

CONFIDENTIAL

The Bureaucracy of Death

**Colonial Execution Protocols
in British India (1914-1944)**

CRIMINOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

BY DR. MRIDUL SRIVASTAVA

**An Analysis of the United Provinces Archives:
Jurisdictional Mandates and the Mechanics of State Control.**

Gallows Protocol: Administrative Procedures for Capital Punishment in British India (1914–1944)



Administrative Accountability & Preparation

Mandatory 24-Hour Vigil
Superintendents must remain at headquarters for 24 hours preceding an execution without delegating duties.



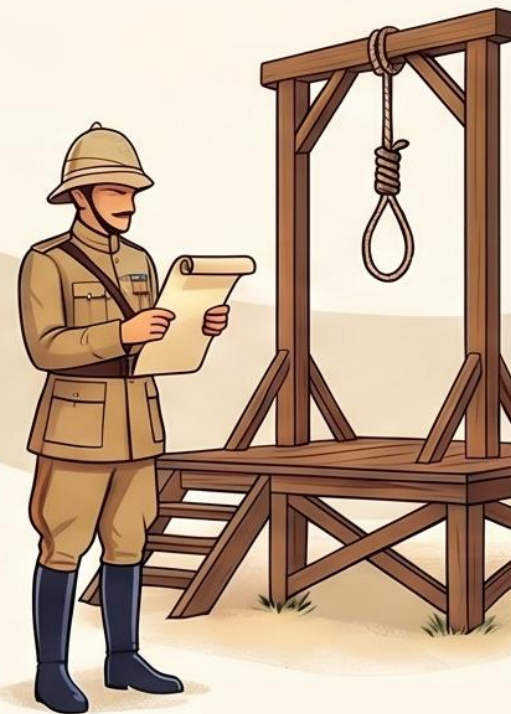
Personal Oversight of Equipment

The superintendent must personally test execution ropes and gallows arrangements rather than delegating to subordinates.



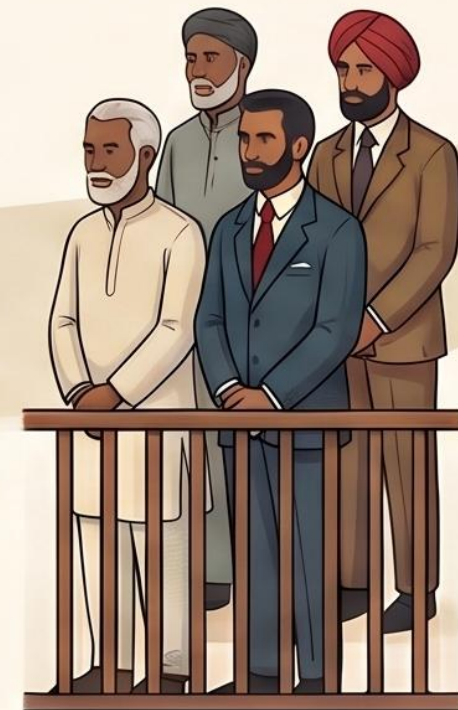
Strategic Site Selection

Gallows must be erected away from public areas like bazars and barracks to ensure privacy.



Formal Reading of the Warrant

The escort halts before the scaffold where a staff officer reads the sentence and warrant aloud.



Restricted Witness Access

Attendance is limited to a maximum of four adult male relatives of the condemned man.

Execution & Post-Mortem Rites



Religious Disposal of the Body

Bodies are buried or burnt in accordance with the deceased's specific racial or religious customs.

1914: The O'Donnell Directive

No. 1296/VI-8 or 1914.

FROM
THE HON'BLE MR. S. P. O'DONNELL,
SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT,
UNITED PROVINCES.

TO
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF CIVIL HOSPITALS,
UNITED PROVINCES.

Dated Allahabad, the 26th March 1914.

Sir,

I am directed to inform you that the Government has decided that in future civil surgeons who are also superintendants of jails must always remain at head quarters during the twenty-four hours preceding the execution of a death sentence and should on no account make over charge of their jails to any one during that period.

2. I am to ask you to communicate this order to the civil surgeons concerned, and to explain to them that the Government

Issued: March 26, 1914, by S.P. O'Donnell, Secretary to Government, United Provinces.

Core Focus: Establishing absolute non-delegable responsibility for jail superintendents.

