factors associated with opportunity. But the opportunity to assassinate a leader is also wrought with hidden complexities.

The psychological profile of a particular leader might motivate a greater or lesser number of potential assassins. The opportunity to assassinate might be similarly influenced by the psychological profile of targeted leaders. It is a well-documented fact that high level political leaders tend to be risk-takers. Both John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy were notorious risk-takers. Risk-takers may tend to underestimate or even ignore the threat of assassination and fail to take appropriate precautions. However, other targeted leaders have been much more cautious.²⁶ Therefore, although risk-taking on the part of the leaders might turn out to be a factor in at least some assassinations, it is probably not a universal feature of assassination behavior.

While the psychological makeup of leaders may play a role in assassination, the most salient variables involved in assessing the opportunity to assassinate any given leader are probably the *location* and *accessibility* of the targeted leader. Both are profoundly shaped by technological innovation. Historically, many regimes reduce the opportunity of motivated assassins to kill their leaders by concealing their precise location—a strategy that has been most effectively employed by Osama bin Laden (and perhaps less effectively by the late Saddam Hussein). Concealment, however, is not an effective strategy in all cultural settings. For some nation states, there are high political costs associated with concealment, especially for democratic regimes that require a degree of interaction between leaders and followers. Concealment, however, is more effective in protecting leaders of decentralized organizations, where power is more diffuse.

The concealment strategy has always been constrained by the evolution of surveillance technologies, especially aircraft and satellites armed with powerful imaging technologies. Osama bin Laden's success has been enhanced by the mountainous terrain of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although the United States has offered \$25 million for information leading to his capture, it is difficult to publicize that generous offer in a region where there is very little electricity, let alone television, radio, or Internet access. Literacy rates might also be less than optimal. Even if there were self-interested informants anxious to collect that reward, there is a dearth of personal communication technology, such as cell phones. If an informant did reveal his location, s/he would have to deal with swift retribution from Bin Laden's notoriously ruthless followers. But for most regimes concealment is not a viable option. That's why most regimes reduce the opportunity to assassinate their leaders by controlling accessibility.

All regimes set up physical barriers that reduce accessibility. Historically, this strategy usually involves the use of fortification, surveillance, intelligence gathering, defensive weaponry, and a coterie of other strategies. Given advancements in modern weaponry, especially increasingly more destructive bombs, most modern regimes rely on underground bunkers to protect their most impor-

tant leaders. Of course, these advancements are invariably neutralized by increasingly more powerful “bunker-busting” bombs.

Traditionally, well-financed assassins penetrate a leader’s strategic defenses through the use of paid informants and/or spies. Some regimes are more difficult to penetrate than others, depending upon the degree of loyalty of followers and likelihood of response to financial incentives. Religiously-based terrorist organizations have been especially difficult to penetrate, not only because of zealous loyalty to their leaders, but also because their followers are less likely to be motivated by worldly enticements, especially financial incentives. Those few potential informants that might be motivated to accept financial rewards are likely to fear retribution by notoriously ruthless and efficient terrorist regimes. Threats issued by regimes that are notoriously efficient at monitoring and enforcement serve as a reliable counterweight to generous rewards, especially when these rewards are offered by regimes of questionable reliability.

Strategically, the only way to control assassination behavior is to reduce either the motivation and/or opportunity of assassins. But as regimes adopt new protective strategies, assassins adapt to these new strategies by developing their own counter-strategies. And of course, both sides of the assassination equation are influenced by technological evolution.

Technologies and techniques

Over thousands of years of recorded history, competition between targets and assassins has resembled an “arms race”, where neither party has gained a lasting competitive advantage. Evolutionary scholars argue that strategic arms races proceed on the basis of feedback causality, whereby advancements in killing techniques automatically breed protective counter-techniques. Theorists often refer to this phenomenon as the “Red Queen Effect”; as you may recall from Lewis Carol’s *Alice in Wonderland*, there was a character that was constantly running in place, but never getting anywhere. Likewise, as natural selection breeds lions with increasingly acute senses and speed, their prey adapt to these changes, which, over generations, neutralizes that advantage.²⁷ Technological arms races have a similar effect. There are two main areas of technological evolution that exhibit the Red Queen Effect: *information technologies* that facilitate the creation and dissemination of information, misinformation, and disinformation; and *offensive and defensive technologies* that are used to kill or defend targets.

