

THE ASSASSINATION CULTURE OF IMPERIAL BRITAIN, 1909–1979*

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ABSTRACT. *The importance of political assassination lies in the response of the state. That response takes place within a specific culture. This article analyses the assassination culture of the British imperial state. Most studies of assassination in British history concentrate on specific events. On the basis of detailed archival investigation the current article argues that long-term trends are discernible, in particular that the imperial state had a recurrent reflex in characterizing the conspiracies that threatened it. This reflex, in turn, governed the nature of the response to assassination.*

Political assassination is the murder of a *significant individual* by an *organized conspiracy* in pursuit of *political ends*. Modern historians can rarely avoid the phenomenon of assassination. The history of the short twentieth century begins with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in 1914. The death of John F. Kennedy in 1963 has remained important within popular culture ever since: the question of whether this death was an assassination, or murder by a deranged individual, remains a starting point for politicians, screenwriters, journalists, and fanatics. These violent acts had both immediate political consequences and long-term symbolic meaning.¹ The assassin has become a figure of enduring fascination.² Despite the intense interest in the justification of political murder, however, most political science studies stress that

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* I would like to thank Professor Colin Kidd, University of St Andrews, for allowing me to read drafts of his articles ‘The Warren Commission and the dons’ and ‘Assassination principles in Scottish political culture: Buchanan to Hogg’ thereby igniting an interest in assassination culture. The current article was immeasurably improved by Professor Julian Hoppit and the anonymous readers of the *Historical Journal*.

¹ For British fascination with, and important role in shaping, the Kennedy conspiracy, see Colin Kidd, ‘The Warren Commission and the dons’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 8 (2011), pp. 411–34.

² Franklin L. Ford, *Political Murder* (Cambridge, MA, 1985). The ‘British assassin’ achieved canonical status in best-selling popular novels (and subsequent films): Geoffrey Household, *Rogue male* (1939); Ian Fleming, *Casino Royale* (1953); and Frederick Forsyth, *Day of the jackal* (1971).

assassination's importance is determined by the nature and response of the state.

During the first three-quarters of the twentieth century the main vector of political assassination for Britain was imperial. The imperial trend set Britain apart culturally from the 'four waves' of global terrorism posited in recent scholarship, assassination being the hallmark of the first, anarchist, and third, 'New Left', waves.³ Before the imperial recrudescence of 1909, British commentators on assassination could confidently assert that 'anarchism finds no food to feed upon. It is greatly to the credit of the Irish Nationalists that even they... have given up violence and threats of violence.'⁴

The difference between Britain and other countries was cultural rather than technological. Assassins operating against the British imperial state used the same tools as their global counterparts, most consistently the repeating handgun. They deployed, contemporaries noted, neither the traditional 'poison or the dagger' of the East nor the 'old Irish methods of assassination'.⁵ The daggers of the Phoenix Park murders of 1882 and the dynamite of the 1883 bombing campaign were regarded as less threatening than modern assassination.⁶ Comparing the 1880s and the 1920s, one commentator wrote, 'our political life has come under the menace of nickel and lead... assassination, dormant since the seventeenth century, is again asserting itself as a political weapon, and the revolver makes its bid for rule'.⁷ The revolver, using jacketed 'nickel and lead' bullets, had reached its modern form in the 1890s. Fabrique Nationale of Belgium perfected the mass-produced self-loading pistol in 1900. 'These devilish inventions', warned Sir Mark Sykes, giving evidence to a CID inquiry in 1917, 'are cheap, accurate, small and easy to smuggle'. 'Any fool', he concluded, 'can shoot a Viceroy or a police inspector'.⁸

³ David Rapoport, 'The four waves of modern terrorism', in Audrey Cronin and James Ludes, eds., *Attacking terrorism: elements of grand strategy* (Washington, DC, 2004), pp. 46–73; Mark Sedgwick, 'Inspiration and the origins of global waves of terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30 (2007), pp. 97–112; David George, 'Distinguishing classical tyrannicide from modern terrorism', *Review of Politics*, 50 (1988), pp. 390–419; M. D. Dubin, 'Great Britain and the anti-terrorist conventions of 1937', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 5 (1993), pp. 1–29; Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, 'From the dagger to the bomb: Karl Heinzen and the evolution of political terror', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16 (2004), pp. 97–115; Richard Bach Jensen, 'Daggers, rifles and dynamite: anarchist terrorism in nineteenth-century Europe', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16 (2004), pp. 116–53, and 'The international campaign against anarchist terrorism, 1880s–1930s', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21 (2009), pp. 89–109; Whitney Kassel, 'Terrorism and the international anarchist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 32 (2009), pp. 237–52.

⁴ Gertrude Slater, 'Politics and assassination', *Westminster Review*, 151 (Feb. 1899), pp. 211–17; Geoffrey Langtoft, 'Assassination: a fruit of socialism', *Fortnightly Review*, 70 (Oct. 1901), pp. 571–80.

⁵ 'Assassination in India', *Saturday Review*, 25 Apr. 1891, pp. 497–8.

⁶ Philip Bagenal, 'Irish unrest reviewed', *Edinburgh Review*, 233 (Jan. 1921), pp. 178–95.

⁷ 'The rule of the revolver', *Saturday Review*, 1 July 1922, pp. 4–5.

⁸ Committee of Imperial Defence: Sub-Committee on Arms Traffic, 'Some considerations on the traffic in arms as a post-war problem', Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark

Table 1 *Significant British imperial assassinations, 1909–1979*

Date	Victim	Location
1909	Sir Curzon Wylie	London
1909	A. M. T. Jackson	India
1922	Sir Henry Wilson	London
1924	Ernest Day (mistaken for Charles Tegart)	India
1924	Sir Lee Stack	Egypt
1931	James Peddie	India
1932	Robert Douglas	India
1933	B. E. J. Burge	India
1940	Sir Michael O'Dwyer	London
1944	Lord Moyne	Egypt
1949	Duncan Stewart	Sarawak
1951	Sir Henry Gurney	Malaya
1973	Sir Richard Sharples	Bermuda
1976	Christopher Ewart-Biggs	Irish Republic
1979	Sir Richard Sykes	Netherlands
1979	Airey Neave	London
1979	Lord Mountbatten	Irish Republic

Bomb attacks were usually unsuccessful until stable high explosive became widely available. TNT was introduced in 1904; plastic explosive was invented in 1940 – but until Irish republicans mastered the use of explosive devices in the 1970s the likelihood of successful assassination of a British official, as opposed to attacks that killed bystanders, was low. Thirteen of the seventeen assassinations in Table 1 were by shooting, three by bombing, and only one by knifing.⁹

The current article unravels for the first time the development of Britain's imperial 'assassination culture', a culture which endured, even when personnel changed. Assassination culture is, as the London-based American Saul Padover wrote in 1943, 'a process which, unfortunately, takes more time than the life span of the average administrator' to evolve.¹⁰ The existence of an identifiable assassination culture should turn the long-running debate about the 'official mind' of imperialism towards the consideration of common assumptions, habits of thought, and standard operating procedures rather than unified

Sykes, Bart, MP, 12 Jan. 1917, London, The National Archives (TNA) (subsequent archival references are to the TNA), CAB16/44.

⁹ Ewart-Biggs, Neave, and Mountbatten were killed by bombs; Stewart by a knife.

¹⁰ Saul Padover, 'Patterns of assassination in occupied territory', *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Winter 1943), pp. 680–93.

policy-making for grand strategy.¹¹ The study of assassination culture also takes us to the heart of the debate on the British state and political violence in the twentieth century. If an essential continuity, stretching from before the First World War well into the post-Second World War period, can be described then it could be said that the British state had an enduring, one might call it 'liberal', script for dealing with political violence.¹²

Assassination allows us to interrogate the suggestion that such a script was primarily intended to address an underlying cultural anxiety, that any weakening of the empire was a weakening of 'gentlemanly' dominance of the British state, and vice versa.¹³ Assassination conspiracies, like foreign espionage plots, conjured up the spectre of 'villains drawn from the lower orders... in whose ranks were thought to be hidden an even larger fifth column'.¹⁴ In this version, the response to assassination might be an attempt to conserve cultural capital. An alternative version flows from the political science literature, where imperial polities are more prone to assassinations for three reasons: an empire had a 'closed selection system' of imperial governors and administrators; the exercise of repression was implicit in an imperial system; and a relatively weak executive was exemplified by the smallness of the imperial governing strata. An imperial realist would work to ensure that 'the political opposition to the regime in power was largely non-revolutionary, and the potentially revolutionary elements were weak and fragmentary'. In this second version, the response to assassination would be an attempt to minimize risk to the state.¹⁵ We can weigh up the relative strength of these interpretations by unpicking the details of how the British state responded to significant assassinations.

¹¹ R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism* (London, 1981), pp. 19–26; John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: the dynamics of territorial expansion', *English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), pp. 614–42; Thomas Otte, 'The Foreign Office and the defence of empire, 1856–1914', and George Peden, 'The Treasury and the defence of empire', in Greg Kennedy, ed., *Imperial defence: the old world order, 1856–1956* (London, 2008), pp. 9–29 and 71–90.

¹² Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), pp. 557–89.

¹³ Marcus Collins, 'The fall of the English gentleman: the national character in decline, c. 1918–1970', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), pp. 90–111.

