



BIG EVENTS BIG CAUSES

MIHOPs, LIHOPs and the 'truth'
behind September 11

Hugh Tobin

Despite long and expensive inquiries, thousands of eye witnesses, and conclusive video, sound and picture evidence, more than five years after the attacks, sceptics continue to challenge every part of the official story of what happened on 11 September 2001.

Unsources photos, quotations taken out of context and confused eyewitness accounts have inspired complex and often bizarre conspiracy theories.

Rather than a terrorist attack, on that day in 2001 the Pentagon was in fact struck by a missile, the World Trade Center buildings were brought down by a controlled demolition, Flight 93 never actually crashed, and some of the hijackers

are still alive in Pakistan—a logistical feat planned and executed by the U.S. government using remote-controlled planes.

The investigation into the death of Princess Diana continues nearly 10 years after the accident. All sorts of theories have surfaced: from Diana's alleged pregnancy, her driver's blood alcohol reading, and Paparazzi and Royal family involvement in her death. It is, apparently, too hard for some people to believe that a Princess could have died in a simple car crash.

The most famous alleged conspiracy of the last 100 years—and one about which seven out of ten Americans remain sceptical—was the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1963. From CIA involvement, to a second gunman on the grassy knoll, the incident has become one of the most reviewed in history.

Since then, the public has developed

an enthusiasm for conspiracy theories that has been reflected through popular culture with hits such as the *X-Files*, and movies and books such as *The Da Vinci Code*. Scandals such as the Watergate affair have only fuelled the public's passion for often bizarre and baseless theories. Most notably, in Australia, there have been persistent claims that Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt didn't drown in the sea off Point Nepean in 1967, but was in fact taken by a Chinese submarine.

S11: An Inside Job

For all the different September 11 conspiracy theories that exist, they generally fall into two categories. Either U.S. government agencies knew that the September 11 attacks were going to occur and failed to act, or, alternatively, the govern-

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ment was directly involved in planning and executing the attacks. A 'MIHOP' is, therefore, someone who believes that the Government *Made It Happen On Purpose* while a 'LIHOP' believes that the Government *Let It Happen On Purpose*.

A large and growing number of people subscribe to these theories. A poll taken by the Scripps Survey Research Centre in September 2006 found that 36 per cent of American respondents thought that it was 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' that the government either took part in the attacks or allowed them to happen. Meanwhile, 16 per cent thought that the destruction of the World Trade Center was aided by explosives. Other polls have reflected these results around the world.

A simple web search on 'September 11 conspiracy' comes up with hundreds of websites and groups devoted to the topic. Some are simple websites set up by individuals, but others are the work of complex organisations such as The 9/11 Truth Movement which is a collection of individuals, researchers and collections of people who are working together to reveal the conspiracy. Another group, known as the Scholars for 9/11 Truth, believes that September 11 'was a psychological operation to launch somewhere from 50 to 100 years of aggressive warfare against Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries'.

According to the Scholars' website, there is no longer any need to debate the fact that the attacks were carried out by the U.S. Government:

Academics, experts, and scholars who have examined the physical evidence and considered this event within its historical context tend to converge in agreement that the inside-job hypothesis is, in fact, strongly supported by the available evidence, while the version advanced

in The 9/11 Commission Report is not only false but provably false and in crucial respects physically impossible. That the official account of 9/11 is a lie and that 9/11 appears to have been an inside job is no longer a matter of serious scientific debate.

Problems with Credibility

Many of the 'experts' used by the Scholars and other conspiracy theorists to explain why it would be impossible for the World Trade Center to have collapsed the way it did, have very little scientific training—apart from watching a couple of cheaply produced videos on the Internet.

Conspiracy theorists cooperate tightly, despite the contradictions that may arise. One theorist who claims that a missile was fired into the Pentagon will associate himself with another theorist who thinks that a remotely controlled plane flew into the Pentagon.

With every new video posted on YouTube, or book published, or website launched, there arise new opportunities for the theorists to quote each other and therefore claim to have overwhelming evidence of the conspiracy. Indeed, it is the cumulative effect of having hundreds of loosely sourced pieces of 'evidence' thrown at the viewer of a 9/11 conspiracy documentary that gives them their power. Each piece of evidence seen individually may be obviously fake or naïve, but the whole is far more convincing than the sum of the parts.

It is this effect that has led to the popularity of videos such as *Loose Change*, which had ten million views in 2006 alone. The producer of *Loose Change* supposedly originally investigated the attacks to make a fictional story about the attacks being an inside job, only to find evidence that there was a real cover up:

That 19 hijackers are going to completely bypass security and crash four commercial airliners in a span of two hours, with no interruption from the military forces, in the most guarded airspace in the United States and the world? That to me is a conspiracy theory.

The Psychology of Conspiracy

Most of the September 11 theories are about as credible as a belief in Nazis on the moon. And although the theories are a form of entertainment and fantasy for many people, it isn't just boredom that is driving the conspiracy theory movement. Psychologists believe that humans are compelled to conspiracy theories, particularly for world-changing events such as September 11, or the drowning of a Prime Minister.