Advancements in information technology, no doubt, have contributed to the frequency, success, and subsequent interpretation of assassinations. In the ancient world, it is probably safe to assume that both motivation and opportunity to assassinate were influenced by the relative dearth of a mass media. For centuries, information pertaining to the location and access to leaders was contingent upon the use of human informants, moles, or spies. Today, thanks to newspapers, radio, cable television, cell phones, and the Internet blogosphere, it is much easier to motivate assassins. Not only do we know more about the be-

havior of our leaders, but we also know what they look like, where they “have been” and where they “will be” at any given time.

But advancements in information technology breed counter-technologies that thwart and/or obfuscate the conveyance of information. Regimes routinely use those same technologies and media outlets to strategically disseminate disinformation in order to conceal the whereabouts of their often-targeted leaders, and, in some cases, even the identity of the assassins; 9/11 may have been an instructive example.²⁸ Subsequent dissemination of both information and disinformation about assassinations and assassination attempts has also been profoundly influenced by the ever-expanding reach of the mass media. And this same mass media has become a prolific source of conspiracy theories.

Historically, the tools of assassination have evolved from relatively simple “low-tech” instruments, like fists, clubs, rocks, knives, and poisons, which require close contact personal with their targets. Today we have complex “high-tech” impersonal instruments such as guns, bombs, aircraft, missiles, and most recently weapons fired from unmanned “drones”. The ongoing war in Iraq has contributed significantly to the evolution of impersonal assassination technology. The introduction of “improvised explosive devices” (“IEDs”) has inspired a corresponding arms race of armored vehicles, and technologies to detect these roadside bombs before they are detonated.

In light of the persistence of assassination behavior worldwide, it is certainly an open question as to whether technological evolution has favored targeted leaders or motivated assassins. But let’s not forget that, despite the utilization of state of the art surveillance technology and remote-controlled killing devices, Osama bin Laden remains at large (if he is, in fact, alive!). It seems that the age-old concealment strategy of hiding in the mountains is still a worthy counterbalance to Western surveillance technologies.

This complex interface between information technology and weapon technology has always been intriguing. Despite the availability of modern surveillance equipment and state-of-the-art communication technology, assassins and targets still act based on false information. Many modern assassinations and assassination attempts inadvertently kill innocent bystanders. Sometimes advancements in killing technologies are effectively neutralized by the skillful use of information technology.

In 2006, the CIA bombed three buildings in Pakistan using an unmanned drone aircraft, killing at least 17 people. According to the Bush administration, the bombing was actually an attempt to assassinate the No. 2 leader of al-Qaida, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Although this turned out to be an unsuccessful assassination, there was significant “collateral damage”. At least some innocent women and children were killed. Thanks to international media outlets such as CNN, news of that attempt was transmitted worldwide, as was the spectacle of thousands of Pakistani citizens protesting in the streets of Karachi. Thus, the mass media can play a major role in motivating future terrorists and retributive assassinations.

Contemporary terrorist organizations are experts at controlling the interpretation of information within their own networks. But they are also highly skilled at manipulating the mass media, and therefore have the ability to inspire global terrorism. Hence, assassinations and assassination attempts against terrorist groups are always portrayed in terms of real or imagined collateral damage, usually the death of innocent women and children: a strategy that tends to motivate greater numbers of would-be terrorists seeking retribution. Utilization of state-of-the-art information technology has both assisted and thwarted many assassinations, but it has also assisted law enforcement, historians, and “spin doctors” in their quest to interpret those assassinations and assassination attempts.

Today, when an assassination or assassination attempt takes place anywhere in the world, we are almost always bombarded by a barrage of information, misinformation, and disinformation. All of this is transmitted globally by multiple media outlets. The lesson here is that assassination has always been conditioned by technological “arms races”, that influence not only the motivation and opportunity to assassinate leaders, but also the subsequent interpretation of assassinations.

