

Does SIS ever assassinate a peace-time target? It was a question that we sometimes discussed with each other on the IONEC, but nobody quite dared to ask one of the DS in front the other students. It was a taboo subject, left unsaid by the DS and unasked by the students.

One evening down at the Fort bar, when nobody else was listening and after several pints of beer, I asked ██████ about it. Absolutely not, never, he replied, his face puckered with sincerity and severity. I was not very convinced though. I knew that, if an assassination was plotted, only a tiny handful of officers would know about it and certainly an IONEC student would not be made privy to such sensitive information.

I was nevertheless a bit taken aback when ██████ the targeting officer for P4 section and assistant to String Vest, called me into his office. What do you reckon to knocking off Slobodan Milosevic then? he asked casually, as if seeking my views on the weekend cricket scores.

██████ had a reputation in the office for being a maverick, but this seemed to be going too far. He was a rarity in the SIS in that he was a former comprehensive schoolboy and redbrick university graduate. In a form of reverse-snobbism he was chippy about this background and rarely missed an opportunity to snipe at minor public schoolboys, myself included. He did not like to be reminded that, after graduation, he had succumbed to elitism and done a PhD at Oxford. Even that, though, seemed a calculated snipe at academic conservatism. He wa a passionate supporter of the Sheffield Wednesday football team, and the subject of his anthropology thesis was tribalistic behaviour in modern football hooliganism.

Why not? continued ██████ after I had expressed my incredulity. We colluded with the Yanks to knock off Saddam in the Gulf War, and the SOE must have tried to take out Hitler in the Second World War.

Yes, but they were legitimate military targets in wartime I replied. We are not at war with Serbia,