**[Our own Sinai](https://www.dawn.com/news/1798328/our-own-sinai)**

[Shahzad Sharjeel](https://www.dawn.com/authors/7601/shahzad-sharjeel) Published December 16, 2023

The writer is a poet. His latest publication is a collection of satire essays titled Rindana

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INDIAN journalist Vir Sanghvi has raised a question. More than the directness of his query, it is the lack of outrage it caused that is more surprising and even more pregnant with danger. He has asked if a modern state can forego the option of eliminating its enemies on foreign soil. Even before the legal, moral, and ethical caveats could be shimmed into the singular answer ‘of course, it cannot’ that he was quick to provide, he lobbed a more lethal and poignant suggestion: “Stop fussing over Khalistani targets, is it beyond us to get real Pakistani terrorists?”

He then mentioned a couple he thinks should be ‘taken out’. Dawood Ibrahim, who he said continues to live in luxury first in Dubai and now in Karachi long after the 2008 attack on Taj Mumbai. He also named Hafiz Saeed in the same breath.

Premeditated murder as a conflict-resolution tool might be as old as human history. Take the Cain and Abel story, for instance. However, it refuses to be relegated to the category of ‘old-fashioned’, as right from the Hasan bin Sabah assassins to the present day, this method of dealing with opponents continues and is valourised. Democracies, monarchies, dictatorships, and every other form of state are partisan to it.

A furore was caused by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who accused the Indian government of orchestrating the murder of Hardeep Nijjar, a Canadian national of Indian origin, near Vancouver in June this year. The allegations came in September, but fissures between the two were evident at the G-20 Summit in New Delhi where Trudeau apparently refused to stay in the hotel suite arranged by the host government, but eventually had to overstay in India by two when his plane developed some ‘technical’ fault.

Sanghvi has posed a double-edged question.

Both governments huffed, and some famous 56-inch chests were puffed. Diplomats were thrown out, and visa services suspended. Just when the dust was settling, and cooperation over the Nijjar murder investigation was being worked out, the Americans rekindled the entire affair by very publicly accusing Indian officials of conspiring to get Gurpatwant Pannun, an American of Indian origin, assassinated on US soil. Pannun is a vocal proponent of an independent Khalistan state in Indian Punjab.

It is in this context that Sanghvi has posed his double-edged or, should we say, double-barrelled, question. While his argument addresses state-authorised murders on foreign soil more specifically, some may want to stretch it and ask, why should a state forego the right to protect itself against an enemy — a citizen or not — within its territorial jurisdiction? Now, it does not take a legal genius to respond that it could not be so because it would be extrajudicial, for there are courts, legal systems, and constitutional rights, and no one, not even a spy who has confessed, could be killed without a trial. Similar mechanisms exist where multiple countries, boundaries, and jurisdictions come into play. These are called extradition treaties, international courts, forums of arbitration under the aegis of organisations like the United Nations, global conventions, and charters that determine the treatment of the worst possible war criminals.

Israel has carried out hundreds of ‘negative treatment of enemy’ operations, a euphemism for murder sanctioned by the prime minister, in Gaza and against Hamas alone, not to mention countless such operations across the Middle East and worldwide. Every ‘liquidation’ was celebrated as one less threat to the state of Israel. Those who argue that taking out an individual criminal or a leader of a murderous group or government is better than risking large-scale wars and hundreds of thousands of lives must answer why all the Mossad and Shin Bet assassinations did not stop the Hamas attacks in October. Similarly, which large-scale war was Jamal Khashoggi’s murder designed to prevent?

We can derive sadistic pleasure from our neighbour’s discomfiture at the hands of the Canadians and their American cousins. But before telling Sanghvi, ‘Yeah! Try it’, we must remember that ghar ki baat ghar mein rahey tau behter (family matters are better resolved in-house). We should do much introspection on sorting out our internal differences lawfully. Political opponents and dissidents must be treated in keeping with the constitutional provisions to strengthen citizens’ confidence in the state. The country has drifted a long way from the anthem’s ‘shad baad, manzil-i-murad’ (may the aspired destination be a happy one), to the burials on Koh-i-Murad.

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