¹⁴ David Vincent, 'The origins of public secrecy in Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 1 (1991), pp. 229–48, at pp. 247–8, and idem, *The culture of secrecy: Britain, 1832–1998* (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁵ Murray Havens, Carl Leiden, and Karl Schmitt, *The politics of assassination* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970); Nachman Ben-Yehuda, 'Gathering dark secrets, hidden and dirty information: some methodological notes on studying political assassination', *Qualitative Sociology*, 13 (1990), pp. 345–71; idem, 'Political assassination events as a cross-cultural form of alternative justice', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 38 (1997), pp. 25–47; Zaryab Iqbal and Christopher Zorn, 'Sic semper tyrannis? Power, repression, and assassination since the Second World War', *Journal of Politics*, 68 (2006), pp. 489–501.

I

In dealing with assassination, the British repeatedly returned to the problem of framing the scope of conspiracies against them. As we shall see, there was in most cases a genuine element of choice about how to go about this framing. Although civil servants, politicians, policemen, intelligence officers, establishment journalists, and lawyers often worked with imperfect information, even immediate investigations threw up a range of legitimate conceptions of the underlying conspiracy. In other words, there was almost always a genuine choice about how widely to define the groups involved, ranging from dismissing an assassination as little more than a deranged act, to seeing it as emblematic of an 'enemy within'. The nature of the conspiracy was rarely self-defining. The definition of the conspiracy, in turn, went some way to calibrating the activity that might flow from the assassination.

Britain's first modern assassination was tailor-made for an extended debate about the nature of conspiracy.¹⁶ On 1 July 1909, Madao Lao Dhingra, a twenty-five-year-old Punjabi Hindu student, assassinated Sir Curzon Wylie, political aide to the secretary of state for India, shooting him as he left a meeting at the Imperial Institute in London. The question of who Dhingra was, and what he represented, immediately fed into an existing debate about the nature of opposition to imperial rule. That debate had been fuelled by the *Times's* Valentine Chirol. In February and March 1909, Chirol had submitted a series of despatches warning of a conspiracy that fused Hindu fundamentalism with Western anarchist techniques.¹⁷

Attention was focused on two institutions, and three individuals. Shyamaji Krishnavarma was the founder of India House, a meeting place for Hindu students in London, and the editor of the *Indian Sociologist*, a radicalizing journal read by the students. Krishnavarma himself had left London in 1907 to link up with a 'small though well-known group of violent Indian anarchists in Paris'. His most effective collaborators were the Savarkar brothers, Ganesh and Vinayak, of Nasik. Vinayak had arrived in London in 1906; Ganesh was sentenced to transportation from India in June 1909.

In December 1909, A. M. T. Jackson, the Collector of Nasik, who had overseen Ganesh's original arraignment, was shot dead as he attended the theatre.¹⁸ The three assassins used the most up-to-date Browning semi-automatics, bought in Paris and shipped to Bombay via London.¹⁹ The

¹⁶ 'The murder of Sir Curzon Wylie', *Times*, 3 July 1909, p. 8.

¹⁷ Cd 9190. *East India (Sedition Committee, 1918): report of a committee appointed to investigate revolutionary conspiracies in India*; Michael Silvestri, 'The bomb, Bhadrakol, Bhagavad Gita, and Dan Breen: terrorism in Bengal and its relation to the European experience', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21 (2009), pp. 1–27.

¹⁸ 'The murder of Mr. Jackson: trial of the accused, Bombay', *Times*, 8 Mar. 1910, p. 5.

¹⁹ 'The Deccan murder conspiracy: arrests and seizure of arms', *Times*, 27 Dec. 1911, p. 3.

authorities discovered that it was Vinayak Savarkar who had orchestrated the supply of advanced weapons through the Paris–London–Bombay triangle.²⁰

Although the police, intelligence services, and courts in Britain and India had considerable success in piecing together the international links between the Wyllie and Jackson assassinations, there was little agreement on the overall meaning of the conspiracy.²¹ The most vociferous commentator, the Liberal Imperialist MP, J. D. Rees, tried to lay the Savarkar conspiracy firmly at the door of the Indian National Congress and its British supporters.²² Valentine Chirol claimed that the assassination was orchestrated by the ‘Maharatta masters in conspiracy’.²³ J. L. Garvin declared that Chirol had uncovered, ‘a struggle for Hindu ascendancy, and that means Brahman domination’.²⁴

The prime minister, Herbert Asquith, campaigning at Southport on the day after Wyllie’s death, tried to limit strictly the concept of a wider conspiracy. He hurriedly inserted in his speech the assessment that the ‘character and methods of the conspiracy’ were ‘happily confined to a small number of people, but desperate and determined in its methods’.²⁵ Asquith struck a careful balance. It was always possible to portray an attacker as a crazed individual. The prime minister chose not to do so. Asquith was most definitely stating the existence of an organized conspiracy. His words were viewed as insulting and accusatory by some. A gathering of Indian activists at the New Reform Club ‘repudiated . . . the suggestion that the assassination should be regarded as having any political significance . . . [and] denied that it was in any sense political’. From the chair, the leading Congress figure Surendranath Banerjee charged that ‘when Governments were driven to a tight corner, when they found that they had been guilty of proceedings absolutely unjustifiable, they fell back upon the existence of conspiracy’. Asquith was guilty of ‘irresponsible effusions’.²⁶

Asquith’s formulation satisfied neither the small group interested in the details of Indian assassination nor the supporters of Indian political reform. It became, however, the standard response of the British government to assassination.²⁷ It could be broken down into three parts. First, that there *was* an organized conspiracy. Second, that very few people were involved in the

²⁰ ‘The Savarkar case: text of the judgment’, *Times*, 14 Jan. 1911, p. 8.

²¹ Peter Heehs, ‘Terrorism in India during the freedom struggle’, *Historian*, 55 (1993), pp. 469–81, and ‘Foreign influences on Bengali revolutionary terrorism, 1902–1908’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 28 (1994), pp. 533–56.

²² J. D. Rees, MP, ‘Political assassination in London’, *Fortnightly Review*, 86 (Aug. 1909), pp. 272–81.

²³ ‘Leading article: the Nasik conspiracy case’, *Times*, 16 Jan. 1911, p. 9.

²⁴ J. L. Garvin, ‘Imperial and foreign affairs: full light on Indian unrest’, *Fortnightly Review*, 88 (Sept. 1910), pp. 386–443.

²⁵ ‘Premier on the budget, land taxes, the Indian assassinations’, *Scotsman*, 3 July 1909.

²⁶ ‘The murder of Sir Curzon Wyllie: speech by Mr. Banerjee’, *Times*, 5 July 1909; Vidván, ‘India in England’, *English Review*, Nov. 1909, pp. 707–806.

²⁷ C. J. Bearman, ‘An army without discipline? Suffragette militancy and the budget crisis of 1909’, *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), pp. 861–89.

conspiracy. Third, the conspiracy was dangerous because of the violence of its methods, not because it represented the tip of an iceberg. A Liberal MP glossed the formula in the House of Commons in May 1913: 'It may be right to yield to the violence of the many, but I am perfectly certain that it is bad policy to yield to the violence of the very few.'²⁸ The mode of thought pioneered by Asquith proved useful: when next faced with a political murder, ministers specifically referred to the procedure developed for the Wyllie assassination as 'precedent'.²⁹

On 22 June 1922, the leading 'apostle of militarism', Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, was shot in Eaton Square, London, by two men, Dunne and O'Sullivan. As a Unionist MP, he was one of the most outspoken opponents of the potential all-Irish settlement emanating from the Anglo-Irish 'treaty' of 6 December 1921.³⁰

There were voices raised in parliament, and outside, who wished to portray the assassination as evidence that the whole 'Irish [Catholic] race' was addicted to assassination.³¹ Winston Churchill, speaking for the government, on the other hand, argued that 'the Irish people had clearly shown their support of the Treaty' and the assassination was the work of a 'rebellious faction'. The home secretary, Edward Shortt, created a sensation by denying that the assassins had anything to do with Ireland: they were both 'Londoners' – their deadly skill was the result of their British army training.³² He was supported, although not helped, by Dunne's own statement that 'we have both been in the British army. We both joined voluntarily – for the purpose of taking human life.'³³

It was not that anybody believed the IRA incapable of an assassination conspiracy. The Anglo-Irish Treaty had been signed by a notorious organizer of assassination, Michael Collins.³⁴ There was, however, little evidence to link Collins to the assassination.³⁵ The commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir William Horwood, reported to ministers that there was no evidence of gunmen being sent from Ireland to London, and that liaison had been established with

²⁸ C. J. Bearman, 'An examination of suffragette violence', *English Historical Review*, 120 (2005), pp. 365–97, at p. 394.

²⁹ Draft conclusions of a Conference of Ministers at 10, Downing Street on Friday, 23 June 1922, at 11 am, HO144/3689.

³⁰ 'Sir H. Wilson murdered', *Times*, 23 June 1922, p. 10.

³¹ Lord Middleton to Lady Bathurst, 24 June 1922, PRO30/67.

³² 'Anxiety in the Commons: police protection for ministers', *Times*, 24 June 1922.

³³ Statement by Dunn, 7 July 1922, HO144/3689.

