

Assassinating Vladimir Putin?

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*Early on the morning of May 3rd the Kremlin was attacked by two explosive drones, and although these were destroyed by the defenses, [the Russian government claimed](#) that the incident had probably been an assassination attempt against **President Vladimir Putin**.*

I was skeptical at the time, but when Ray McGovern was interviewed a few days later he seemed to take the accusation seriously. Given his 27 years as a CIA Analyst, including serving as head of the Soviet Policy Group, I tend to trust his judgment on such matters:

Although pro-Ukrainian forces had likely been responsible for the drone attack, our government provides all their funding, intelligence, and control, and such a momentous act must have been fully authorized by top American officials. Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland is the Neocon responsible for Ukraine issues and McGovern believed she would have been the one who signed off on the strike against the Kremlin.

Russia's nuclear arsenal is the most formidable in the world, [somewhat larger than our own](#), while its revolutionary hypersonic delivery systems are entirely unstoppable. This currently gives Moscow a measure of strategic superiority and if Putin or his successor gave the order, the bulk of our population could be annihilated within hours. Although he came into office at the end of 1999 and has spent more than twenty years in power, Putin's current [approval rating is over 80%](#), more than twice that of President Joseph Biden, so his death or serious injury might have world-shattering consequences.

Given the ongoing Russia-NATO military confrontation in the Ukraine war, an American sponsored drone strike against the Kremlin and Putin is an extraordinarily reckless and foolish action. What would we think if the Soviets had attacked the White House at the height of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis? But extraordinarily reckless and foolish actions have become an American specialty in recent years, notably including [our destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines](#), perhaps Europe's most important civilian energy infrastructure.

Indeed, soon after the outbreak of the Ukraine war in early 2022, our bipartisan political and media elites began vilifying Putin as “another Hitler,” with [leading media figures](#) and [top U.S. Senators](#) loudly calling for the assassination of the Russian president.

Such statements are particularly provocative given that just two years earlier we had publicly assassinated a top Iranian leader in a drone attack. At the time [I had warned](#) of the extremely dangerous implications for our future relations with Russia:

The January 2nd American assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani of Iran was an event of enormous moment.

Gen. Soleimani had been the highest-ranking military figure in his nation of 80 million, and with a storied career of 30 years, one of the most universally popular and highly regarded. Most analysts ranked him second in influence only to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s elderly Supreme Leader, and there were widespread reports that he was being urged to run for the presidency in the 2021 elections.

The circumstances of his peacetime death were also quite remarkable. His vehicle was incinerated by the missile of an American Reaper drone near Iraq’s Baghdad international airport just after he had arrived there on a regular commercial flight for peace negotiations originally suggested by the American government.

Our major media hardly ignored the gravity of this sudden, unexpected killing of so high-ranking a political and military figure, and gave it enormous attention. A day or so later, the front page of my morning *New York Times* was almost entirely filled with coverage of the event and its implications, along with several inside pages devoted to the same topic. Later that same week, America’s national newspaper of record allocated more than one-third of all the pages of its front section to the same shocking story.

But even such copious coverage by teams of veteran journalists failed to provide the incident with its proper context and implications. Last year, the Trump Administration [had declared](#) the Iranian Revolutionary Guard “a terrorist organization,” drawing widespread criticism and even ridicule from national security experts appalled at the notion of classifying a major branch of Iran’s armed forces as “terrorists.” Gen. Soleimani was a top commander in that body, and this apparently provided the legal fig-leaf for his assassination in broad daylight while on a diplomatic peace mission.

But note that Congress has been considering [legislation declaring Russia an official state sponsor of terrorism](#), and Stephen Cohen, the eminent Russia scholar, has argued that no foreign leader since the end of World War II has been so massively demonized by the American media as Russian President Vladimir Putin. For years, numerous agitated [pundits have denounced Putin](#) as “the new Hitler,” and some prominent figures have even called for [his overthrow](#) or death. So we are now only a step or two removed from undertaking a public campaign to assassinate the leader of a country whose nuclear arsenal could quickly annihilate the bulk of the American population. Cohen has repeatedly warned that the current danger of global nuclear war may exceed that which we faced during the days of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and can we entirely dismiss his concerns?

I went on to note that this American policy represented a radical change from the

practice of past centuries, with the major Western countries having abandoned the use of assassination in the 17th century after the end of the bloody Wars of Religion.

