

## Conspiracy Theories – 1: The Basics

According to a recent **poll** in the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, one in five Germans believes that the U.S. government may have sponsored the 9-11 attacks. Among those under 30, the proportion is one in three. Conspiracy theories **as insane** as that one, or **worse**, currently corrupt the political thinking of the great majority of people in the world, including a substantial and influential minority in the West.

A conspiracy theory is

- an explanation of observed events in current affairs and history ... which
- alleges that those events were planned and caused in secret by powerful (or allegedly powerful) conspirators, who thereby...
- benefit at the expense of others, and who therefore...
- lie, and suppress evidence, about their secret actions, and...
- lie about the motives for their public actions.

Conspiracy theories are widely regarded as characteristic of irrational modes of thinking. The very term 'conspiracy theory' is usually reserved for *irrational* explanations meeting the above criteria. For conspiracies do happen. Criminal conspiracies are proved every day in courts. Political conspiracies are **discovered** from time to time. If we can rationally explain a bank robbery as being the consequence of a conspiracy, why not a war? Or the world economic system? What distinguishes a conspiracy theory (irrational, by definition) from a sane opinion that a particular group of people worked in secret to bring about certain observed events for their own immoral purposes?

Here, the *irrefutability* of conspiracy theories is usually cited: to a conspiracy theorist, everything that happens, or could possibly happen, constitutes evidence for the conspiracy. If the alleged conspirators seem to benefit, then that is evidence against them. If they do not, then that is just evidence that the media and/or other conspirators are concealing the facts, or that something much more valuable is **secretly at stake**.

But there is more to it than irrefutability. There is more to it even than the tendency to **invent** (rather than merely reinterpret)

evidence to conform to the conspiracy theory. For it is no

coincidence that every (irrational) conspiracy theory is in fact false. Underlying their invalid arguments and mishandling of evidence in judging explanations, there is a pathological mistake in the conspiracy theorists' conception of what constitutes an explanation in the first place.

## Part 2

Wed, 08/13/2003 - 21:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

### Low-rent creationism

Conspiracism is to political science and economics as creationism is to evolutionary biology: an intellectually indolent quest for a nice pat answer without having to learn how things actually happen, usually in broad daylight.

by [Alan Furman](#) on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 06:01 | [reply](#)

### You neocons are posting this ...

You neocons are posting this to hide your conspiracy.

by a reader on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 11:29 | [reply](#)

### who do you work for, a reader...

who do you work for, a reader? WHO DO YOU WORK FOR?

by a reader on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 16:10 | [reply](#)

### They are not dumb, they are just driven by their motives

In absent of an absolute truth, we judge and reason by weighting evidences on a relative scale. Intellectual honest people are VERY aware of their premises' short coming hence more likely they will not fall into the conspiracy camp easily. On the other hand, conspiracy theorists are driven by their motives so they do not bother to utilize the critical thinking tools that they have learned and used well in their day-to-day professional career or they would be un-employed for the rest of their life. The tools have been there in their world 3 library, they just block it with their motives when falling in love with the conspiracy theorem.

### Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Fri, 08/15/2003 - 18:22 | [reply](#)

### Is that counting for Bush also?

Bush also told the world his Conspiracy theorie. and started WAR with it. Well the FBI hasnt updated theyr website yet, how come?

There are many false Conspirancys in the WWW, but on TV there is

only 1 false Conspiracy Theorie, but its ok cause its the goverment that telling that theorie.

<http://www.fbi.gov/mostwant/terrorists/terubl.htm>

## CAUTION

Usama Bin Laden is wanted in connection with the August 7, 1998, bombings of the United States Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. These attacks killed over 200 people. In addition, Bin Laden is a suspect in other terrorist attacks throughout the world.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

## **A theory is only a theory because it hasn't been proven**

Had someone suggested in 1972 that the president of the United States personally knew about and authorized secret agents to literally break into his political opponents hotel room in order to find information to be used against him in the coming campaign, most ordinary people would have called them a "conspiracy theorist". But they would have been right. Had some one suggested that the US government sent CIA officials to assassinate the democratically elected rulers of socialist South American countries, or that the administration was making arms trade deals with Iran to fund insurgents in a democratic society, they would be labeled a "conspiracy theorist". But these things happened. There is this stigma attached to the word "conspiracy" as though it belief in one automatically makes them insane or at least without credibility. But the fact remains that conspiracies exist. A conspiracy is just a group of people getting together to discuss the details of a crime. The rich and powerful commit crime just as often as anyone else. And often times they work together. Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, and CIA support of military coups against the democratically elected governments in Chile, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, including the murder of their leaders, as well as the many unsuccessful attempts to do the same in Cuba, were all conspiracies. The only reason some ideas are conspiracy "theories" is because insufficient evidence exists to prove them. Which you would expect, if the conspirators had covered their tracks well.

