

# Is assassination justifiable government policy?

by Marangeli Rivera  
ASSASSINATIONS

Even before Julius Caesar was stabbed to death by a group of conspirators in the senate house in 44 B.C., assassinations were used as a political tool.

Today, although many countries openly condemned the act, there is evidence that political assassinations still take place.

Last Saturday Abu Jihad, military chief of the Palestine Liberation Organization and a top deputy of PLO leader Yasir Arafat, was shot to death by a group of gunmen at his home in Tunisia in what the State Department called an "act of political assassination."

In 1984, a 90-page CIA manual distributed in Nicaragua surveyed which called for hiring professional criminals to carry out "selective jobs," creating "murders" and coercing Nicaraguans into carrying out rebel assignments.

The Middlesex News asked political science professors, politicians and others: "Is assassination by a government a justifiable instrument of foreign policy?"

SEFOM BROWN, chairman of the department of politics at Brandeis University, Waltham:

"The assassination of an enemy political leader is justifiable in times of war, but even in times of war it is not always prudent. A judgment has to be made as to the consequences... To inflame your enemies'

passions and create a revenge psychology including an intensification of their determination to assassinate your own leaders may not be prudent. Also, to eliminate the highest responsible people in the enemy camp may make it impossible for you to have a serious negotiation to reduce the causes of conflict."

MASER ARJUN, professor of political science at Southeastern Massachusetts University, North Dartmouth:

"No. It is morally and legally reprehensible and politically it is counter-productive. And yet two governments which condemn terrorism more than any one else in the world use that term as a defense for their own practice of state terrorism."

"For the United States and Israel assassination is an acceptable instrument of foreign policy. The CIA's Nicaragua manual speaks of "selective use of violence," meaning assassination, and says "it is possible to neutralize carefully selected and planned targets such as judges, police and security officials."

"Under the Reagan administration the U.S. has practiced this form of state terrorism in Central America and the Middle East. On March 8, 1985, an undercover Lebanese terrorist unit formed and trained by the CIA under a Presidential Directive exploded a car bomb in front of the home of a Lebanese leader which killed 80 persons and wounded 20.

"Israel's Mossad, i.e. secret service, is responsible for the as-

assination of hundreds of Palestinian leaders in their homes and offices. The last such incident was carried out last week."

"The U.S. also tried to assassinate a head of state in Libya in his own house and assassinated the leader of Granada and the leader of Chile, who had been elected democratically."

It's a difficult moral issue to discuss. Polite, civilized people do not condone government assassinations, but realistically the elimination of dangerous enemies might also be seen in the context of war.

LARRY LOWENTHAL  
MetroWest Jewish Federation

"The Reagan administration described Israel's attack on the PLO headquarters in Tunis two years ago as a form of self-defense. This is a bizarre dimension of policy which violates the norms of civilized behavior and the concept of a world order based on international law and morality. It retards world peace by promoting unilateralism and a state-of-nature atmosphere."

LARRY LOWENTHAL, executive director of the MetroWest Jewish Federation, Framingham:  
"I think there are two levels to this discussion. One is the 'civilized' level and the other is the realistic level.

"Assassination is an ugly word. When a government kills

an individual, it is an assassination, but when a government kills masses of people, it is called war."

"In Israel's case, Israel is in a state of war with its Arab enemies. It is not clear if Israel assassinated Abu Jihad, but if they did, it should be considered in the context of war."

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PETER WOLL, professor of politics at Brandeis University:

"My answer is simply no. I don't think there are any circumstances that can objectively be defined that would warrant political assassinations. Those are the techniques of terrorists and the secret police of some nations that the United States should categorically reject."

JOSHUA RUBENSTEIN, northeast regional director of Amnesty International U.S.A.:

"Over the years, Amnesty International has documented officially sanctioned killings of government opponents in numerous countries. The vast majority of these victims in Guatemala and El Salvador, in South Africa, in Argentina, have been non-violent activists. Too often these governments have not been held accountable for assassinating or disappearing their own citizens."

PHILIP MELANSON, professor of political science at Southeastern

Massachusetts University and author of "The Politics of Protection: The U.S. Secret Service in the Terrorist Age":

"The political assassination of leaders is never a justifiable tactic in the same sense that mass murder is not a justifiable state tactic. The fact that numerous governments including our own and including some of the world's most aggressive regimes have engaged in assassinations, does not render it justifiable.

"The United States should not react to the use of this tactic by foreign regimes, but should maintain its own moral standard. The fact that we did not outlaw assassinations until 1975 and that some agencies have suggested it since 1975 is deplorable."

ROGER FISHER, professor of law at Harvard University and director of the Harvard Negotiation Project, Cambridge:

"Assassination is an unwise policy for any government. The possibility that serious evil might be avoided is outweighed by the almost certainty of setting a bad example for others to follow. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

"Any government has more potential targets for assassinations — ambassadors, diplomats, businessmen, etc. — than does any terrorist organization. Those of us who want respect for law and human rights should ourselves respect law and human rights."