The 1914 terrorist assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was certainly organized by fanatical elements of Serbian Intelligence, but the Serbian government fiercely denied its own complicity, and no major European power was ever directly implicated in the plot. The aftermath of the killing soon led to the outbreak of World War I, and although many millions died in the trenches over the next few years, it would have been completely unthinkable for one of the major belligerents to consider assassinating the leadership of another.

A century earlier, the Napoleonic Wars had raged across the entire continent of Europe for most of a generation, but I don't recall reading of any governmental assassination plots during that era, let alone in the quite gentlemanly wars of the preceding 18th century when Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa disputed ownership of the wealthy province of Silesia by military means. I am hardly a specialist in modern European history, but after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War and regularized the rules of warfare, no assassination as high-profile as that of Gen. Soleimani comes to mind.

During our Revolutionary War, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and our other Founding Fathers fully recognized that if their effort failed, they would all be hanged as rebels by the British. However, I have never heard that they feared falling to an assassin's blade, nor that King George III ever considered using such an underhanded means of attack. During the first century and more of our nation's history, nearly all our presidents and other top political leaders traced their ancestry back to the British Isles, and political assassinations were exceptionally rare, with Abraham Lincoln's death being one of the very few that comes to mind.

Unfortunately, the use of such lethal measures was eventually revived amid the bitter ideological struggle of World War II, at least in some quarters. According to renowned historian David Irving, when Hitler's secret service suggested that an attempt be made to assassinate the Soviet military leadership, the German Fuehrer [immediately forbade](#) any such practices as contrary to the laws of warfare.

But his Western opponents had fewer such scruples. In 1941 Czech agents with Allied assistance successfully assassinated Reinhard Heydrich in Prague and in 1943 the US military intercepted and shot down the plane of Japanese admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. However, some of the highest profile targets the Allied leadership selected for elimination seem to have been within their own ranks.

[Curtis B. Dall](#) was a New York stockbroker who had been FDR's son-in-law during the early 1930s and he later spent decades as a leading figure in various anti-Semitic Far Right political organizations. In 1967 a fringe Christian group published his memoirs in a cheap paperback edition, and I happened to read that book three or four years ago.

Most of the incidents and stories Dall recounted seemed reasonably plausible, but I was very surprised when he claimed that late in the war the American government, possibly under Communist influence, had decided to assassinate Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the largest Allied nation. Although the effort fell through and the project was later

abandoned, I'd never previously seen a hint of that story anywhere else and I was very skeptical of such an astonishing claim from a rather doubtful source. However, when I read Prof. Sean McMeekin's outstanding 2021 history [Stalin's War](#) a year or two later, he provided the same account, drawing upon the memoirs of a high-ranking American military commander based in the Chinese theater.

The plan had been to eliminate Chiang by means of a plane crash, and [according to Irving](#) the American and British governments also intended the same fate in 1943 for Charles de Gaulle, who was proving very uncooperative in his subordinate role as Free French leader in exile. However, de Gaulle survived the near-fatal accident caused by the sabotage of his plane and thereafter became much more cautious in his air travel.

Other Allied leaders were less fortunate. Like de Gaulle, [Gen. Władysław Sikorski](#) was based in London as leader of the Polish government in exile, and at first his relationship with the Allied leaders was good, with many thousands of Polish troops and airmen serving side-by-side with the British forces. However, in 1943 the Germans discovered and publicized the 1940 Katyn Forest massacre, revealing that Stalin had executed some 20,000 Polish officers whom he held as POWs. Sikorski was outraged at that enormous wartime atrocity and demanded a full Red Cross investigation while refusing to be fobbed off by Soviet denials or the implausible claim that the Germans themselves had been responsible. This led Stalin to break relations with the Polish exile government, and Irving [makes a strong case](#) that the top Allied leaders eventually decided that preserving the vital Soviet wartime alliance required Sikorski's elimination, leading to the latter's death in a suspicious airplane crash on Gibraltar a couple of months after de Gaulle had narrowly avoided the same fate.

Irving also explains that the previous year Gen. Dwight Eisenhower had made a deal with [Admiral François Darlan](#), commander of all Vichy French forces, recognizing his authority in return for his joining the Allied cause; but the Allied leadership then nullified that controversial agreement by apparently arranging Darlan's assassination a few weeks later.