³⁴ 'The rule of the revolver', *Saturday Review*, 1 July 1922, pp. 4–5; Tom Bowden, 'The Irish underground and the Irish War of Independence, 1919–1921', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8 (1973), pp. 3–23; Charles Townshend, 'The Irish Republican Army and the development of guerrilla warfare, 1919–1921', *English Historical Review*, 94 (1979), pp. 318–45; Anne Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday, November 1920', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), pp. 789–810.

³⁵ Peter Hart, 'Michael Collins and the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson', in *The IRA at war, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 194–222.

Collins's representative after the treaty.³⁶ Ministers believed that the assassins were 'Rory O'Connor Republicans', IRA men opposing the treaty by armed force, so-called for the leader of the faction which seized the Four Courts building in Dublin and held it against the government. They had no desire to give the Four Courts rebel the oxygen of publicity. There was 'general agreement... to bring the prisoners to trial and to convict them as soon as possible; to avoid anything which would give the appearance of a great political trial'.³⁷

A similar desire to limit the extent of the conspiracy was apparent in response to the recrudescence of political assassination in India. In October 1924, the viceroy of India, Lord Reading, publicly announced that two pre-war 'Red Bengal' terrorist organizations, Anusilan and Jugantar, had been resuscitated.³⁸ Their main target was Charles Tegart, commissioner of the Calcutta Police. On 12 January 1924, the Jugantar had 'assassinated' Tegart, only to find that they had killed another man, Ernest Day. The most spectacular Jugantar attempt to kill Tegart occurred on 25 August 1930 in Dalhousie Square, Calcutta.³⁹

Despite the fact of multiple assassination attempts, there was a reluctance to overplay the conspiracies. Under Sir Samuel Hoare, secretary of state for India between 1931 and 1935, two lengthy reports were published on terrorism.⁴⁰ To the profound anger of some officials in India, India Office reports played down the threat of assassination. The 1933 report concluded that although there were serious conspiracies, 'the situation is definitely under control, so far as large-scale organised outrages are concerned. But there are a large number of individuals abroad who are prepared to commit or take part in isolated outrages.' By the time the former lieutenant-governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, was shot and killed, and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, wounded, at the Caxton Hall, London, in March 1940, the act was dismissed as that of a crazed individual. 'This fanatic', the *Times* commented when Udham Singh was condemned to death, 'was resorting to terrorist methods which have long been discredited and discarded by many schools of Indian Nationalism.'⁴¹

In the case of Indian or Indian-inspired assassinations, there was a persistent attempt to play down the importance of violence and to stress, instead, the

³⁶ Note by the commissioner (Brigadier-General Sir W. Horwood), c. 23 June 1922; Micheál MacDonnchadha (acting secretary to the Provisional Government) to Edward Shortt (home secretary), 8 Aug. 1922, HO144/3689.

³⁷ 'Draft conclusions', 23 June 1922, HO144/3689.

³⁸ India Office, *The Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act*, 20 Feb. 1925; Sir Alfred Watson, 'Terrorism in Bengal; a limited cult; 1 – perverted patriots', *Times*, 5 Sept. 1933, p. 11.

³⁹ Michael Silvestri, "An Irishman is specially suited to be a policeman": Sir Charles Tegart and revolutionary terrorism in Bengal', *History Ireland*, 8 (2000), pp. 40–4.

⁴⁰ Cmd 4014, *Measures taken to counteract the civil disobedience movement and to deal with the terrorist movement in Bengal*, Feb. 1932, and *Note by the secretary of state for India on terrorism in India*, 30 Nov. 1933, in Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, 1933–4, *Report*, 1 (Part 1), 31 Oct. 1934.

⁴¹ Leader: 'The trial of Udham Singh', *Times*, 6 June 1940, p. 7.

ongoing work of political reform.⁴² Indeed, nearly all official commentary in the inter-war era stressed the need to hold the ring through robust police action, but not to overreact. Senior officials showed little interest in trying to tie either Gandhi personally, or the Congress party, to assassination. This line earned condemnation from more fire-and-brimstone commentators. 'Until the Government and its officers shake off their hidebound tradition', wrote one, 'and shoot a few assassins . . . without trial, they will continue to be faced with a steady recurrence of . . . murders.'⁴³ Neither did it reflect reality as seen by the men on the ground. In March 1931, James Peddie, the district magistrate of Midnapore, was shot dead at close range by two Hindu youths whilst attending an exhibition of manual work at the local school. In April 1932, his successor, Robert Douglas, was shot dead whilst presiding at the district board. In September 1933, Douglas's replacement, B. E. J. Burge, was killed on the police football ground at the start of a match. The sole surviving district magistrate of Midnapore wrote that the first thing he heard when he arrived in Calcutta was the noise of a Congress demonstration celebrating the assassins floating through the windows of the United Service Club. There were definite political choices made about how to interpret assassination conspiracies.⁴⁴

The most notorious assassination of a British official in the first half of the twentieth century demonstrated that it was possible to take a different approach to defining conspiracy. The assassination of Sir Lee Stack, sirdar of the Egyptian army and governor-general of the Sudan, shot in Cairo on 16 November 1924, produced an initial response that was at odds with standard British practice. Nevertheless, the norms of assassination culture eventually reasserted themselves.

Many of the same political figures involved in previous assassinations were active in the Stack case. Asquith, for instance, was a guest of the high commissioner in Cairo at the time of the assassination.⁴⁵ Yet, most elements of its handling stand out as atypical. First, Britain could directly blame the government of an independent state, Egypt, for commissioning the assassination. Second, Britain had a ready-made and achievable punishment—the overthrow of the government and the expulsion of Egypt from the Sudan—already under consideration. Third, and crucially, Britain had an imperial proconsul, Lord Allenby, willing to operate outside the usual framework of checks and balances. In the Stack case, as in all the others under consideration, Britain had real choices about how it framed the conspiracy. In this case, it chose to place blame on a specific political movement, the Wafd party led by Saad Zaghlul.

⁴² Manu Bhagavan, 'Demystifying the "ideal progressive": resistance through mimicked modernity in princely Baroda, 1900–1913', *Modern Asian Studies*, 5 (2001), pp. 385–409.

⁴³ Hamish Blair, 'Shoot the assassins', *Saturday Review*, 2 Dec. 1933, p. 566.

⁴⁴ J. C. French (lately in charge of the Midnapore district), 'Midnapore—the murder spot: how Indian terrorism began and its constitution', *Saturday Review*, 3 Feb. 1934, pp. 121–2.

⁴⁵ Chamberlain to Allenby, tel. 240, 24 Nov. 1924, FO141/502.

Observers of the Egyptian scene could hardly fail to notice the assassination culture that had grown up since the murder of the Coptic prime minister, Butros Ghali, in February 1910. Nevertheless, the nature of post-1918 assassination conspiracies was not clear.⁴⁶ Even before Stack had died of his wounds, however, British officials withdrew their public co-operation in the investigation, on the grounds that they already knew who was behind the conspiracy.⁴⁷ On 22 November 1924, a detailed charge sheet was drawn up within the High Commission. Its title, 'Points establishing Saad Zaghlul's direct responsibility for the murder of Sir Lee Stack' was an accurate indication of its purpose and conclusions.⁴⁸

As in other assassination cases, the High Commission paper demonstrates that there was room for manoeuvre in defining the conspiracy. Its contents, if not its conclusions, could easily have led to a much more cautious approach, if anyone had been minded to pursue such. As it was, Allenby was relentless in his pursuit of Zaghlul personally, leading to a rate of action that London found disturbing in its pace, if not its direction. On the afternoon of 22 November 1924, the high commissioner tracked down the prime minister in order to deliver an ultimatum before Zaghlul's government had the chance to resign.⁴⁹

Allenby delivered his ultimatum of British demands accompanied by a regiment of lancers.⁵⁰ British troops paraded through Cairo, led by Russell Pasha, the chief of police. Royal Marines seized the Alexandria Customs House, whilst troops paraded through that city too. Smaller military parades were organized for Port Said and Port Suez. Aircraft were despatched to fly over provincial towns so that the inhabitants would have first-hand sight of British power. The operations did not take too long to have an effect: within a week, Allenby was able to order a withdrawal back to ships and barracks.⁵¹ In the Stack case, the British had clearly defined political goals. Indeed, that very clarity was a point of criticism.⁵² One official account of the incident admitted that 'an

⁴⁶ R. M. Graves (European Department, Ministry of Interior) to R. A. Furness (The Residency, Ramleh), 28 July 1924, FO141/746/1; 'Murders in Egypt', *Saturday Review*, 17 Mar. 1923, pp. 361–2; Donald Reid, 'Political assassination in Egypt, 1910–1954', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (1982), pp. 625–51; Malak Badrawi, *Political violence in Egypt, 1910–1924: secret societies, plots and assassinations* (Richmond, 2000); Owen Sirrs, *A history of the Egyptian intelligence service: a history of the Mukhabarat, 1910–2009* (London, 2010).

⁴⁷ Lord Allenby to Foreign Office, tels. 370 and 371, 20 Nov. 1924, FO141/502; 'The sirdar's murder', *Times*, 22 Nov. 1924, p. 12.

⁴⁸ J. H. Percival, 'Points establishing Saad Zaghlul's direct responsibility for the murdering of Sir Lee Stack', 22 Nov. 1922, FO141/502.

