

Abstract

History has shown that assassination could be wielded as an effective weapon in the pursuit of interest, security and power. As the feudal age neared its end in Europe, nation states emerged. Despite its pragmatic usefulness, assassination was considered unfit for this new form of governance. States no longer sought to destroy one another as predicted by Thomas Hobbes, but adhered to John Locke's proposed values, which believed that states could mutually exist as rivals. In this system which favored negotiation and settlements, it was difficult for assassination to have a place. Yet at the start of the 21st century, assassination once again saw employment. As of today, it is preferably referred to as targeted killing by its employers and has become somewhat of a 'new normal.' Clearly, there must be certain permissive catalysts that allowed this to happen. This master's thesis firstly explores the ways the United States, Israel and Russia conduct their assassination/targeted killing operations to present the unique ways these states eliminate their enemies, and secondly pinpoints the permissive causes that allowed these three super and great powers of assassination to transform the international norm against assassination and turn a dishonest, immoral practice into something more acceptable and fit for the pursuit of interest, security and power. The use of technology will undoubtedly change how targeted killing operates and is perceived. Though the US, Israel and Russia are determined to partake in the race towards AI and robotics, these states will continue to have their own assassination culture even though they are developing along the same technological curve.

Key Words: targeted killing, assassination, covert operations, intelligence, emerging technologies, drones, robotics.