1944: Memorandum C

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SECRET

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Copy of Government of India Home Department circular letter No. 115/44-Jails dated August 24, 1944,

—

Subject:- Memorandum for guidance in carrying into execution a sentence of death by hanging passed by a general court-martial on an Indian Soldier.

—

With reference to the correspondence ending with your letter No. 2138/XIII-1784-1943, dated May 27, 1943, I am directed to forward for the information of the Provincial Government a copy of Memorandum 'C' for guidance in carrying into execution a sentence of death by hanging passed by a general court-martial on an Indian Soldier.

—

Government of the United Provinces
Home Department (Jails)
No. 3154 /XIII-1784-1943
Dated Lucknow, September 22, 1944.

Issued: Sept 22, 1944, under Government of India Home Department for Indian Soldiers facing general court-martial.

Core Focus: Standardising the logistics, secrecy, and suppression of public martyrdom for military executions.

SECRET

The Burden of the Civil Surgeon

Physical Readiness:
Testing of execution
ropes.

Infrastructure: Oversight
of gallows arrangements.

The
24-Hour
Window

Communications: Immediate
disposal of urgent
telegrams regarding the
condemned.

Absolute Priority:
Execution matters take
precedence over all
other medical or
administrative work.

WARNING

Zero Delegation Rule: Charge of the jail cannot be made over to anyone during this period. Duties cannot be delegated to a deputy magistrate or assistant surgeon.

THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF CIVIL HOSPITALS,
UNITED PROVINCES.

Dated Allahabad, the 26th March 1914.

Sir,

I am directed to inform you that the Government has decided that in future civil surgeons who are also superintendants of jails must always remain at head quarters during the twenty-four hours preceding the execution of a death sentence and should on no account make over charge of their jails to any one during that period.

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si,
NELL,
Secretary.

No. 1297/VI-6.

Copy forwarded to the Inspector General of Prisons, United
Provinces, for information.

The Window of Execution

1995a B. Government Memorandum, Initiated A/Beny 12, 1972,
Harministrador, HN Gol. 8871

MENORANDUM
Communication modern
Travel time in a isk of the prison

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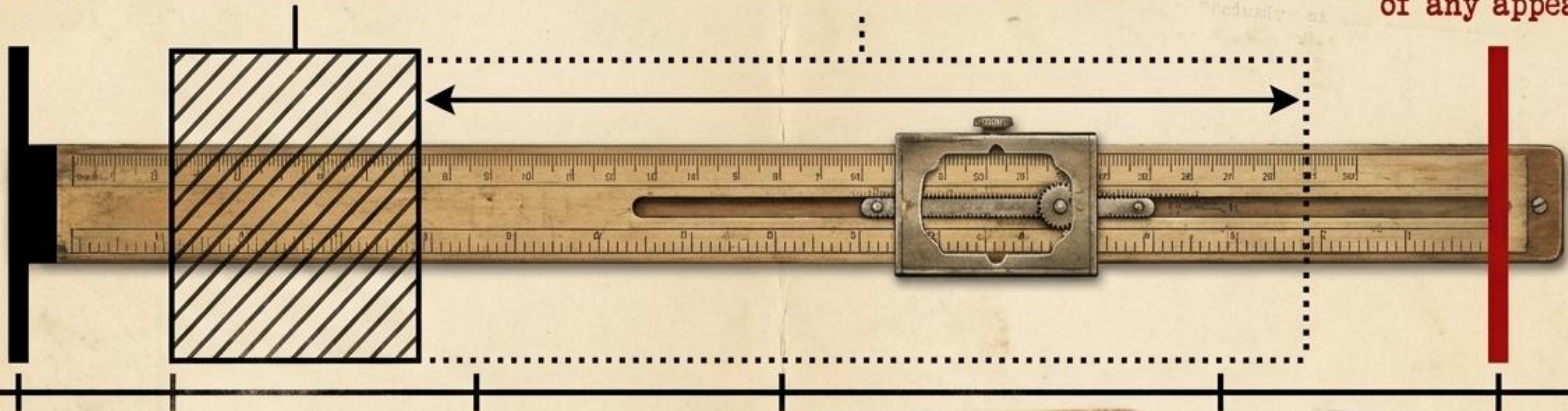
2. This levormor determined date

Event 0:
Receipt of
Warrant

The Minimum
Buffer
(3 Clear Days)

The Sliding Variable:
Calculated based on travel time for
notice to reach next-of-kin, plus
their travel time to the prison.