⁴⁹ Allenby to Chamberlain, tel. 384, 22 Nov. 1924; Chamberlain to Allenby, tel. 232, 22 Nov. 1924; Allenby to Chamberlain, tel. 388, 23 Nov. 1924; Chamberlain to Allenby, tel. 236, 23 Nov. 1924, FO141/502.

⁵⁰ Allenby to Chamberlain, tel. 384, 22 Nov. 1924, FO141/502.

⁵¹ 'Swift moves in Egypt', *Times*, 24 Nov. 1924.

⁵² 'France and Egypt: British action criticized', *Times*, 24 Nov. 1924.

impression appears to be prevalent that HMG have attempted to take advantage of the tragic circumstances in which Sir Lee Stack . . . recently met his death'.⁵³

Allenby had a trump card to play in the form of an informer inside the assassination gang. He led British officials to the Zaghlist politician Shafiq Mansur. Mansur confessed to his crimes.⁵⁴ His evidence in turn led directly to ministers in the Zaghlist government, Nakrashi Bey and Ahmed Maher.⁵⁵ Notably, however, the end of Allenby's term of office marked a return to, by now, traditional tendency to narrow the conspiracy as much as possible.⁵⁶ Allenby was warned by the foreign secretary, Austen Chamberlain, that his fame as the liberator of Jerusalem would not save him from disgrace if he engaged in indiscriminate brutality – specifically the taking and executing of hostages as reprisal for assassination, 'a measure repugnant to British traditions'.⁵⁷ Allenby did not believe the conspiracy was limited, but this became the official line.⁵⁸ At the height of the crisis, the government despatched an obsessively conformist diplomat, Nevile Henderson, to act as Allenby's minder. Whereas Allenby had wanted to use Mansur, alive and talking, to destroy the Wafd's leadership, Henderson advised the immediate execution of Mansur and his band. As a result, Nakrashi and Maher were found not guilty at trial in May 1926.⁵⁹

The standard operating procedure of the British imperial state sheds particular light on the reaction to the high-profile assassinations carried out by Jewish terrorists in the 1940s. The most prominent British victim of the campaign was the cabinet minister, Lord Moyne. Most of the criticism aimed at Churchill for his unwillingness to declare a widespread Jewish conspiracy in the wake of Moyne's assassination – despite the possession of building blocks that could have been erected into a compelling political narrative – focuses on either Churchill's pro-Zionism or his kow-towing to American Zionist interests.⁶⁰ Critics drew a direct comparison between the handling of the Stack killing and that of Moyne.⁶¹ Concentration on the Middle East situation, however, disguised the fact that Churchill was acting in a tradition in which he himself had been repeatedly involved, going back to the Wylie assassination, when he was Liberal president of the Board of Trade, and the Wilson

⁵³ Confidential print no. 1, draft statement on Egypt by the foreign secretary, 2 Dec. 1924, FO141/502.

⁵⁴ 'The murder of the sirdar: trial begun in Cairo', *Times*, 27 May 1925, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Shafiq Mansur, 'History of the secret societies in Egypt', 18 June 1925, FO141/502.

⁵⁶ 'The Cairo trial', *Times*, 8 June 1925, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Chamberlain to Allenby, tel. 237, 24 Nov. 1924, FO141/502.

⁵⁸ High commissioner to Chamberlain, tel. 244, 2 July 1925, FO141/502.

⁵⁹ Henderson to Chamberlain, tel. 500, 6 July 1925 and Henderson to Chamberlain, tel. 294, 14 Aug. 1925, FO141/503.

⁶⁰ Michael Cohen, 'The Moyne assassination, November 1944: a political analysis', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), pp. 358–73.

⁶¹ Paper by Brigadier Clayton, 14 Nov. 1944, FO141/1001; Minister Resident's Office (Cairo) to Foreign Office, tel. 2448, 19 Nov. 1945, PREM4/51/11.

assassination when he had been the leading speaker for the Coalition government in the subsequent House of Commons debate.

On 8 August 1944, Sir Harold MacMichael, the high commissioner in Palestine, was ambushed and wounded by a team of assassins posing as a road survey party and dressed in British army uniform. The would-be assassins escaped to a Jewish settlement.⁶² At the end of August 1944, the British cabinet minister resident in the Middle East, Lord Moyne, wrote to the colonial secretary that 'the [attempted] murder of the High Commissioner was for political motives and by agents of a definite extremist political group or groups in Palestine'. The groups Moyne was referring to were the Irgun and the Stern Gang, but he added that they were encouraged by statements 'amounting in effect to incitement to violence by high Jewish circles in Palestine'.⁶³ His office had closely monitored the use of assassination in 1944.⁶⁴ Intelligence analysis of Jewish terrorist organizations identified the Stern Gang as the group that had tried and failed to assassinate MacMichael.⁶⁵

On 6 November 1944, Lord Moyne himself was killed in Cairo by two assassins, Eliahu Hakim and Eliahu Bet-Tsouri. Two days later, the assassins confessed to the Egyptian authorities that they were members of the Stern Gang.⁶⁶ By the next week, a forensic examination had established that the pistols wielded by the killers had been used in a string of murders of British police officers carried out by the Stern Gang in Palestine.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the decision had already been taken not to concentrate too much on the 'masters' of the assassins lest in doing so 'drastic action . . . should be directed against the whole Jewish community in Palestine'.⁶⁸ Instead, all attention was to be concentrated on the two killers.⁶⁹

The Jewish Agency's willingness to arrest some members of the Irgun, the so-called Season, was regarded as sufficient co-operation.⁷⁰ As Moyne's grieving former officials commented, through gritted teeth,

our whole policy at the moment is based on the assumption that there are 'good' Jews . . . [who] are the official leaders and the vast majority of the Zionist movement; and that the people who organised the murder of Lord Moyne are a tiny and

⁶² 'Report on the attempt to assassinate the high commissioner of Palestine', WO201/189.

⁶³ Paper by Brigadier Clayton (for Sir Walter Smart), 14 Nov. 1944, FO141/1001.

⁶⁴ Minute by J. S. Bennett, 31 Aug. 1944, FO921/147.

⁶⁵ PIC paper no. 2 (revised), 'Jewish illegal organisations in Palestine', 8 Nov. 1944, FO921/154; Killearn to FO, tel. 257, 29 July 1945, and A. J. Kellar (MI5) to C. G. Eastwood (Colonial Office), 24 Aug. 1945, CO733/456/12.

⁶⁶ Shone (Cairo) to Foreign Office, tel. 2298, 8 Nov. 1944, CAB104/254; Shone to FO, tel. 2300, 8 Nov. 1944, PREM4/51/11.

⁶⁷ Commandant Cairo City Police, to director general, Public Security, Ministry of the Interior, 15 Nov. 1944, CAB104/254.

⁶⁸ John Martin to prime minister, 20 Nov. 1944, PREM4/51/11. The drafting of this note was begun on 16 Nov. 1944.

⁶⁹ Prime minister to foreign secretary, 3 Dec. 1944, PREM4/51/11.

⁷⁰ Jerusalem to Colonial Office, tel. 544, 30 Nov. 1944, FO921/154.

execrated minority. (Whether it is a true assumption is another matter; but having adopted a policy, we are entitled to follow it through).⁷¹

In some ways, post-war assassination looked similar to pre-war assassination to British observers. In Egypt, Maher and Nakrashi reaped what they had sown. Both became prime minister and were assassinated, Maher in 1945, his successor Nakrashi in 1948. Gandhi was assassinated by Hindu fanatics operating from western India in 1948. The Stern Gang murdered the UN envoy to Palestine, Count Bernadotte, in September 1948.⁷² Britain itself faced a new assassination complex in South-East Asia after the war. In a two-year period, the British governors of Sarawak, Singapore, and Malaya were attacked: two of the three were killed. On 3 December 1949, Duncan Stewart, the new governor of Sarawak, was stabbed by Malay youths in Sibü. On 28 April 1950, an attempt was made to assassinate the governor of Singapore, when a hand grenade failed to explode properly. Finally, on 6 October 1951, Sir Henry Gurney, high commissioner in Malaya, was shot dead when his car was ambushed.

In the case of Stewart's assassination, the British government acted in its customary fashion to narrow the published scope of the conspiracy. The rare use of knives in the killing, and the exotic remoteness of Sarawak, made the conspiracy appear ramshackle and primitive.⁷³ The transfer of Sarawak to Britain, in 1946, had been made by the last 'White Rajah'. The assassins were members of the Malay minority, fighting, it seemed, for the return of a quixotic British dynasty.⁷⁴

The organizer of the assassination was portrayed as 'a discredited civil servant' with a notorious record of collaboration with the Japanese.⁷⁵ The centrepiece of the prosecution case was his correspondence with the secretary-general of the Malay National Union.⁷⁶ What was deliberately not stressed in public was the evidence that the Malay National Union was a front organization for Indonesia.⁷⁷ A very clear decision was taken to avoid all mention of the Indonesian origins of the assassination. 'We have hitherto taken the line that this agitation is by a self-seeking small clique who have lost their privileged position under the Rajahs', London instructed Sarawak, 'and to introduce any

⁷¹ J. S. Bennett to Sir William Croft, 2 Dec. 1944, FO921/154.