During World War II America's government had also put very substantial resources [into the development of biological weapons](#) and this continued after the end of the conflict although all these facts were kept completely secret at the time. There was considerable overlap of technology and personnel with the poisons and other assassination methods developed by the recently-established CIA during that period, as was discussed in a 2019 book by respected journalist Stephen Kinzer, who also mentioned some of the prominent world leaders that our government attempted to assassinate during that era.

However, this climate of media avoidance has recently begun changing. Another strong endorsement of Baker's book came from Stephen Kinzer, who just a year earlier had published [Poisoner in Chief](#), primarily focused upon the notorious MK-ULTRA mind-control projects of Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the CIA researcher described in the title. Kinzer's book attracted glowing accolades from Pulitzer Prize winners Seymour Hersh and Kai Bird, both writers with great experience on intelligence matters, and received [quite favorable reviews](#) in the elite mainstream media.

At first glance, mind-control and biological warfare might seem entirely dissimilar topics, but they actually share considerable areas of overlap. Both required the creation and use of dangerous biological or biochemical agents, which for maximal effectiveness must then be tested upon unwilling human subjects, often in dangerous or lethal ways. Since in this regard they obviously operate outside the boundaries of normal legality,

especially in peacetime, their use must be kept entirely secret, naturally matching them with the proclivities of an intelligence agency such as the CIA. Throughout his book Kinzer emphasized the considerable overlapping personnel and resources between these two domains. Indeed, as the CIA's "chief poisoner," Gottlieb developed a wide range of deadly biological compounds which he deployed in a number of mostly unsuccessful attempts to assassinate foreign leaders such as Prime Ministers Zhou Enlai of China and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, as well as Cuba's Fidel Castro.

However, unlike today's climate of bold public declarations, all those previous American assassination plots of the 1950s and 1960s were kept secret from the American people. And as I explained in an [an article](#), their eventual disclosure during the post-Watergate era produced a huge public backlash:

At the height of the Cold War, our CIA did involve itself in various secret assassination plots against Cuba's Communist dictator Fidel Castro and other foreign leaders considered hostile to US interests. But when these facts later came out in the 1970s, they evoked such enormous outrage from the public and the media, that three consecutive American presidents—[Gerald R. Ford](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), and [Ronald Reagan](#)—all issued successive Executive Orders absolutely prohibiting assassinations by the CIA or any other agent of the US government.

Although some cynics might claim that these public declarations represented mere window-dressing, [a March 2018 book review](#) in the *New York Times* strongly suggests otherwise. Kenneth M. Pollack spent years as a CIA analyst and National Security Council staffer, then went on to publish a number of influential books on foreign policy and military strategy over the last two decades. He had originally joined the CIA in 1988, and opens his review by declaring:

One of the very first things I was taught when I joined the CIA was that we do not conduct assassinations. It was drilled into new recruits over and over again.

Yet Pollack notes with dismay that over the last quarter-century, these once solid prohibitions have been steadily eaten away, with the process rapidly accelerating after the 9/11 attacks of 2001. The laws on our books may not have changed, but

Today, it seems that all that is left of this policy is a euphemism.

We don't call them assassinations anymore. Now, they are "targeted killings," most often performed by drone strike, and they have become America's go-to weapon in the war on terror.

The Bush Administration had conducted 47 of these assassinations-by-another-name, while his successor Barack Obama, a constitutional scholar and Nobel Peace Prize winner, had raised his own total to 542. Not without justification, Pollack wonders whether assassination has become "a very effective drug, but [one that] treats only the symptom and so offers no cure."

Thus over the last couple of decades American policy has followed a disturbing trajectory in its use of assassination as a tool of foreign policy, first restricting its application only to the most extreme circumstances, next targeting small numbers of high-profile "terrorists" hiding in rough terrain, then escalating those same killings to

the many hundreds. And now under President Trump, the fateful step has been taken of America claiming the right to assassinate any world leader not to our liking whom we unilaterally declare worthy of death.

Pollack had made his career as a Clinton Democrat, and is best known for his 2002 book *The Threatening Storm* that strongly endorsed President Bush's proposed invasion of Iraq and was [enormously influential](#) in producing bipartisan support for that ill-fated policy. I have no doubt that he is a committed supporter of Israel, and he probably falls into a category that I would loosely describe as "Left Neocon."

But while reviewing a history of Israel's own long use of assassination as a mainstay of its national security policy, he seems deeply disturbed that America might now be following along that same terrible path. Less than two years later, our sudden assassination of a top Iranian leader demonstrates that his fears may have been greatly understated.