The Maximum Limit:
1 Month
(Normally, inclusive
of any appeal)



SECRET

Once fixed, the date shall be at once communicated to the condemned man and altered save only in very exceptional circumstances.

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Jurisdiction & Infrastructure

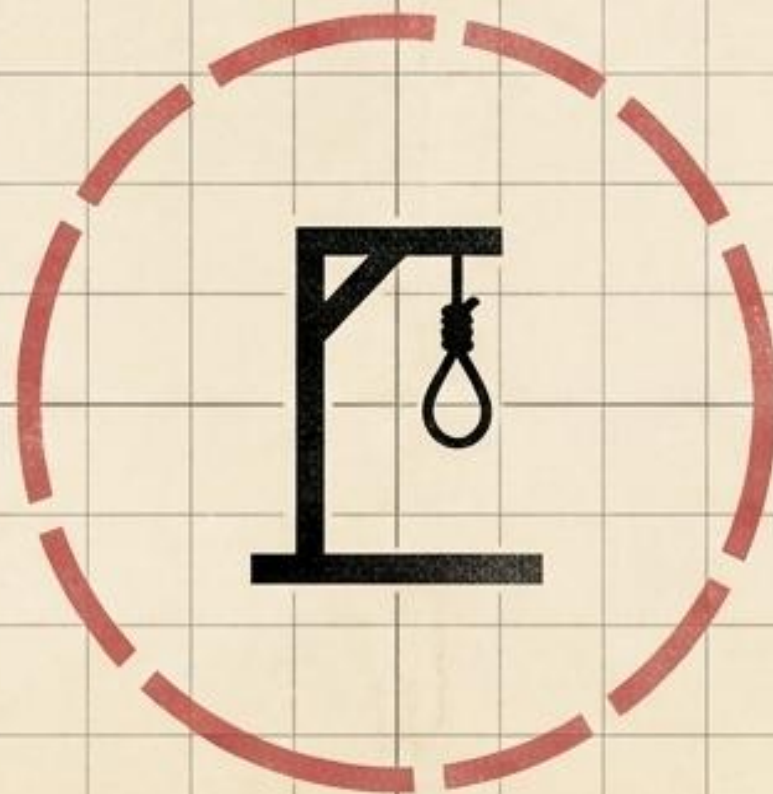
Civil Jail (Primary)	Military Contingency (Secondary)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Siting: The nearest civil jail. - Provision: Officer in charge of the civil jail provides the gallows. - Construction: Erected by the Public Works Department (PWD). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trigger: Executed if removal to a civil jail is impracticable. - Infrastructure: The Garrison Engineer must make all arrangements for gallows provision.

REFERENCE: Wherever there is a civil jail, the gallows should be obtained from the officer in charge of it and erected by the Public Works Department... if this is impracticable, the garrison engineer must make all arrangements for the provision of the gallows; and the place of execution should be carefully selected away from the bazaars and not too near the barracks.

Exclusion Zone Map



The Bazaars
(To prevent civilian crowds)



The Barracks
(To prevent military unrest)

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Roles & Responsibilities Matrix

The Minor Jail Official	Sent by civil authorities; physically escorts the convict hangman; solely responsible for the hangman's presence and behaviour.
The Escort Party	Comprised of a daffadar's or havildar's party from the condemned's regiment; guards the closed vehicle; halted and turned about before the scaffold.
The Staff Officer	Responsible for the official reading of the charge, finding, sentence, confirmation, and warrant at the scaffold.
The Medical Officer	Must be in attendance strictly to observe and formally report when death has taken place.
The British Officer	From the unit to which the condemned man belongs; required to be present as an official witness.

Official
Sent by civil authorities; physically escorts the convict hangman; solely responsible for the hangman's presence and behaviour.

The Escort Party

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Comprised of a daffadar's or havildar's party from the condemned's regiment; guards the closed vehicle; halted and turned about before the scaffold. He is required to use the

responsible for the official reading of the charge, confirmation, and warrant at the scaffold.
The Medical Officer

Sourcing the Executioner

Convict hangmen, alongside all requisites including tested ropes, were supplied upon telegraphic request by designated district magistrates.