⁷² J. Bowyer Bell, 'Assassination in international politics: Lord Moyne, Count Bernadotte, and the LEHI', *Political Science Quarterly*, 16 (1972), pp. 59–82.

⁷³ 'Governor stabbed on tour in Sarawak', *Times*, 5 Dec. 1949, p. 4.

⁷⁴ 'The Sarawak crime: Mr. Anthony Brooke's statement', *Times*, 10 Dec., p. 3; 'Late governor of Sarawak', *Times*, 19 Dec. 1949.

⁷⁵ 'Murder of governor of Sarawak: Malay youths on trial', *Times*, 6 Jan. 1950, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Dawson to Sir Thomas Lloyd, 14 Dec. 1949, FO371/84678.

⁷⁷ John Higham (CO) to R. H. Scott (FO), 6 Feb. 1950, FO371/84678; C. W. Dawson (OAG, Sarawak) to Higham, 13 Oct. 1949, FO371/84678; Dawson to Higham, 12 Jan. 1950, FO371/84678.

publicity revealing direct anti-British or pro-Indonesian feeling would provide yet another handle for our critics'.⁷⁸

Defining the conspirators in the Gurney killing was more straightforward. There was an ongoing war against the Malayan Communist party, and its military wing the MRLA (Malay Races Liberation Army). The identity of the conspirators was easy to discover but the question of whether to spread the blame widely was a potentially explosive issue.⁷⁹ In the days before his death, Gurney himself had expressed the view that the ethnic Chinese community was collectively responsible for Communist violence.⁸⁰ M. V. Del Tufo, the officer administering the government (OAG), and Malcolm MacDonald, the commissioner general in South-East Asia, struggled to get Malay leaders to attend a crisis meeting because the 'Chinese would be present'. Although the Malay attempt to blame a rival ethnic group merely accorded with Gurney's own view, the British immediately recognized that the sentiment 'will become dangerous if it is allowed to develop unchecked'. Immediately after the assassination, officials, whilst arguing that they had a 'Chinese problem', were not willing to go too far down the road towards collective guilt.⁸¹ Winning over the Chinese became the centrepiece of British policy. In Malaya, the possibility of holding the Chinese community responsible for the assassination of the high commissioner was rejected. However, there was already a high degree of 'collective guilt' built into the policy of enforced resettlement of half-a-million so-called Chinese 'squatters'. The tendency to attribute collective blame to a community was, nevertheless, held in check by the longer-established assassination culture.⁸²

The 1950s was the decade in which British policy-makers were most likely to use rhetoric suggesting that whole ethnic groups were implicated in assassination conspiracies. Yet, such talk of broad conspiracies tended to dissipate during the secondary response. The potential political dangers of conspiracy-mongering had re-introduced a note of traditional caution. There was, in any case, a gap in significant assassinations, causing the issue to become dormant. The next assassination of a senior official, Sir Richard Sharples, the governor of Bermuda, in March 1973, was treated as a post-imperial tragi-comedy. The main point of consternation was that Sharples had been killed whilst walking in the grounds of Government House and had taken the same walk with

⁷⁸ Higham to Aikman (Sarawak), 22 Feb. 1950; Malcolm MacDonald (commissioner-general for the UK in South-East Asia) to foreign secretary, 28 Mar. 1950, FO371/84678.

⁷⁹ 'Investigation into the murder of HE the late high commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, on 6 October 1951', CO537/7283; Leon Comber, "'The weather . . . has been horrible": Malayan communist communications during the "emergency", 1948–1960', *Asian Studies Review*, 19 (1995), pp. 37–57.

⁸⁰ Simon Smith, 'General Templer and counter-insurgency in Malaya: hearts and minds, intelligence, and propaganda', *Intelligence and National Security*, 16 (2001), pp. 60–78.

⁸¹ OAG, Federation of Malaya (M. V. del Tufo) to secretary of state for the colonies, no. 83, 30 Oct. 1951, CO537/7284.

⁸² Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and minds in guerrilla warfare: the Malayan emergency* (Oxford, 1989).

Prince Charles only a fortnight previously. There was some speculation about a black power movement, the 'Black Berets'. Nevertheless, even the immediate response to the murder called it 'an isolated incident'.⁸³ The next governor concluded that the killing was the work of local criminals and that 'there is no widespread political unrest in the colony'.⁸⁴ In line with British practice, this conclusion underplayed the extent of the conspiracy: recent scholarship points to the links the 'Black Berets' maintained with violent Black power organizations such as the US Black Panthers.⁸⁵

Assassination conspiracies might have remained a minor imperial hangover. Thanks to assassinations by Irish republicans, however, they became an imperial hangover of considerable importance.⁸⁶ In assassination terms, Ireland was seen as an imperial issue. The Republican mantra, that Ireland was Britain's first and last colony, appeared regularly. 'Mountbatten', the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) said of its most famous victim, 'has been described as... a pillar of post-imperialist Britain: but Britain is still an imperialist power'.⁸⁷

The assassination by Irish republicans of senior Britons began with the murder of the British ambassador in Dublin in July 1976. There was then a tightly packed trio of assassinations in 1979: the British ambassador in The Hague and the opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland, both in March, and Lord Mountbatten, the queen's cousin, in August.

Christopher Ewart-Biggs, the newly appointed British ambassador in Dublin, was blown up by a culvert bomb. In initial talks with British diplomats, the officer in charge of the investigation 'speculated that it might have been a break-away unit of the PIRA, though some of the suspects appear to be PIRA members. He pointed out that it would be unusual for the PIRA to mount a successful operation and not to claim responsibility immediately afterwards'.⁸⁸ The British, however, had little doubt that they had been victims of the PIRA. They knew that there was no PIRA 'splinter' movement: instead, the PIRA had been taken over by a group of northern 'young turks'.⁸⁹ According to British military intelligence, the PIRA now favoured assassination of prominent individuals, 'to indicate that their normal lower posture stems from restraint rather than weakness'.⁹⁰

⁸³ Bermuda (Kinnear) to FCO, unnumbered tel., 11 Mar. 1973, PREM15/1313.

⁸⁴ Caribbean Department, FCO-Bermuda: visit of Sir Edwin Leather, governor of Bermuda, Nov. 1973, PREM15/1313.

⁸⁵ Quito Swan, *Black power in Bermuda: the struggle for decolonization* (New York, NY, 2010).

⁸⁶ Richard Ned Lebow, 'The origins of sectarian assassination: the case of Belfast', *Journal of International Affairs*, 32 (1978), pp. 43-61.

⁸⁷ Dublin to FCO, tel. 246, 3 Sept. 1979, FCO33/3848.

⁸⁸ Dublin to FCO, tel. 282, 22 July 1976, FCO87/489.

⁸⁹ Dublin to FCO, tel. 246, 3 Sept. 1979, FCO33/3848.

⁹⁰ Brigadier J. M. Glover (Defence Intelligence Service), 'Northern Ireland: future terrorist trends', 2 Nov. 1978, was leaked to a Republican newspaper, Peter Taylor, *Brits: the war against the IRA* (London, 2002), pp. 218-26.

The British had an interest in defining the conspiracy in a manner that would influence the Irish Republic. Fears in the Republic of being tarred with the PIRA brush might make the Cosgrave government more willing to collaborate with Britain in effective counter-insurgency. 'The government', wrote John Hickman, the British chargé in Dublin, 'had a strong political interest in dissociating themselves and their country from the murder in order to protect their international reputation.' It was undesirable, in political terms, that the Irish 'should too easily be able to expiate their sense of national responsibility'.⁹¹

Richard Sykes, the deputy under-secretary responsible for Irish affairs, was despatched by the foreign secretary, Tony Crosland, to take personal charge of the British effort in Dublin.⁹² Unfortunately, the British concluded, it would be in 'bad taste' to push too hard for deals. Indeed, the initial attempt to frame the conspiracy in a useful fashion was rapidly replaced by the cynical Northern Ireland Office observation that, 'once last week's tragic events begin to recede into history, and that will be at the end of this month after the memorial services, the Irish Government will be in the same position politically as they always have been'.⁹³ In the autumn of 1976, the Gardai did tentatively identify the head of the PIRA assassination squad, but there was no attempt at an arrest.⁹⁴

On 22 March 1979, Sir Richard Sykes, by then the British ambassador in The Hague, was shot dead by two assassins.⁹⁵ The same day, a Belgian banker was murdered at his home in Brussels. It rapidly became clear that the intended victim had been his next-door neighbour, a British official at NATO.⁹⁶ The British were sure that Sykes had been the victim of the PIRA but were unable to establish a convincing narrative about an IRA assassination campaign in continental Europe.⁹⁷ Not only was the Dutch investigation 'fruitless' but the Dutch and Belgians rapidly lost interest, regarding the assassination as 'an event extraneous to the Netherlands'.⁹⁸

⁹¹ J. K. Hickman to Crosland (foreign secretary), 25 July 1976, PREM16/1341.

⁹² Ewen Fergusson (FCO) to Patrick Wright, 23 July 1976, PREM16/1341.

⁹³ F. D. Milne to I. M. Burns, 28 July 1976, CJ4/1060.

