Political Assassinations - Washington’s “Signature Move”

“The US government is no stranger to the dark arts of political assassinations. Over the decades it has deployed elaborate techniques against its foes, from dispatching a chemist armed with lethal poison to try to take out Congo’s Patrice Lumumba in the 1960s to planting poison pills (equally unsuccessfully) in the Cuban leader Fidel Castro’s food,” writes The Guardian.

For some time now, the New Eastern Outlook has also reported that political assassinations have long become not only the “signature move” of the CIA but also of U.S. political establishment in general.

In the past, Americans at least made some attempts to put up a smoke screen when carrying out political assassinations and preferred to avail themselves of the services of intelligence agencies or of their puppets abroad for such purposes. However nowadays, having become convinced of its own infallibility, Washington has begun to disregard all international laws and openly eliminate people it deems “inconvenient” from the political arena. The most recent example was the assassination of Major General Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an influential leader of a Shi’ite force, in Iraq at the beginning of January.

It is quite noteworthy that, at present, the White House appears to treat such public political assassinations as routine. According to The Washington Post, on the same day that Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani was killed, U.S. forces also attempted to liquidate another Iranian commander and financier of Quds Force (a special unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), Abdul Reza Shahlai, in Yemen. It has been reported that the mission was unsuccessful, however, no further details have been provided thus far. Abdul Reza Shahlai is known to have been active in Yemen, where Houthi rebels are engaged in a war against the Saudi-led Arab coalition.
However, even before the assassination of Major General Qasem Soleimani, the United States had violated international law on numerous occasions by eliminating politicians and military personnel of foreign nations that had attempted to oppose the dominance of Washington or American corporations.

In fact, President Donald Trump was not the first U.S. leader to give a direct order to carry out such an assassination. According to declassified documents concerning the killing of the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Patrice Lumumba, by the United States, President Dwight Eisenhower himself ordered the assassination of the African politician.

The United States tends to use demagoguery in its appeals to follow the rule of law, to comply with international legislation and to respect human rights, but, at the same time, it openly disregards the United Nations Charter and resolutions, thus showing the world that high-profile assassinations are as natural a means of achieving one’s goals for American elites as gang wars are.

In the past 50 years, there have been plenty of instances of U.S. interventions involving attempts to kill and, at times, successful assassinations of foreign opponents by extremely questionable legal or ethical means. In fact, Washington has admitted that it tried to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro at least 8 times. In reality, there have been more than 600 attempts on his life.

Former employee of the U.S. Department of State William Blum, the author of Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions since World War II, exposed a number of sins committed by Americans as a result of invasions, bombs, overthrows of governments, assassinations and actions of death squads. According to William Blum, Washington was behind regime changes in at least 50 nations and the same number of attempts to eliminate “inconvenient” leaders.

Nowadays, more and more information is coming to light about the murderous Condor operation, a United States-backed campaign of political repression against the socialist-minded and pro-Soviet opposition in Latin America in 1970s and 1980s. It was carried out under the personal guidance of a famous American diplomat and politician, Henry Kissinger. During the aforementioned period, the U.S. government was responsible for the imprisonment and torture of 400,000 South Americans, 50,000 deaths and 30,000 disappearances!

The subject of eliminating “inconvenient” for the U.S. leaders came to the fore at the end of 2017, when then Director of the CIA Mike Pompeo made a fairly direct statement about the possibility of assassinating DPRK leader Kim Jong-un. “With respect to, if Kim Jong-un should vanish, given the history of the CIA, I’m just not going to talk about it,” said Mike Pompeo “when asked what would happen if Kim suddenly died”. “Someone might think there was a coincidence,” he added laughing, thus clearly demonstrating poor professional judgement.

Mary Ellen O’Connell, a Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame, has said that the introduction of drones in year 2000 gave the United States a fairly powerful weapon in its dubious quest to eliminate political opponents, and drew a direct parallel between the behavior of former U.S. administrations and Donald Trump’s unpredictable nature. Bill Clinton was the first to use a drone strike as a means of assassination when he ordered the attack on Osama bin Laden which failed. The first successful “targeted killing” (as they are now referred to) occurred soon after, in Yemen, during Bush’s Presidency. Barack Obama increased the frequency with which drones were used for assassination purposes 10 fold. At the same time, he also attempted to cloak these killings in some form of legality by documenting them in internal classified memos. These documents affirmed that assassinations by drone strikes were supposedly lawful because, according to international law, they could be viewed as a means of self-defense against future terrorist attacks. The use of such a justification is a matter of debate and widely viewed as an incorrect interpretation of the UN Charter.

In 1975, the U.S. government established a United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, with Senator Frank Church as its Chairman, in response to open disapproval expressed by the American public towards a whole slew of political assassinations committed by the United States. During its lifespan, the Church Committee was able to declassify and publicize only a fraction of documents pertaining to activities of U.S. intelligence agencies (capable of operating outside of the law), and came to the conclusion that politically motivated operations aimed at discrediting “inconvenient” individuals (such as Dominique Strauss-Kahn) or at liquidating them remained a tool used by Washington. Still, there is actually an existing ban on assassinations of foreign leaders in the United States, as President Gerald R. Ford said before “Killing is not and must not be a U.S. foreign policy tool”.

Then why does the United States continue for decades to act with impunity despite disapproval towards its use of political assassinations expressed by international community and U.S. society? And when will institutions such as
the United Nations and the International Court of Justice condemn such actions and impose international sanctions against the culprit?

Vladimir Platov, an expert on the Middle East, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.