We know these things happened, and yet, being so long ago (20 years?) we conclude they are no longer relevant, and choose to continue to believe that something like that could never happen.

What is important is not proving whether or not the official version of 9/11 - physically - is accurate. To say that one should never question the purity of the American government is to insure that if they ever tried to do something like that, they would succeed. Indeed, if they were in anyway involved, the best way to prevent any real investigation, to prevent being questioned, is to accuse anyone who doubts them of being unpatriotic. This is exactly what Pop Mekanics and McCain have said (and I used to really like him). This is what millions of American citizens think to themselves. This is what is written as if it went without saying in the original article here.

"Conspiracy theories as insane as that one, or worse, currently corrupt the political thinking of the great majority of people in the world"

Insane, as though it were not only false, but as if it were unthinkable.

Perhaps physically everything happened on 9/11 as the official version says. That doesn't mean the CIA couldn't have trained the hijackers, or provided funding, or even just suggested the idea in the first place.

I'm not saying those things happened. But to call belief in that possibility "insane" is dangerously close minded.

It is acknowledged that conspiracies actually happen, in politics as in organized crime. Considering that we must look at every possibility in as much detail as we can and not discount certain things as "conspiracy theories" just because we really really don't want to believe them.

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 16:53 | [reply](#)

## Motive, opportunity, will

Obviously there are some theories out there which are born of hearsay, conjecture, misinformation, and ignorance.

Others have not really been addressed in any serious way - and probably could not be, because no one would have written out documents.

The people who object to them, (Popular Mechanics, John McCain, 9/11myths.com) tend to point out the reasons why such and such could have physically happened the way the official version says it did, or why such and such theory is impossible.

They then also say something along the lines of it being both unscientific and and detrimental to America to suggest such things. But how it happened is not the point, and never was.

*Never mind* that they were supposedly unable to find any of 4 blackboxes at the WTC center site (which are specifically designed to withstand a crash - that is the entire point of their existence - and give of a signal to aid in their recovery) but they were able to find a passport made of paper within hours - which happened to belong to one of the "terrorists"; it **could** happen.

*Never mind* that the damage to the pentagon was substantially smaller than the size of the plane which was supposed to have hit it, and that there was no sign of pieces of wing, engine or other plane parts visible anywhere on the site (or that video of the event was confiscated, or that it just happened to hit the one wing of the building which had just been reinforced and was largely empty due to the renovation), perhaps the engines vaporized but the fuselage punched through, it **could** happen.

*Never mind* that WTC 7 (which housed the FBI, CIA, and SEC - including the files on prosecuting Enron and dozens of other corrupt corporations) collapsed entirely due to fire and being hit with falling debris - unlike WTC 3, 4, 5, 6 and every other building in the area -

which is unprecedented in all the rest of history. That too **could** be a coincidence.

If every thing physically happened exactly the way the official version says, that does not in anyway make it less likely Americans - and specifically the government - was directly involved.

If they were, we would likely never know. They certainly had a lot to gain from it, much more than the Islamists did.

It would not have taken much.

Say a few core members of the PNAC ( <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PNAC> , <http://www.newamericancentury.org/> ), a couple high level, trusted CIA agents, and 2 or three trusted Saudi Arabians, Bin Ladens perhaps.

The PNAC is a primary think tank of the neocon movement, and includes people who have held high government positions for the past half century and other rich and powerful people, including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, Zalmay Khalilzad, Richard Perle, Richard Armitage, Dan Quayle, and Steve Forbes.

I am not saying this happened. Just consider the possibility.

Say, hypothetically, they plan what the targets should be, maximum effect, minimum actual damage, and believable. Something symbolic, but not catastrophic. A military target to justify a military response, and plenty of civilian deaths to get the American people agitated. They maybe provide limited cash, but that's it, for fear of ever being caught.