TELEGRAM REQUEST:
HANGMAN & ROPES.

General Concentration Jails

Authorised to supply hangmen for
condemned convicts.

Agra, Allahabad, Bareilly, Benares,
Cawnpore, Fyzabad, Gonda, Gorakhpur,
Jhansi, Lucknow, Meerut, Saharanpur,
Sitapur.

The Exception (Muttra)

The district of Muttra is explicitly
excluded from the general supply chain.

Reason: The jail at Muttra is strictly
intended for female convicts only.

IN CONNECTION WITH WHICH THE JAIL DEPARTMENT ARE CONCERNED
In the Stated Provinces:- The magistrates of one of the under-
mentioned districts:-
Agra, Allahabad, Bareilly, Benares, Cawnpore, Fyzabad, Gonda,
Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Lucknow, Meerut, Saharanpur, Muttra and Sitapur.
(All the Districts mentioned above, except Muttra, have concentration
jails for condemned convicts. The jail at Muttra is intended
for female convicts only).

The Final Protocol: At the Scaffold

Step 1: The Halt
 The escort of the condemned's own regiment is halted near the scaffold and commanded to turn about (facing away from the gallows).



Step 2: The Proclamation
 A Staff Officer reads aloud the charge, finding, sentence, confirmation, and the death warrant.



Step 3: The Execution
 The condemned is conducted to the gallows by the same escort that accompanied him from the prison; sentence is carried into effect.



Step 4: The Confirmation
 Medical Officer formally reports death has taken place. The escort is marched back to quarters, leaving only a specialized party for disposal.

6. If necessary, the condemned man should be conveyed in a closed carriage under the escort of a daffadar's or havildar's party of his own regiment, to the place appointed for the execution. Then in front of the scaffold, the escort will be halted and turned about, and the charge, finding and sentence, and confirmation of the court-martial, also the warrant should be read aloud by a staff officer.

7. The condemned man should then be conducted to the gallows by the escort which accompanied him from the prison and the sentence carried into effect.

8. A medical officer should be in attendance for the purpose of reporting when death has taken place. A staff officer and a British officer of the unit to which the condemned man belongs will also be present.

9. The escort will then be marched back to quarters leaving only a party to superintend the disposal of the body.

10. The body should then be taken down for burial or to be burnt.

11. Unless the removal of the body is likely to be made the occasion of a public demonstration such body-

- (i) may at the request of the friends or relatives of the deceased, be made over to such friends or relatives; or
- (ii) if not made over to the friends or relatives under clause (i), may be disposed of under municipal or other local arrangements.

In the event of the officer commanding the station considering it undesirable, that the body should be made over to the relatives or friends of the deceased, such body shall be burnt or buried (a) within the jail if the execution has been carried out therein, under the written order of the magistrate; or (b) at any suitable spot if there be no civil jail or if the execution has been a public one, under the written order of the officer commanding the station; the cremation or burial being conducted in consonance, as far as possible, with the racial or religious customs of the community to which the deceased belonged. Friends of the deceased not exceeding four in number may, at the discretion of the officer commanding the station (and of the magistrate if taking place within a jail) be admitted to the funeral ceremony and allowed to perform any customary rites. In the absence of any friends or relatives of the deceased, the ceremony shall be performed.

The Politics of Mourning: Disposal of the Body

THREAT ASSESSMENT:

Is removal of the body likely to be made the occasion of a public demonstration?

NO (Low Threat)

YES (High Threat / Undesirable)

- Action: Body may be made over to friends or relatives upon request.

- Fallback: If not claimed, disposed of under municipal or local arrangements.

10. The body should then be taken down to quarters of a public demonstration such body-

(i) may at the request of the friends or relatives be made over to such friends or relatives;

(ii) if not made over to the friends or relatives under clause (i), may be disposed of under municipal or other local arrangements.

- Action: Body shall not be released. Must be burnt or buried under strict state control.

- Location Rules: Within jail walls (if jail execution) or at a suitable spot (if public).