The authors of *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, a comprehensive rebuttal published by the engineering magazine *Popular Mechanics*, argue that conspiracy theories 'share a basic thought pattern: great tragedies must have great reasons'. A conspiracy theorist will look at an event such as September 11 and quickly conclude that it is impossible for a small handful of terrorists to inflict widespread death and destruction against the world's most powerful nation.

Once conspiracy theorists have established that there must be an alternative explanation for the events, they then proceed to find supporting evidence for their theory. At this point, science and conspiracy theory split. Whereas science makes an evaluation of the truth based on all the available evidence, conspiracy theories generally look for evidence to support conclusions that have already been 'established'. Other evidence is either ignored or discredited.

For the conspiracy theory to gather

Theorists often connect unrelated information and sources.

a popular following it needs to explain elements of the story that the official account is unable to explain easily to a lay person. In the case of 9/11, it was strange that World Trade Center building 7 also collapsed, despite not being directly hit in the attacks. Similarly, many find it strange that the Pentagon was so easily attacked, and even more bizarre that not one of the planes was shot down by the military. Many people also find it impossible to believe that the World Trade Center could fall in such a uniform fashion without that being the result of a controlled demolition. The most popular theory claims that the hole in the wall of the Pentagon seems to be too small considering that a 747 was meant to have crashed into the building.

What makes matters difficult for conspiracy theorists is that they need to build a complete, alternative explanation of all events. This includes gathering evidence. Often the theorists will base their evidence on early news reports that have been recanted. They also often connect unrelated information and sources.

September 11 conspiracy theorists, for instance, claim that the World Trade Center buildings could not have collapsed because of a plane impact as temperatures inside the building would not have been high enough to melt metal. This is true, but is disingenuous. Although it is true that steel's melting temperature is 1,500 °C and that temperatures in the World Trade Center would not have likely exceeded 1,100 °C, steel that is heated to over 1,000 °C softens and is reduced in strength to 10 per cent of its room-temperature value. They also fail to look at factors such as the internal damage to the building support structures and fire-proofing insulation.

Government Motives

But the details of a conspiracy theory are more often than not secondary to establishing a motive. In this regard, the September 11 conspiracy theorists have their work done for them thanks to the subsequent War on Terror.

In September 2000, the American

think-tank Project for the New American Century produced a document called *Rebuilding America's Defences: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New Century*. The document argued for a dramatic build-up in U.S. military spending but warned that the transformation was 'likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor'.

According to conspiracy theorists, this document provides proof that neo-conservatives had the motive to carry out a large-scale attack on America so that they could use it to justify increased military spending by the U.S. government. September 11 was used as a convenient opportunity for neo-conservatives to push this military build-up on an enraged American public. The subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the increased military and intelligence spending, restrictions on civil liberties, and large contracts for firms such as Halliburton in the Middle East, are all used as evidence to support this case.

Operation Northwoods

While many people would think that it is crazy and offensive to suggest that the U.S. government would attack its own citizens to pursue domestic and international policy interests, theorists claim to have evidence of a CIA plan from the 1960s that shows that the Government is capable of such an act.

In March 1962, during the Kennedy Administration, a plan known as Operation Northwoods was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and presented to Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. The plan was aimed at generating U.S. public support for military action against the Cuban government of Fidel Castro. It was suggested that the military take part in various 'false flag' actions, including simulated or real state-sponsored acts of terrorism on U.S. and Cuban soil. These attacks would be blamed on Castro and the U.S. would use them as a justification to attack Cuba.

Although the plan was rejected by the Kennedy Administration, conspiracy

theorists use it as evidence that the U.S. government is at least capable of such a plan.

September 11 conspiracies all suffer from serious factual and logical flaws. How could anyone have possibly prepared a controlled demolition in the World Trade Center without being noticed? Why would the government go to so much trouble planning such a complex conspiracy using foreign terrorists? Why were black-box recorders and bodies found at the Pentagon if a 747 didn't crash there?

September 11 is the most watched event in history and one of the most important events of our lifetime. The 9/11 Commission produced a 571-page report that explains the events in full. The National Institute of Standards and Technology also produced 10,000 pages of evidence on how and why the World Trade Center buildings collapsed the way they did. It could find 'no corroborating evidence for alternative hypotheses suggesting that the WTC towers were brought down by controlled demolition using explosives planted prior to September 11, 2001'.

It is said that Napoleon once remarked, 'Never ascribe to malice that which is adequately explained by incompetence'. Certainly there is strong evidence to suggest that there were serious errors made by the Bush and Clinton Administrations in the lead-up to the September 11 attacks. But suggestions that the United States Government, or aliens, or the *X-Files*' Cigarette Smoking Man, were involved in the tragic events of our past have little basis in reality—even though they might feed some deep-seated psychological need for operatic complexity.

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