

not least in some of his chapter titles (such as ‘Overthrowing Governments’, ‘Mass Murder and International Assassination’, and ‘Failed Initiatives’). In the end he throws the responsibility for judgment over to the region’s people themselves, saying that while the ‘good Pope Francis would undoubtedly forgive the United States and Henry Kissinger for the past ... Latin Americans with a sense of history would probably be less forgiving’ (p. 247). A characteristic understatement.

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## **Alan McPherson, *Ghosts of Sheridan Circle: How a Washington Assassination Brought Pinochet’s Terror State to Justice***

**(Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 382 pp.**

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On a grey, autumn morning in late September 1976, an explosive device that had been mounted under the car of Orlando Letelier was detonated as the former Chilean diplomat approached Sheridan Circle in Washington, DC’s Embassy Row neighbourhood. As an ambulance rushed him to nearby George Washington University Hospital, Letelier, whose body had been severed at the waist by the blast, was pronounced dead. Also perishing in the explosion was Ronni Moffitt, Letelier’s young colleague at the Institute for Policy Studies, the progressive DC think tank where Letelier and his wife, Isabel, had become exiled critics of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Moffitt’s husband, Michael, seated in the car’s back seat, was the bombing’s lone survivor. As historian Alan McPherson reminds us, the heinous attack, carried out by agents of the Chilean dictatorship, remains to this day the ‘only assassination of a foreign diplomat on U.S. soil’ and the only act of state-sponsored assassination to ever occur in the District of Columbia proper (p. 8).

McPherson is a leading scholar of US–Latin American relations, having published an important study of anti-Americanism during Latin America’s Cold War and a more recent book on Latin American resistance to US military occupation in Central America and the Caribbean. In *Ghosts of Sheridan Circle*, he draws upon this expertise to provide a detailed historical account of the Letelier–Moffitt assassinations. Using US government and Chilean archives, and important collections of personal papers and organisational records, the author moves between the United States and Chile over some four decades. In the process, McPherson underscores the impact that the assassinations had on US–Chile bilateral relations while also illuminating how the 1976 attack was shaped broader transnational processes related to state terror, human rights activism and transitional justice.

McPherson's book is divided into three parts, each comprised of between five and seven fast-paced chapters. In Part 1, McPherson reconstructs the lives of the key historical actors in the 1976 assassination. A short biography of Letelier depicts a member of Chile's reform-minded middle class, who embraced an expansive vision of social and economic democracy just as a global conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union prevented such a vision from being enacted. Early chapters also consider the lives of Pinochet, his secret police chief, Manuel Contreras, and Michael Townley, the US-born explosives expert who helped build the bomb that eventually killed Letelier and Moffitt. Among other things, these chapters offer a glimpse into the intimate world of mid-century Chilean politics. In Chapter 3, for example, McPherson notes that after President Salvador Allende appointed Letelier as Chile's Minister of Defence in 1973, Pinochet and Letelier interacted frequently. For a time, the general even carried the new defence minister's briefcase as part of his security detail.

But it's the transnational scope of McPherson's monograph that is most impressive. Exceptional chapters on the international human rights movement detail how activists used the Letelier–Moffitt case to show US members of Congress just how unethical US support for Latin American dictatorships had become in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Such analysis stresses that progressive grassroots mobilisation pushed President Jimmy Carter to make human rights a centrepiece of his foreign policy agenda. Similarly, fascinating chapters on the transnational anti-communist Right make a compelling case for why the Letelier murder should be understood as a product of transnational right-wing political coordination that emerged in response to the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Pinochet's overthrow of the democratically elected, socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973 emboldened violent, anti-democratic anti-Castro groups, like the Cuban National Movement. One year later, Cuban exiles accounted for nearly half of all terrorist bombings around the world (p. 79). In 1976, anti-Castro militants played a key role assisting in the Letelier assassination itself. By presenting these histories of a transnational political Left and a transnational political Right side by side, McPherson captures the hemispheric reach of Latin America's Cold War.

McPherson's detailed examination of the decades-long investigation into the 1976 assassinations is among the book's most novel contributions. *Ghosts of Sheridan Circle* emphasises the crucial work that mid-level officials at the US Justice Department, like Assistant US Attorney Eugene Propper, and at the State Department, like Chile Desk Officer Robert Steven, carried out to ensure the Letelier case remained a top priority not just for progressive Democrats but for some conservative Republicans as well. Propper, Steven and others shepherded the investigation into the 1976 attack through US government bureaucracy. Ultimately, their persistence helped ensure that during the late 1970s and 1980s all US diplomacy with Chile was, in one way or another, 'Letelier diplomacy' (p. 118).

*Ghosts of Sheridan Circle* also restores Chile's Cold War agency in important ways. Although Pinochet's consolidation of power after 1973 would not have occurred without US support, the Letelier case exposed how the Chilean dictatorship frequently charted its own violent, anti-communist path. Contreras, the most prominent Chilean official to be convicted for his role in Letelier–Moffitt murders, is exemplary of this. As human rights prosecutors homed in on him, the former

secret police chief's repeated claim that the CIA was behind Letelier's murder demonstrates how fraught the relationship between the Pinochet regime and its one-time benefactor would become. So much distance existed between the United States and Pinochet that the Reagan administration eventually refused to support an important World Bank loan to the dictator and even began funnelling US aid to human rights groups that opposed the regime. A 1987 CIA report, only recently declassified, noted that US intelligence officials were finally convinced that Pinochet had 'personally ordered' the murder of Letelier (p. 223). US Secretary of State George Shultz reiterated this claim in a memo to then President Ronald Reagan, calling the 1976 assassination 'a blatant example of a chief of state's direct involvement in an act of state terrorism' (p. 224).

McPherson concludes that the Letelier–Moffitt killings were among the 'most consequential assassinations' to occur anywhere in the world during the Cold War. He adds that the subsequent investigation provided 'hope that ordinary people' might one day 'obtain justice against tyrants and terrorists even when their own governments were less than forthcoming' (p. 293). But McPherson's analysis of the Letelier investigation during and after the Reagan years suggests a less obvious – and certainly more complicated – legacy of the Letelier case as well. As the author notes, one reason that Reagan administration officials continued to pursue Letelier and Moffitt's assassins was that it allowed them to pivot toward an emerging national security concern: international terrorism. Propper notes that before the Letelier case, neither the FBI nor the CIA had any experience investigating terrorism (p. 295). In essence, by recategorising an event that activists had denounced as a 'human rights' crime, the US government repurposed the meaning of the Letelier assassination to align with its changing national security priorities in a post-Cold War world. Better understanding why and how the foundation for a global fight against terrorism emerged out of the murder of a long-time critic of US Cold War intervention is a topic that future scholars should explore further.

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## **Joshua Savala, *Beyond Patriotic Phobias: Connections, Cooperation, and Solidarity in the Peruvian-Chilean Pacific World***

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Josh Savala's succinct and snappy monograph deftly counters the dominant tendency among both popular commentators and scholars to start investigations of