

The Dubai assassination and the “war on terror”

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The reaction of governments around the world to the murder of Hamas member Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai last month underscores the extent to which basic precepts of international law have been torn up under the “war on terror”. As far as the US government and its allies are concerned, extra-judicial executions and so-called targeted killings now constitute a legitimate state activity and do not warrant comment, let alone condemnation.

While the Israeli government has refused to confirm or deny any involvement, its intelligence agency, Mossad, is widely understood to be directly responsible for the Dubai operation. The Obama administration has maintained a strict silence over the affair, while the governments of Britain, Australia, France, Germany and Ireland have merely issued pro forma protests over the doctoring of their passports. None has condemned Mabhouh’s murder.

The assassination was a cold-blooded operation, planned down to the last detail. According to Dubai police, 27 men and women were involved in the preparation which culminated in Mabhouh being injected with a muscle relaxant drug, succinylcholine, then suffocated with a pillow. The killers reportedly left behind medicine for high blood pressure in order to give the initial appearance of a natural death, hung a “do not disturb” card on their victim’s hotel room door and fled Dubai before the authorities were notified after Mabhouh’s wife was unable to telephone her husband.

Israel has a long record of tracking down and murdering its enemies around the world, and in the last decade has waged a systematic assassination campaign against the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza.

The more or less open acceptance by Washington and

its allies of Mossad’s latest atrocity is because similar methods now form a central component of the “war on terror”. As well as being subject to indefinite detention without trial, rendition and torture, individuals identified as a threat to the security of the US state are routinely executed in countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen. True to his campaign pledge to escalate US military operations in Pakistan and Central Asia, President Barack Obama has signed off on drone air bombings in the AfPak theatre which typically kill civilians in addition to the selected target. US troops, intelligence operatives, and their proxies on the ground also continue to hunt down and kill Iraqis and Afghans involved in armed resistance activities against the foreign occupation of their countries.

It is now taken for granted in ruling circles internationally that the Central Intelligence Agency and allied intelligence agencies, including Mossad, have the right to act as judge, jury and executioner against those alleged to be involved in terrorist activities. The CIA’s murderous activities during the Cold War—including the 1961 assassination of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba and attempts on the life of Cuban President Fidel Castro—provoked international outrage. In 1976, following a wave of public opposition after revelations of CIA assassination plots internationally, President Gerald Ford issued an executive order barring the CIA from directly carrying out assassinations or contracting them out to others. But now there are no such qualms about “targeted killing” and few restrictions are placed on the CIA and military. US Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair revealed last month that there are defined “policy and legal procedures” allowing the assassination of American citizens throughout the world.

Every national government aligned with Washington is

culpable. The diplomatic protests registered by Britain, Australia, France, Germany and Ireland over the abuse of their passports are nothing but a grotesque charade. One need only ask the question—how would the reaction have differed had Iranian intelligence agents carried out an assassination in another country using forged European and Australian passports? Instead of diplomatic niceties there would be a drumbeat for full-scale war.

None of the national governments involved has any interest in pursuing the incident with the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. All are complicit in the Zionist state's war crimes. Britain, Australia and Germany were among just 16 countries which voted with the US and Israel last November against a UN General Assembly resolution which endorsed the Goldstone Report finding that Israel had committed war crimes during its offensive in Gaza. Moreover, after a British court last year issued an arrest warrant for former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on war crimes charges, the Labour government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown pledged to change the relevant legislation to ensure Israeli officials were shielded.

According to the British *Daily Mail*, Israel forewarned the Brown government as a "courtesy". While this story remains unconfirmed, it raises the question as to whether the other countries involved, as well as the US, were prewarned.

Whatever the case, there is little doubt that those responsible for the Dubai murder were conscious that most of the governments whose passports they were forging were themselves intimately familiar with assassination campaigns. The Labour government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown has for several years presided over an extensive targeted killing operation in Iraq. According to a new book by BBC reporter Mark Urban, British elite SAS troops have murdered between 350 and 400 "terrorist" leaders in Iraq. Similar operations have been orchestrated by other US allies—Australia's SAS is highly valued by Washington for its role in hunting down senior resistance fighters in Afghanistan, while German forces have engaged in similar killings of alleged Taliban figures.

It is no surprise, then, that the official reaction to the murder of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai takes the form of an international league of war criminals closing ranks.

It is testament to the debased political and moral character of the major parties and the media in the US, Europe and Australia that there has been no discussion on the far reaching implications of the Dubai assassination with regard to international law and democratic rights. To the extent that concerns have been raised, they are strictly tactical—that perhaps the operation had drawn too much adverse publicity and that the Israeli government ought not to have forged passports belonging to its allies.

Other commentators, however, openly celebrated the killing. "It is an unfashionable thing to say, but I have a considerable admiration for the Israeli way of doing things," Melanie Reid of the London *Times* wrote on February 18. "They want something, they get it. They perceive someone as their deadly enemy, they kill them. They get hit, they hit back. They don't waste time explaining or justifying or agonising; nor do they allow their detractors to enter their country and then afford them generous welfare payments. They just act. No messing. No scruples. Not even a shrug and a denial, just a rather magnificent refusal to debate anything."

The assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh and the official international response must be taken as a grave warning. So-called targeted killings will be increasingly relied upon by governments internationally in the coming period, applying not merely to alleged terrorists but potentially to any individual who comes to be identified as a threat to the existing social and political order.

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