So in recent years assassination has become a standard tool of American policy, often publicly declared. This has naturally lowered the threshold for its use, perhaps leading our government to now target the political leader controlling the world's largest nuclear arsenal, a possibility that would have been utterly unimaginable during the original Cold War.

There may be another contributing factor to this disturbing trend of American behavior. As I've recently discussed, over the last three decades the Neocons have gained a bipartisan stranglehold over our national security policy, and whether or not the particular individuals are Jewish, they have all been closely aligned with support for Israel and the Zionist ideological cause.

One particularly problematical aspect of this powerful Israeli ideological influence has been the long Zionist history of the use of assassination, both before and after the creation of the State of Israel. In early 2020 our Solemaini killing prompted me to publish a very lengthy presentation of this important yet long concealed history, from which this paragraph and many of the preceding extracts were drawn:

Indeed, the inclination of the more right-wing Zionist factions toward assassination, terrorism, and other forms of essentially criminal behavior was really quite remarkable. For example, in 1943 Shamir [had arranged the assassination of his factional rival](#), a year after the two men had escaped together from imprisonment for a bank robbery in which bystanders had been killed, and he claimed he had acted to avert the planned assassination of David Ben-Gurion, the top Zionist leader and Israel's future founding-premier. Shamir and his faction certainly continued this sort of behavior into the 1940s, successfully assassinating Lord Moyne, the British Minister for the Middle East, and Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN Peace Negotiator, though they failed in their other attempts to kill [American President Harry Truman](#) and [British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin](#), and [their plans to assassinate Winston Churchill](#) apparently never moved past the discussion stage. His group also [pioneered the use of terrorist car-bombs and other explosive attacks against innocent civilian targets](#), all long before any Arabs or Muslims had [ever thought of using similar tactics](#); and Begin's larger and more "moderate" Zionist faction did much the same.

We should also recognize the reality that during the last seventy years America has maintained the world's largest and best-funded biological warfare program, with our

government spending many tens of billions of dollars on biowarfare/biodefense across those decades. And as I've discussed in a long article, there is even considerable evidence that we actually used those illegal weapons during the very difficult first year of the Korean War.

Soon after their invasion, the Russians [publicly claimed](#) that the U.S. had established a series of biolabs in Ukraine, which were preparing biological warfare attacks against their country. Last year one of their top generals [declared](#) that the global Covid epidemic was probably the result of a deliberate American biowarfare attack against China and Iran, echoing the accusations previously made by those countries.

Russian security concerns over our advanced biowarfare capabilities and the extreme recklessness with which we might employ them may explain the rather strange behavior of President Putin when he met in Moscow for talks with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz shortly before the outbreak of the Ukraine war.





At the time many observers were puzzled why in each case the two national leaders were seated at opposite ends of a very long table, with [Putin blandly suggesting](#) that the placement was meant to symbolize the vast distance separating Russia and NATO's Western leaders. Perhaps that innocuous explanation was correct. But I think it far more likely that the Russians were actually concerned that the Western leaders meeting him might be the immunized carriers of a dangerous biological agent intended to infect their president.

Considering the total madness that America's ruling elites have exhibited in recent years, we can hardly blame the Russians for taking such unusual precautions to ensure Putin's safety. This is especially true because in today's Russia nominal and actual political power are conjoined, a very different situation than is often found in America or much of the West, as [I'd noted in 2015](#).

Today when we consider the major countries of the world we see that in many cases the official leaders are also the leaders in actuality: Vladimir Putin calls the shots in Russia, Xi Jinping and his top Politburo colleagues do the same in China, and so forth. However, in America and in some other Western countries, this seems to be less and less the case, with top national figures merely being attractive front-men selected for their popular appeal and their political malleability, a development that may eventually have dire consequences for the nations they lead. As an extreme example, a drunken Boris Yeltsin freely allowed the looting of Russia's entire national wealth by the handful of oligarchs who pulled his strings, and the result was the total impoverishment of the Russian people and a demographic collapse almost unprecedented in modern peacetime history.

Given this situation, I think it is very fortunate for the world—and our own country—that both Russia and China are currently led by extremely cautious and pragmatic individuals willing to forego any cycle of retaliatory escalation. But the ruling political elites of DC should recognize that their own persons are hardly likely to remain permanently sacrosanct

from the terrible forces they seem all too eager to set into motion.

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