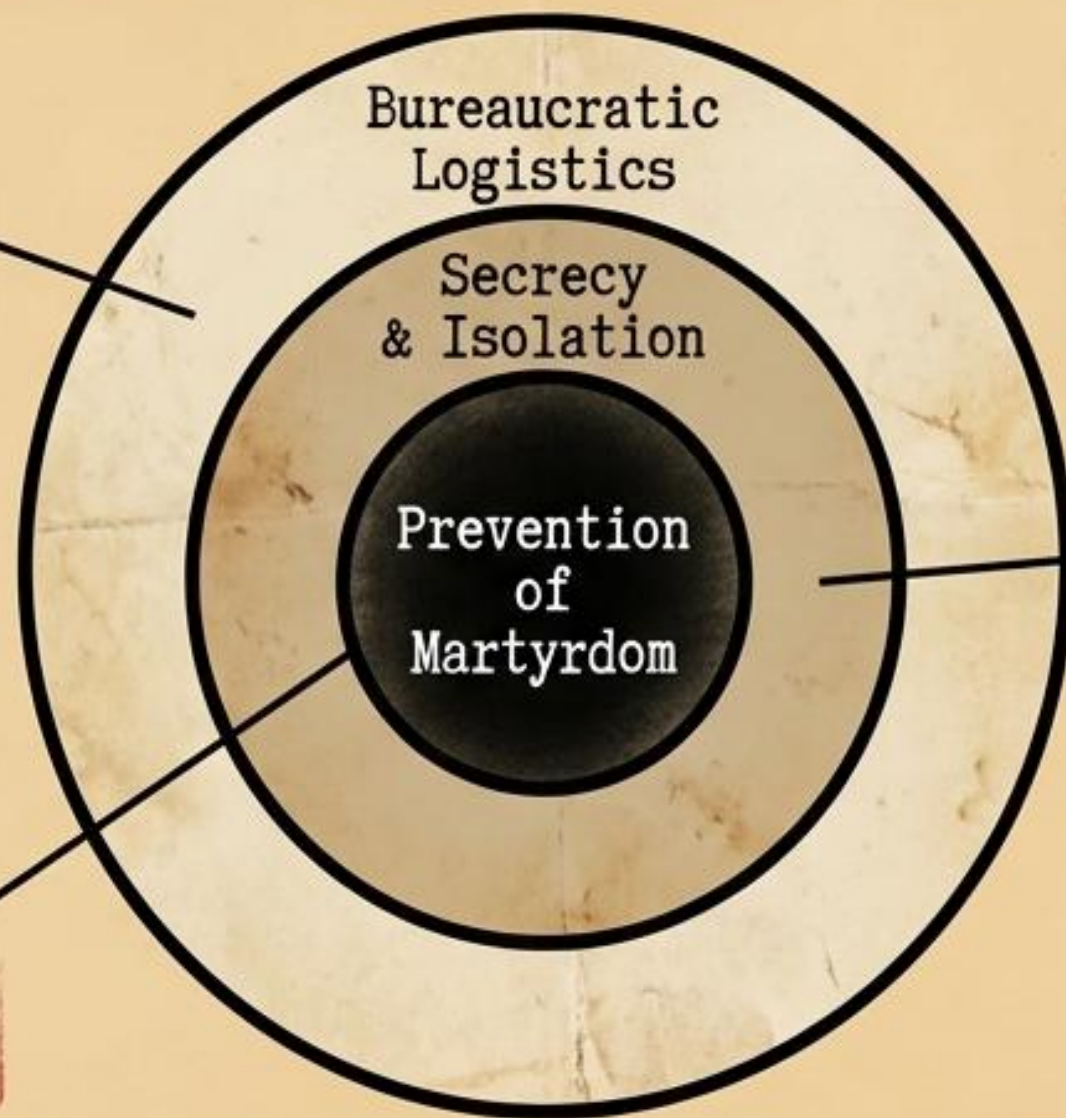
- Ceremony Rules: Maximum 4 friends/relatives admitted. Customary rites performed by senior jail official of deceased's religion or by an Indian NCO/Officer.

Synthesis: The Mechanics of Control

The 1914 and 1944 protocols reveal that the British colonial administration viewed execution not merely as a judicial end, but as a critical political vulnerability.

Total Accountability: By restricting delegation and mapping distinct duties, the state ensured seamless execution without administrative failure.

Denial of the Relic: Body disposal protocols explicitly overrode religious and familial rights to prevent public demonstrations and political martyrdom.



YES

The Invisible Scaffold: Banning crowds, closing vehicles, and enforcing geographic exclusion zones stripped the condemned of an audience.

Bureaucracy engineered to silence not just the individual, but the public response to their death.