⁹⁴ Dublin to FCO, tel. 413, 22 Oct. 1976, FCO87/493; Christopher Walker, 'Inquiry into the alleged errors in hunt for Dublin envoy's killer', *Times*, 4 Jan. 1978, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Roger Hervey (The Hague) to E. [wen] A. J. Fergusson (FCO), 25 Mar. 1979, FCO33/4157.

⁹⁶ Duty clerk to prime minister, 22 Mar. 1979, PREM16/2244.

⁹⁷ Hervey (The Hague) to FCO, 23 Mar. 1979, PREM16/2244; Brussels to FCO, tel. 44, 27 Mar. 1979, FCO33/3848; The Hague to FCO, tel. 88, 25 Mar. 1979; The Hague to FCO, tel. 94, 27 Mar. 1979, FCO33/4157; FCO (David Owen, foreign secretary) to Berne, tel. 17, 5 Apr. 1979, FCO33/3848; FCO to Berne, tel. 19, 26 Apr. 1979, FCO33/3848; Paris to FCO, tel. 316, 16 June 1979, FCO33/4157.

⁹⁸ Hervey (The Hague) to David Owen, 27 Apr. 1979 'Murder of Sir Richard Sykes'; Hervey to Ian Winchester, 20 June 1979; The Hague to FCO, tel. 238, 23 Aug. 1979, FCO33/4157.

Just as officials and reporters were scrambling to understand the Hague/Brussels assassinations, they were swept from the headlines by the assassination of the Conservative politician, Airey Neave, killed on 30 March 1979 by a car bomb in the House of Commons car park. Unlike the Sykes case, there was an immediate claim of responsibility made by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), whom the British understood to be 'a militant group which broke away from the IRA'. The British definitively confirmed the INLA as responsible for the Neave assassination. Intelligence sources were very specific that the assassination had been carried out by a six-man INLA team despatched to the mainland.⁹⁹

The Sykes and Neave cases were then eclipsed by a still more spectacular murder.¹⁰⁰ On 27 August 1979, Lord Mountbatten and his family were blown up on their yacht off the west coast of Ireland. In the Mountbatten case, good police work quickly identified the perpetrators. On the morning of 27 August, a sharp-eyed provincial Garda officer had spotted and arrested two known members of the PIRA, Thomas McMahon and Francis McGirl. The Irish courts subsequently declared their detention illegal, but in the meantime paint from Mountbatten's boat had been found on McMahon's clothes. They were re-arrested for murder.¹⁰¹ McMahon was convicted of the assassination in November 1979; McGirl was acquitted. The Irish Special Criminal Court then decided that McMahon was not a member of the IRA. In the formal view of the Irish criminal justice system, therefore, there was no IRA conspiracy to assassinate Lord Mountbatten. For unexplained reasons, an individual, who swore he was not a member of the IRA, had planted and detonated a sophisticated radio-controlled bomb on a boat of aristocratic holiday-makers. The Irish did, at least, get further than the Dutch: the Sykes case was never solved.

II

The most straightforward response to assassination was enhanced security for likely targets. In 1909, a few days after Wyllie's death, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police wrote that, 'in consequence of the Indian agitation, culminating in a recent assassination, it has been necessary to detail Officers for the personal protection of Statesmen'.¹⁰²

The major political issue surrounding Sir Henry Wilson's murder revolved around the lack of protection for senior figures. In the emergency debate held after the assassination, angry Unionists were well primed on this issue. 'Is it not a fact that recently, on account of the so-called improved relations between

⁹⁹ J. A. Chilcot (Home Office) to N. J. Sanders, 5 Apr. 1979, FCO87/907.

¹⁰⁰ Hervey (The Hague) to J. L. Bullard (FCO), 26 Sept. 1979, FCO33/4157.

¹⁰¹ Dublin to FCO, tel. 233, 30 Aug. 1979, FCO87/841.

¹⁰² Stephen Twigge, Edward Hampshire, and Graham Macklin, *British intelligence: secrets, spies and sources* (London, 2008), p. 21.

Ireland and this country, instructions were given to Scotland Yard that they need not concern themselves about these affairs', demanded the senior Tory, Ronald McNeil. The leader of the Conservative party, Austen Chamberlain, had to admit that 'undoubtedly it is the case that owing to what was thought to be the improved relations police protection was removed from Ministers, as well as from certain others who had formerly been under special police protection'.¹⁰³ Indeed, a hurried conclave of ministers had already realized that 'criticism in the forthcoming Debate would be directed mainly in regard to the degree of protection provided in the past and to be provided in the future'. They asked some pointed questions of the commissioner, Sir William Horwood and the head of Special Branch, Sir Borlase Childs, about how they had arrived at this indefensible political position.¹⁰⁴

In the hours after the Wilson assassination, protection was re-instated for cabinet ministers and the leaders of Ulster Unionism. On the day of the debate, ministers decided to extend that protection to prominent critics of the government, including McNeil. In defending himself against the witch-hunt aimed at finding 'upon whose advice this protection was removed', Horwood blamed ministers. He pointed out that it was the Treasury who had complained 'as to the large sum now being expended on the protection of Ministers'. Senior ministers had agreed that protection was no longer necessary.¹⁰⁵

The main sentiment was against too much protection, in part because it created a barrier between the authorities and the people. This was a constant refrain, even in dangerous imperial situations. In Bengal in the early 1930s, the 'murder campaign' certainly had a severe impact on the 'daily lives of officials'. The 'unusual precautions which had to be taken for their safety undoubtedly interfered with their normal duties', the India Office admitted. 'They live', the report continued,

in houses guarded by armed sentries; many of them when they go out are accompanied by armed personal guards, sometimes with their revolvers drawn; the roads they use are constantly patrolled; intending interviewers when not known are searched before admission; and in Calcutta and some other places there are restrictions on entrance to clubs which at times give rise to irritation and bad feeling.¹⁰⁶

When Sir Samuel Hoare spoke about the Midnapore murders to the Oxford University Conservative Association, it was 'the first time a speaker at a University meeting has had a police guard'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ 'Sir Henry Wilson: police protection removed' and 'Anxiety in the Commons: police protection for ministers', *Times*, 24 June 1922.

¹⁰⁴ 'Draft conclusions', 23 June 1922, and note by the commissioner, c. 23 June 1922, HO144/3689.

¹⁰⁵ Note by the commissioner, c. 23 June 1922, HO144/3689.

¹⁰⁶ *Note by the secretary of state for India on terrorism in India*, 30 Nov. 1933.

¹⁰⁷ 'Mr Burge's assassination', *Scotsman*, 14 Oct. 1933, p. 13.

The Bengal protocols were rarely replicated elsewhere. Despite the attack on Sir Harold MacMichael, Lord Moyne was accompanied by his usual military driver and aide at the time of his assassination. In the immediate aftermath of the attack on MacMichael, Moyne had been 'regularly escorted by Egyptian police in a car which accompanied his own, and a police guard was stationed on his house by day as well as by night' but 'the police escort car and day guard on the house were dispensed with on the Minister's direct instructions'.¹⁰⁸ Commenting on the attempted assassination of the governor of Singapore, a Colonial Office official wrote prophetically that,

it has always been a source of some surprise to me that attempts have not been previously made on the lives of senior officials in both Singapore and the Federation. When I went about with Sir H. Gurney . . . the police protection was so inconspicuous that I am sure there would have been little difficulty in a determined assassin carrying out his intention.¹⁰⁹

A strict security protocol was subsequently developed for Sir Henry Gurney and promulgated in May 1951. There were different levels of protection mandated for journeys on terrorist-infested 'red routes' and for more routine movement. The road upon which Gurney was killed was not a red route. Nevertheless, he should have had a bodyguard of twenty-two police in a number of vehicles. At the time of the ambush, after a comedy of errors, he had six policemen in a Land Rover accompanying him.¹¹⁰ When the colonial secretary flew in to retrieve the situation he was met by the commissioner-general with a convoy of armoured cars. As his aeroplane came to a halt, it was surrounded by a human wall of uniformed police. He was bundled into an armoured vehicle. The minister, Oliver Lyttelton, regarded such visible precautions as harmful to his dignity and lowering for British political prestige in Malaya.¹¹¹

Such attitudes were still prevalent in the 1970s. The only British officials who received armed protection – from former special forces soldiers working for a private contractor – were those stationed in Beirut. Sir Richard Sykes had with him a valet, a civilian driver, and a female secretary. His shocked deputy reported to the Foreign Office's head of security that 'the Embassy Rolls was generally regarded here as "bullet-proof". This description is quite wrong.'¹¹²

It was in the wake of the Sykes and Neave assassinations that MI5 finally concluded that British officials needed personal armed protection and 'armoured' cars.¹¹³ In 1980, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police noted that 'the number of officers currently employed on Special Branch duties

¹⁰⁸ Cairo (Minister Resident's Office) to Foreign Office, tel. 2408, 8 Nov. 1944, CAB104/254.

¹⁰⁹ Higham to Paskin, 16 May 1950, CO537/5964.

¹¹⁰ 'Investigation into the murder of . . . Sir Henry Gurney', CO537/7283.

¹¹¹ Security arrangements for Oliver Lyttelton's visit to Malaya in 1951, CO1022/81.

¹¹² Roger Hervey to Ian Winchester, 25 Mar. 1979, FCO33/4157.