In summary, assassinations are constrained by two highly contextualized sets of culturally shaped determinants: motivation and opportunity. Strategic, forward-looking assassinations are motivated by the desire to alter the future political environment of a regime. Non-strategic, backward-looking assassinations are motivated by in-group/out-group bias and are often precipitated by the desire to achieve collective retribution for past acts of lethal aggression. Retributive motivation is highly conditioned by both the personal and cultural beliefs of the assassin(s). These beliefs are shaped by the communities that produce assassins as well as the communities of their targets. Many assassinations are motivated by intergenerational ideological beliefs that have been replicated via teaching and learning and facilitated by information technology. Many, if not most assassinations have been motivated by disinformation that has been strategically disseminated by competing leaders. Other assassinations appear to be forensically inexplicable if not irrational. And finally, both the motivation and the opportunity for assassination are influenced by the evolution of technology.

Conclusion

Any credible General Theory of Assassination must address the philosophical minefield that envelopes our cultural interpretation of assassination behavior. First of all, we must acknowledge that the labeling process is always *ex post facto*; that is to say, our knowledge of the details of particular assassinations is shaped by subsequent forensic investigators. Whenever a politically important person dies, forensic investigators must determine whether that death was the result of an accident, natural causes, or whether that person was murdered, executed, or assassinated. These investigations are enormously complex, highly fallible, and contingent upon the competence, objectivity, and knowledge base of the investigators. Although most historians now agree that the Warren Commission that initially investigated the Kennedy assassination was incompetent,

there is still lingering debate concerning its objectivity, if not outright complicity. Our cultural interpretation of assassination, therefore, is contingent upon the veracity of these subsequent investigations, which are perpetually revisited by subsequent generations of investigators. In short, our knowledge of assassination behavior is inexorably historical and interpretive. Because assassinations are regarded as pivotal sociopolitical events, they are subject to endless cycles of reinterpretation within and across generations.

Forensic investigations are typically conducted under the auspices of national and international governmental institutions, which are also responsible for gathering a “chain of evidence”. These “official” investigations are invariably reinterpreted by other governmental institutions, journalists, and historians. Some assassinations are subsequently interpreted as non-politically motivated murders. Some are initially interpreted as accidents, but subsequently reinterpreted as assassinations, and vice versa. Sometimes “lone gunmen” are subsequently reinterpreted as bit players in larger conspiracies, and sometimes conspiracies expand or dissolve under scrutiny. At least some assassinations previously interpreted as out-group assassinations are reinterpreted as in-group assassinations, and vice versa. Although at least some investigations are conducted by relatively competent investigators that are motivated to uncover the Truth, many others are either incompetent or co-conspiratorial.

Our knowledge of particular assassinations is further hampered by the fact that assassination behavior is rooted in Machiavellian guile and deception at multiple levels. Deception plays a key role on both sides of the assassination equation. Assassins employ deception to locate their targets and get close enough to kill them and leaders employ deception to protect those leaders. Assassins and their co-conspirators employ deception to not only escape, but also avoid subsequent prosecution. Again, “Machiavellian Intelligence” requires a highly developed cerebral cortex.

Assassinations will always be complex historical events that are subject to interpretation and reinterpretation within and between generations. Today, law enforcement specialists, journalists, historians, sociologists, and forensic psychologists engage in seemingly endless debate over both past and present assassinations. It is especially difficult for regimes, researchers, and other subsequent interpreters of political assassinations to unravel the Truth behind well-orchestrated conspiracies. When assassinations originate from either within or outside of any given regime there is usually ample motivation and opportunity to orchestrate “cover-ups”. Moreover, regimes that fail to protect their leaders may be either incompetent or part of a larger conspiracy. This may explain why the historical record seems to be overly populated with “lone assassins”, who are forensically portrayed as drug addicted, fanatical, insane, imbalanced, and/or mentally ill.

Over time, our beliefs about assassinations become cultural artifacts as narratives that are passed down and revised across generations. Sometimes new technologies shed light on the past, and sometimes they contribute to its obfuscation. One of the more puzzling aspects of all of this has to do with the information revolution and the resulting decentralization of knowledge. In light of an

ever-growing legion of official and unofficial interpreters or “spin doctors”, it has now become that much more difficult to determine the underlying “Truth” behind any given assassination. There is also a normative dimension to assassination discourse; that is, we debate its legality and morality. Consequentialist arguments, both for and against assassination, employ forward-looking cost-benefit ratios. Non-consequentialist, rights-based arguments focus on assassination as retribution for wrongdoing.