Mostly what they would have provided was the idea, what to do, how to do it. They would have wanted clues planted well in advance - for example, having the volunteers train at a US flight school, when they could just as easily trained in their own country, or a neutral one. They might have made sure to set up certain military training exercises, certain security camera angles, stuff which could seem perfectly innocent, but which would help make it easier to carry out, and easier to know who to blame. Bin Laden's original idea was to hit some 10-20 targets at once, on both coasts, but they would have shot that idea down, because they wanted to limit the actual damage. Then, through the Arab contacts, they found some people looking to martyr themselves. The actual hijackers have no idea that they are actually enacting a plan partially developed by and for the US leadership, they feel they are doing God's work by killing thousands of corrupt infidels. And the end result is the Islamists are able to up their recruiting a million percent, and the PNAC gets almost absolute power and one step closer to their stated goal of world domination.

Their principals (emphasis mine):

- we [the US] need to *increase* defense spending *significantly* if we

are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future;

- we need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our *interests* and values;
- we need to promote the cause of political and *economic* freedom abroad;
- we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, *our prosperity*, and our principles.

<http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>

They spelled out in better detail how to achieve this in a report they released in 2000:

(<http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>)

"while the unresolved conflict in Iraq provides the immediate justification [for US military presence], the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein"

"Over the long term, Iran may well prove as large a threat to U.S. interests in the Gulf as Iraq has. And even should U.S.-Iranian relations improve, retaining forward-based forces in the region would still be an essential element in U.S. security strategy given the longstanding American interests in the region".

"...advanced forms of biological warfare that can target specific genotypes may transform biological warfare from the realm of terror to a politically useful tool"

"...the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event — like a new Pearl Harbor."

This last one is most telling, since there is strong evidence that the US government, including possibly President Roosevelt, knew that the Japanese were planning the attack, and deliberately failed to warn the base because a surprise attack would better appal the American people and build their support for the war.

(  
<http://www.thenewamerican.com/departments/feature/1999/070499.htm>  
<http://www.fff.org/freedom/1291c.asp>  
<http://www.independent.org/events/transcript.asp?eventID=28> )

by David Craig Hiser on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

## Perhaps YOU suggested the idea to the hijackers

Prove me wrong.

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

## Conspiracies, rational and irrational

Jay and David argue that there is something cynical, perhaps uncritical about those who reject the notion of a conspiracy by the US government in the happenings of 9/11. If all these people were saying was that nothing other than the official version could ever, even in principle, happen, Jay and David would be correct. But, in the real world, it is Jay and David who are cynical and uncritical, as evident from their methodology.

For instance, Jay says

The only reason some ideas are conspiracy "theories" is because insufficient evidence exists to prove them. Which you would expect, if the conspirators had covered their tracks well.

This is the tip of the iceberg of the false methodology used by Jay, David and their like-minded conspiracists. The truth is that a theory is, logically, never *proven*; they are *disproven*. A conspiracy theory, however, is never disproven, even in principle. Just read a bit more, and you'd see that Jay and David confirm this. Jay writes,

Perhaps physically everything happened on 9/11 as the official version says. That doesn't mean the CIA couldn't have trained the hijackers, or provided funding, or even just suggested the idea in the first place.

David similarly writes,

If every thing physically happened exactly the way the official version says, that does not in anyway make it less likely Americans - and specifically the government - was directly involved. If they were, we would likely never know.

That is, even if we disprove the central claim of the 9/11 conspiracists, i.e. that the events of 9/11 did not take place according to the official description, Jay and David will inform us that is not *in the least* sufficient to discard their conspiracy version of events. This central feature, that their theories are in principle *unfalsifiable* is what makes them *unscientific*, and what's more, *irrational*. So when Jay replies to calling such conspiracy theories "insane" by **The World** by "as though it were not only false, but as if it were unthinkable" he gets it right despite his sarcasm--if we take "thinkable" to mean "rationally thinkable."

Jay and David also share the irrational assumption that discovering truth and uncovering realities is a matter of *belief*. The truth is, however, that the growth of knowledge comes about through trial and the *elimination* of error. Jay says,

Considering that we must look at every possibility in as much detail as we can and not discount certain things as "conspiracy theories" just because we really really don't want to believe them. [Emphasis mine]

But how can we, logically, consider *every* possibility, of which there

is an infinite number? And why should we at all *believe* in a theory, as though we have no better way of examining, criticizing, and discarding the wrong ones? Real conspiracies, like the CIA involvement in coups, or the Watergate and Iran-contra were all uncovered in this rational way, not by irrational beliefs and false methodologies. So, presenting them as examples by Jay is at best irrelevant to his approach.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 12/28/2006 - 02:50 | [reply](#)

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