¹¹³ I. S. Winchester to chief clerk, 4 May 1979, FCO33/3848.

is 405. The branch afforded personal protection to British and foreign dignitaries... due... to the continuing need for additional protection, as a result of the assassination of Mr Airey Neave, MP.¹¹⁴ Sir David McNea added that following Mountbatten's killing, a review of protection of the royal family, government ministers, and other prominent public figures showed the need to increase manpower.¹¹⁵ These dispositions ran into determined resistance from the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Reginald Hibbert. The security response was little more than an attempt to look 'radical and effective' but had no real point other than 'to make me fairly uncomfortable'. He had no intention of giving up the ambassadorial Rolls for an armoured Ford. Security, he argued, exhibited a 'trench warfare mentality when it ought to be looked at with the intention of conducting a war of movement'.¹¹⁶

Hibbert sounded like the last of the imperial breed. His 'war of movement' jibe, however, dovetailed with a growing sense of frustration that Britain could no longer make the most immediate logical response to assassination: capture and punish the assassins. In this instance, there was a radical discontinuity between the early and later period. Until the 1940s, some kind of justice or retribution was achieved for most assassinations. Dhingra was tried and executed for the assassination of Curzon Wylie, as were Dunne and Sullivan for that of Wilson. In both cases, justice was swift. In India, most assassination cases ended in executions.¹¹⁷ In Egypt, the British insisted on the execution of their own star witness in the Stack case. Churchill personally orchestrated the extreme pressure exerted on the Egyptian government to execute the assassins of Lord Moyne.¹¹⁸ Duncan Stewart's assassins were executed in March 1950 after a short trial in Kuching. Two men, Larry Tacklyn and Erskine Burrows, were executed for the murder of Sir Richard Sharples in 1977. This Bermudan execution was the last in British-controlled territory. An important change had got underway in the 1960s. That change was threefold. First, the British parliament itself effectively abolished the death penalty in the UK in 1965. Second, the Aden campaign saw the emergence of international NGOs, such as Amnesty International, willing to condemn British brutality, and to uphold the rights of terrorists. Finally, the decline in Britain's imperial reach. By the 1970s, Bermuda was an exception: assassinations either occurred in places where governments were not 'penetrated' by British influence, or the assassins could flee to such places.

¹¹⁴ Cmnd 8254, *Report of the commissioner of police of the metropolis for year 1980*, June 1981.

¹¹⁵ Cmnd 7932, *Report of the commissioner of police of the metropolis for the year 1979*, June 1980.

¹¹⁶ Reginald Hibbert (Paris) to Ian Winchester (security), 23 May 1979, FCO33/3848.

¹¹⁷ Amir Kumar Gupta, 'Defying death: nationalist revolutionism in India, 1897-1938', *Social Scientist*, 25 (1997), pp. 3-27; Peter Heehs, 'Aurobindo Ghose and revolutionary terrorism', *South Asia*, 15 (1992), pp. 47-69.

¹¹⁸ Killearn (Cairo) to Foreign Office, tel. 479, 28 Feb. 1945, FO141/1006; Major N. K. Branch, 'Trial of Lord Moyne's assassins', 12 Jan. 1945, FO141/1006; Gerold Frank, 'The Moyne trial: a tragic history', *Commentary*, 1 (1945/6), pp. 64-71.

The problem of jurisdiction actually went back to the beginning of the cycle: Britain and France had clashed at The Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1909 over the custody of Vinayak Savarkar.¹¹⁹ What had once been an interesting, but resolvable, problem for international lawyers was, by the 1970s, a core issue. The Dutch, Belgian, and Irish authorities, amongst others, exhibited little enthusiasm for pursuing the assassins of British officials. In fact, they strongly implied that Britain's imperial past was to blame for the assassinations. A British analysis of private, official, and press reaction to the murder of Richard Sykes concluded that all saw it as an extra-European event. European police forces were gearing up for political and diplomatic protection but explicitly denied that their motivation was the threat to Britons. Assassins of British officials were thus placed in a different category to the 'modern' New Left assassins, such as Baader-Meinhof or Red Brigades, operating in continental Europe.¹²⁰

When the newly elected government of Margaret Thatcher convened to consider the Mountbatten assassination there was a feeling that 'other measures would have to be considered'. Unfortunately, most of those measures had been tried before with little success. A potential response was the 'more vigorous use of SAS', special forces specializing in counter-terrorism.¹²¹ Critics of the British government see here the seeds of a 'war of movement' that reintroduced the concept of an 'eye-for-an-eye' into the reaction to assassination or terrorism. They pointed to the killing of three IRA terrorists in Gibraltar by the SAS on 6 March 1988. The implication of documentaries such as Thames Television's *Death on the Rock* was that, deprived of the means of judicial execution, Britain had opted for the use of 'death squads'. The emergence of different, post-imperial, norms remains, however, controversial, and difficult to prove.¹²² In the period 1979 to 1983, the SAS was, in fact, shifted away from its 'vigorous' role towards intelligence gathering.¹²³ It can be noted that in the imperial period, a flirtation with using counter-assassination special forces against the Stern Gang in Palestine had been thoroughly discredited by the performance of Nichol Gray, the chief of police in Palestine, and then Malaya.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ 'Award of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the case of Savarkar, between France and Great Britain', *American Journal of International Law*, 5 (Apr. 1911), pp. 520–3.

¹²⁰ Hervey, 'Murder of Sir Richard Sykes', FCO33/4157.

¹²¹ M. A. Pattison (No. 10) to J. G. Pilling (NIO), 28 Aug. 1979, FCO87/841.

¹²² Ward Thomas, 'Norms and security: the case of international assassination', *International Security*, 25 (2000), pp. 105–33.

¹²³ Mark Urban, *Big boys' rules: the SAS and the secret struggle against the IRA* (London, 1993), pp. 83, 163–72, and Appendix 1: Republican terrorists: cause of death, April 1976 to November 1987.

¹²⁴ David Ceserani, *Major Farran's hat: murder, scandal and Britain's war against Jewish terrorism, 1945–1948* (London, 2010).

A political effect of assassination was often a determination not to change course. Of the Moyne assassination, Churchill famously said that,

if our dreams for Zionism are to end in the smoke of assassins' pistols, and our labours for its future to produce only a new set of gangsters worthy of Nazi Germany, many like myself will have to reconsider the position we have maintained so consistently and so long in the past.

Yet, he was sedulous in avoiding moves against the wider Zionist movement.¹²⁵ In 1944, there was a profound political act available to the British government: a declaration that it would enforce its own 1939 White Paper and taper off Jewish immigration, in order to preserve the Arab majority in Palestine. Although, on paper, that road was contemplated it had little chance of being adopted. 'Suspension of the quota was', wrote the head of Churchill's private office and former secretary to the Peel Commission on Palestine, 'calculated only to play into the hands of the Extremists by raising a general outcry against the Government (probably not limited to Palestine), in which the extremists will outbid the Moderates and all hope of a reasonable settlement will disappear.'¹²⁶ The British, indeed, maintained a long-term policy of not using the assassination to manipulate public opinion against Israel. When Israel's government had the bodies of Bet-Tsouri and Hakim repatriated from Egypt in 1975, and buried with full state honours, the British response was notably low key. It was the Israelis who published the correspondence between James Callaghan and Yigal Allon, in order to make political capital out of a mild reproach for insensitivity. Callaghan had only written to Allon on the understanding that 'we should not initiate any publicity'.¹²⁷

The 1975 Anglo-Israeli spat over the murderers of Moyne neatly illustrated a difference in political cultures of assassination. Unlike some other societies, such as Israel, British ritual stressed the 'art of forgetting'. The 'intangible social reality' was the avoidance of fuss and mastery of self. A standard British sentiment was that offered by David Owen at Richard Sykes's memorial service: 'All emotions of hatred are bad. Therefore he who lives under the guidance of reason will endeavour as far as possible to avoid being assailed by such emotions. Consequently he will also endeavour to prevent others being so assailed. Hatred is increased by being reciprocated.'¹²⁸

There were, on occasion, impressive rituals. Wilson and Mountbatten received state funerals in London. Wilson himself took a very cynical view of such occasions. He described the memorial service for army officers killed in Ireland as 'the most... shameful, that I ever saw'. But politicians and military

¹²⁵ Cohen, 'The Moyne assassination', pp. 358–73 and 'Churchill and the Jews: the Holocaust', *Modern Judaism*, 6 (1986), pp. 27–49.

¹²⁶ Martin to PM, 20 Nov. 1944, PREM4/51/11.

¹²⁷ Patrick Wright (No. 10) to S.J. Barrett (FCO), 27 June 1975, PREM16/552.