The cultural interpretation of assassination behavior also has an economic dimension. As far as we know, throughout history assassinations have been orchestrated by not only inept assassins who “got lucky”, but also by well-trained, highly paid, professional assassins assisted by well-stocked arms dealers, paid informants, and even governments. In the Middle East there is a robust market for surveillance equipment, night vision goggles, video technology, body armor, bullet proof glass, and armored vehicles—not to mention, body guards, spin doctors, and life insurance actuaries. Economic reality can also directly or indirectly influence forensic investigations by providing lucrative financial opportunities for not only the lawyers and expert witnesses that participate in these investigations, but also for journalists and the mass media.

Over the years, assassination has more than enriched the coffers of the entertainment industry. For those of us with moral convictions that prevent us from actually assassinating leaders in the real world, there has always been a well-stocked supply of books, music, and movies that explore assassination as human activity. Today, thanks to modern technology, we also have a generation of young men hooked on popular video games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, *Splinter Cell*, and *Hitman*, which provide an opportunity for young males to vicariously exercise lethal aggression via that “Machiavellian Module”.

I have suggested that assassination behavior is a form of lethal violence that is ultimately rooted in human nature and shaped by biological evolution and environmental factors. Although it is ultimately shaped by biology and environment, its subsequent interpretation is proximately shaped by cultural evolution. Discourse about assassinations thus tends to focus upon questions concerning the political status of leaders, motivation of assassins, and the opportunity of assassins to act upon those motives. Hence, assassinations involve complex interactions between assassins and targets operating within cultural settings shaped by malleable cultural beliefs.

So what can we expect from a General Theory of Assassination? Certainly, the universality of assassination behavior suggests a biological predisposition. My suspicion is that evolutionary biology may someday provide a robust explanation for all human behavior, but it probably will not contribute much to our ability to predict or to control that behavior. That’s because human behavior is often shrouded by deception. In the case of assassination behavior, our ability to penetrate this veil is often compromised by incompetent and/or complicit forensic investigators. Therefore, public discourse becomes a battle of interpretation, which is contingent upon public trust.

So the most challenging question confronted by a General Theory of Assassination will be to explain how we subsequently interpret assassination behavior in a larger social context. I have suggested that assassination behavior is grounded in deception. Therefore, a General Theory of Assassination must do more than identify the kinds of leaders and regimes that are most likely to be involved in assassinations, but must make sense of its cultural interpretation. It should also explain why forensic investigations invariably produce these endless cycles of interpretation and reinterpretation. In short, a General Theory of Assassination may be quintessentially post-modern.²⁹

Endnotes

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² United States Senate, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975). In 1976, President Gerald Ford issued Executive Order 11905, the first of three by different Presidents, specifically prohibiting assassination by “anyone employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government”.

³ Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker and Timothy E. Naccarato, “Targeting Saddam and Sons: U.S. Policy Against Assassination,” *IDF Law Review* **1** (November, 2003) 2–3 (22 pages): http://www.mcgeorge.edu/government_law_and_policy/publications/governance_web_journal/TARGETING%20SADDAM-Final%20Draft.pdf.

⁴ See, for example, James H. Fetzer, *Render Unto Darwin: Philosophical Aspects of the Christian Right's Crusade Against Science* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2007).

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⁸ James W. Clarke, “American Assassins: An Alternative Typology,” *British Journal of Political Science* **11** (January 1981) 103.

⁹ The psychiatric interpretation of assassination behavior is exemplified by Rosenberg's study of the 1881 assassination of U.S. President James Garfield: Charles Rosenberg, *The Trial of the Assassin Guiteau: Psychiatry and Law in the Gilded Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

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- ¹⁶ Zaryab Iqbal and Christopher Zorn, “Sic Semper Tyrannis?,” pp. 489–501. A list can be found at http://www.journalofpolitics.org/files/68_3/Iqbal%20App.pdf. A nice discussion of the ubiquity of assassinations in history is David W. Mantik, “The Silence of the Historians”, in James H. Fetzer, ed., *Murder in Dealey Plaza: What We Know Now that We Didn’t Know Then about the Death of JFK* (Chicago, IL: Catfeet Press/Open Court, 2000).
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