¹²⁸ Tribute by the Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP at the memorial service for Sir Richard Sykes KCMG MC, Kloosterkerk, 28 Mar. 1979, PREM16/2244.

leaders behaved in a low-key and dignified manner, whatever the bitterness that lay beneath the surface.¹²⁹ In the case of Moyne, his son, Captain Bryan Guinness, insisted that there ‘should be no ceremony in England since there had been a State funeral in Cairo, and it was his wish that everything in England should be of a private and family nature only’. The norm overseas was for a rapid and functional funeral with honours, and burial *in situ* or the unpublicized return of the body to the UK.¹³⁰

Commemoration rarely threatened to run out of control, but when it did this provoked deep discomfort. The most notable instance was the response to the assassination of Christopher Ewart-Biggs. An alliance of the Catholic politician and campaigner, Lord Longford, and a number of Irish politicians, most notably the Republic’s foreign minister, Garret Fitzgerald, lobbied for a high-profile memorial. A new element in the 1970s was that Ewart-Biggs’s wife, Jane, unlike other bereaved spouses, was young, attractive, and wanted her opinions heard in the press. The result was rushed official support for a Ewart-Biggs peace prize. ‘It is important that the venture should not flop’, wrote Biggs’s successor in Dublin.¹³¹ Jane Ewart-Biggs had been escorted to Dublin by Richard Sykes. When he, in turn, was assassinated the Foreign Office quietly ensured that there was no repeat of the Ewart-Biggs commemoration.¹³²

III

The empirical study of assassination culture reveals that it transcended the subordinate bureaucratic structures of the state. Although imperial administration was fractured by the existence of competing bureaucracies, including the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, and the India Office, they were more united than divided in their response to assassination. Disagreements were more likely to occur between ‘London’ and the ‘men on the spot’, often demanding more robust action from the authorities than between officials from different departments.

Bureaucracies that developed fundamentally different policies on, for instance, decolonization, nevertheless shared a culture. This is understandable when we note two factors. First, the various imperial services differed in detail rather than in overall composition, being drawn ‘overwhelmingly from the upper middle and professional classes’.¹³³ In 1968, when the Colonial,

¹²⁹ C. E. Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: his life and diaries* (2 vols., London, 1927), II, 26 Nov. 1920.

¹³⁰ Armstrong to Greenwood, 10 Nov. 1944, CAB104/254.

¹³¹ Hickman (Dublin) to FCO, 11 Aug. 1976, PREM16/1341.

¹³² Julian Bullard (FCO) to Sir Jock Taylor (The Hague), 18 Sept. 1979. Personal and confidential hand-written note attached to official correspondence, FCO33/4157.

¹³³ Ronald Hyam, ‘Bureaucracy and “trusteeship” in the colonial empire’, and John Cell, ‘Colonial rule’, in Judith Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford history of the British empire*, IV: *The twentieth century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 255–79 and 232–54.

Commonwealth Relations, and Foreign Offices were merged, the foreign secretary, Michael Stewart, noted that the administrative elite remained stubbornly homogeneous.¹³⁴ Second, assassination tended to be an integrating factor in complex imperial situations. Sir Lee Stack and Lord Allenby were generals with overlapping military, colonial, and political responsibilities. Lord Moyne presided over a multi-departmental staff in Cairo as minister resident and had the explicit mission of integrating British policy in the Middle East. He himself was a cabinet minister responsible to the Foreign Office, but was a former secretary of state for the colonies. The initial response to the Stewart and Gurney assassinations fell to the commissioner-general in South-East Asia. This office had the explicit role of co-ordinating British policy in the region from Singapore. It too answered to the Foreign Office but was held by a former colonial secretary, Malcolm MacDonald.

The study of assassination generates a picture of the British imperial state – cautious, clear-headed, and cold-blooded – rather closer to the traditional conception of ‘phlegmatic imperialism’ than have been recent critiques, often concentrating on hot-headed popular imperialism or the state’s ‘ruthless deployment of overwhelming force’, either in the early 1920s or mid-1950s.¹³⁵ That having been said, it should be noted that recent re-evaluations of the British state’s relationship to political violence have tended, in the end, to reach similarly traditional conclusions. A decade ago Jon Lawrence argued that ‘Britain did change fundamentally after the First World War’, inasmuch that for ‘politicians, conservative as well as radical . . . there was a growing doubt about the role of force in the maintenance of imperial rule, and a sense that idealistic notions of Britain’s “civilizing” mission . . . were incompatible with military subjugation’. Lawrence admitted, however, that the ‘apostles of militarism’ only had a brief efflorescence between 1919 and May 1921.¹³⁶ More recently, Robert Gerwarth and John Horne have stressed the ‘continued importance of victory and social and political stability in limiting the brutalizing effect of the

¹³⁴ John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London, 1992), pp. 17–20.

¹³⁵ Stephen Howe, ‘When – if ever – did empire end? Recent studies of imperialism and decolonisation’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (2005), pp. 585–99; Joanna Lewis, ‘Nasty, brutish and in shorts? British colonial rule, violence and the historians of Mau Mau’, *Round Table*, 96 (2007), pp. 201–23; Huw Bennett, ‘Minimum force in British counterinsurgency’, *Small wars and insurgencies*, 21 (2010), pp. 459–75.

¹³⁶ Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, pp. 557–89; Brock Millman, ‘A counsel of despair: British strategy and war aims, 1917–1918’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36 (2001), pp. 241–70, and idem, ‘HMG and the war against dissent, 1914–1918’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (2005), pp. 413–40; Keith Jeffery, ‘“An English barrack in the Oriental seas”? India in the aftermath of the First World War’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 15 (1981), pp. 369–86; idem, ‘The British army and internal security, 1919–1939’, *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 377–97; John Darwin, ‘Imperialism in decline? Tendencies in British imperial policy between the wars’, *Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), pp. 657–79.

War' for Britain.¹³⁷ These conclusions point to an essential continuity also borne out by the study of assassination.

The British imperial mind proved itself clear-headed in its consideration of assassination. The state's assassination culture helped it to hold the ring against both 'the apostles of militarism' and the fellow travellers of terrorism. The British were well aware that there were violent and deadly conspiracies aimed against them. They devoted considerable resources, both 'hidden hand' and public sphere, to understanding those conspiracies. There was, however, a consistent reluctance to overstate the threat. Faced by assassination, the British rarely gave in to 'information', or any other form of panic.¹³⁸ From time to time, some commentators claimed British leaders were paralysed by an unarticulated fear for their own lives. The climate of fear in post-war Palestine has been cited as one example.¹³⁹ Henry Wilson claimed that British policy on Ireland was dictated by a 'Cabinet... running away from Valera's pistol'. He quoted Marshal Foch with grim satisfaction: 'You cower under the assassin and the Jew. Your friendship is no longer worth seeking.'¹⁴⁰ Internalized terror is hard to prove: but the mass of evidence does not suggest an empire run on fear. Notably, the one imperial governor who responded to a supposed threat to his own life by the imposition of a 'police state' was humiliatingly rebuked by a public enquiry.¹⁴¹ Asquith's off-the-cuff formulation: there were organized conspiracies; relatively few people were involved in such conspiracies; they were dangerous because of the violence of their methods, not because of who they represented, endured.

The obverse side of the determination not to panic was cold-bloodedness. Although the assassinations that began in 1909 marked a new wave, including killing of prominent individuals on the streets of London, there was little shock. To be an imperial power was to invite hatred. There was a tacit acceptance that running an empire was dangerous and might lead to injury or death, including by assassination. But if assassination occurred in its 'rational' form, as a protest against imperial governance, it could be accepted, almost as a safety valve against other forms of violence. If the British assumption of limited conspiracy was accurate, then it was rational to believe that a large population shot through

¹³⁷ Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, 'Vectors of violence: paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923', *Journal of Modern History*, 83 (2011), pp. 489–512.

¹³⁸ C. A. Bayly, 'Knowing the country: empire and information in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27 (1993), pp. 3–43; D. K. Lahiri Choudhury, 'Sinews of panic and the nerves of empire: the imagined state's entanglement with information panic, India c. 1880–1912', *Modern Asian Studies*, 38 (2004), pp. 965–1002.

¹³⁹ Motti Golani, *The end of the British mandate in Palestine, 1948: the diary of Sir Henry Gurney* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 1–5.

¹⁴⁰ Wilson, *Diaries*, 3 Aug. 1921 and c. 13 Oct. 1921.

¹⁴¹ Cmnd 814, *Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Enquiry*, July 1959 (Devlin Report); Brian Simpson, 'The Devlin Commission (1959): colonialism, emergencies and the rule of law', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 22 (2002), pp. 17–52; John Darwin, 'The central African emergency, 1959', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21 (1993), pp. 217–34.

with violent, but fragmented, revolutionary organizations might be amenable to subtle management. Draconian justice, or vengeance channelled into extra-legal state reprisal, risked inciting the very waves of violence that encouraged assassination conspirators into a dangerous cascade of political killing.¹⁴² The British were never entirely passive: in each case there was a response, but even with regard to practical, and perhaps easier, actions there was reluctance to embrace wholesale change. Phlegmatic imperialism was, in the case of assassination, pragmatic imperialism.

The assassination culture of late imperial Britain was more rational than anxious. We have observed a consistent tendency not to overstate conspiracies against the state. Indeed, the actual behaviour of the British state aligns with a model of rational normative behaviour posited in political science studies. To over-commemorate the dead, or indulge in overwhelming displays of grief, gave assassination a symbolic value that was of more use to the insurgent than the state. The most effective response was stoic acceptance: and that was the approach adopted. It was politic to transfer grief into the private sphere as rapidly as possible. Although it did not like to admit it, the culture of the late British imperial state embraced an 'acceptable level of assassination'.

¹⁴² Iqbal and Zorn, 'Sic semper tyrannis? Power, repression, and assassination since the Second World War', pp. 489–501.