

Conspiracy Theories – 2: Lying About Motives

Here's a fairly classic conspiracy theory. It is that the Bush Administration's foreign policy is part of a plot to impose Fascism on America. We don't especially recommend reading it (unless you are entertained by that sort of thing) but look at this passage:

I will examine exactly what the Bush Administration *in fact* stands for, which is in stark contrast to the claims of Bush's mindless chorus of fawning acolytes.

This "stark contrast" between the conspirators' *purported motives* and their *real motives* is at the heart of every political conspiracy theory. For if a conspiracy theory is to **explain observed events in current affairs and history**, the conspirators' hidden actions must somehow be translated into something significant and visible – a war, a major change in the law, the enrichment of some group and the impoverishment of another – which requires visible actions and efforts by large numbers of people. If, for whatever reason, the real objective of those efforts cannot be acknowledged openly, then many of those people must believe that they are furthering some different objective.

Now, consider a person who favours that ostensible objective and works towards it, but opposes the conspirators' true objective. Such a person is a dupe of the conspirators. Conspiracy theorists always believe in the existence of dupes because they see themselves as desperately warning them to open their eyes and see what would be "blinding ... in its clarity" if they did; but also, the alleged conspiracy itself usually depends on the cooperation of many dupes, such as journalists and political commentators ("Bush's mindless chorus of fawning acolytes") and soldiers and civil servants and of course ordinary voters.

It is in the interests of the conspirators to enlist as many dupes as possible. Every lie the conspirators tell, every secret meeting they hold, every secret decision they take and every secret message they share, incurs a risk of exposure. Therefore, the more dupes are willing to further the aims of the conspiracy without having to participate in the secret planning and without having to conceal their real reasons for supporting the plans, the safer the secret is. Also, the more dupes spontaneously work hard on the conspirators' behalf without wanting a payoff, the fewer real conspirators are needed to achieve the objective. And if there are spoils (there

usually are!) the larger the share each conspirator will receive.

So there are lots of dupes. But the question arises: *are there any politicians among them?*

It is in the nature of conspiracy theories that there is no immediate way of telling. Since the conspiracy depends on the conspirators behaving, in public, exactly as if they were dupes, it must be true that any duped politicians would be behaving in public exactly as if they were conspirators: arguing for the policy, voting for it, trying to discredit its opponents, cutting deals to promote it and so on.

You can see where this is going, can't you? *How high are the dupes allowed to rise?* For all we know, even some of the highest-ranking Neo-Cons are dupes. Even some members of the Cabinet might be outside the Conspiracy and genuinely be motivated by the arguments and objectives they advance in public.

Could the President himself be a dupe? If he was lying about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction then he was a Conspirator, and of course nothing could ever prove that he wasn't. But there again, there is no evidence that he *was* lying.

The fact is, *all* supporters of the Administration's policy could be 'dupes' – or rather, honest holders of the opinions they purport to hold – and still behave exactly as we see them behave. In other words, if there were no conspiracy there at all, we'd never know.

Well, obviously.

And therefore, the conspiracy theory explains exactly nothing. Yet it appends layers of weirdness and complexity to the commonsense picture of the world. There is an unlimited supply of such (non-)explanations, all postulating invisible complexity and all contradicting each other. Even if one of them were true, it would be vanishingly unlikely that anyone would happen to hit on it by a method that was impervious to evidence.

That is one reason why, in practice, conspiracy theories are always false.

But there is also another, more important reason.

Part 3

Thu, 08/21/2003 - 13:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Conspirancys

The strangest Conspiracy i heard about 9/11 is:

A Ex-CIA agent in a Cave in Afghanistan was planning these atack with help of his world wide terror network El-Qaida. He was able to get VISA's for guys that where watched by the CIA. But there where no insider in the CIA. And sure no insiders in the US goverment.

Thats strange stuff, but with that theorie they started a WAR on afghanistan.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Not so strange

-The "ex-CIA agent" in question did, after all, admit to the planning on a widely-broadcast videotape. So what's so strange about ascribing the conspiracy to him?

-Nobody ever said there were no insiders in the CIA and/or US government. Maybe there were. "No insiders" is not an essential part of the true conspiracy theory.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:31 | [reply](#)

we know who the paleos/social...

we know who the paleos/socialists are referring to with their theories...J-E-W-S.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 19:43 | [reply](#)

smile

that's spelled N-E-O-C-O-N now ;p

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 21:21 | [reply](#)

Theories

All such theories exist on a continuum, from the absurd, to the plausible, to the "official" view. (None of which may be true)

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 22:38 | [reply](#)

Conspirancys

To blame the Jews or any other religion for this is nuts i think. But its clever to be critical about those who benefits most of those attacks, Some ppl with strong influence in the US goverment, ppl with strong influence in the CIA. Remember Operation Northwoods and what happend to the man that sopped it, mister John F. Kennedy. I think some company owners have to much influence on the US goverment and also links to some dubios middle east companys. Who benefits most of this attacks? Folow the Money. There are many ppl from difrent Nations and diffrent religions behind this. The Official is not true, so we have to keep searching the trueth, its out there folow the money

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

mmmhhhhh

<http://www.ericblumrich.com/buddy.html>

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 11:43 | [reply](#)

Keep open your eyes.

... for irrational conspiracy theories (but I repeat myself):

<http://www.conspiracyplanet.com/channel.cfm?channelid=89&contentid=481>

[Editor's Note:

Please don't post lengthy material in comments and especially not lengthy non-original material; please post links instead.]

by a reader on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

ok Links

http://www.unansweredquestions.org/images/Small_9-11_Chart.gif

by a reader on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

The Likelihood of an America Fascism

The author of the article referenced above is indeed mistaken that Bush is a Fascist. But there is no question that proto-fascist memes are ambient in American political culture and that these memes have been growing stronger for some time now. These memes are transmitted by the likes of Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, the Freepers, Jerry Falwell etc. **This article** provides a sober assessment of the danger that is posed by these people and their memes and how that danger is all the greater post 9-11. As the author notes: "European fascism was a terrible thing. An American fascism, though, could very well devastate the world". It always pays to be vigilant. And it doesn't take a conspiracy for fascism to arise.

by a reader on Wed, 05/26/2004 - 05:41 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy theory (with a lot of prejudice)

I am not surprised to hear that in a recent newspaper poll 20% of Germans believe that the U.S. government may have sponsored the 9-11 attacks

In my view conspiracy theories are particularly popular between two classes of people. 1) Those who could be described as not very well informed (or 'clueless'), the sort of people that one expect to find in countries of the 'Less Developed World' –In Buenos Aires one of the top best selling (non fiction) title "Hitler Won the War" by the economist W. Graziano, describes how the events of September 11, were part of a plan hatched between President Bush and Bin Laden to take Control of the Globe - And 2) those well educated, like the Germans or the French who are too lazy to look beyond their own back yard and just react out of malice, envy and prejudice. To all of them the more grotesque the theory the more attractive turns out

to be.

By South American reader

by a reader on Wed, 09/22/2004 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

This example isn't really a conspiracy theory

I can see calling it that, but it seems like a bit of a stretch.

Anyway, it is a misguided version of reality.

The goal of the US is not now and never has been spreading democracy, it is spreading capitalism.

Hence the CIA's participation is overthrowing democratically elected socialist South American leaders. Hence the fight against communism, which is an economic, not political system.

What we want is free markets, which has nothing to do with democracy.

In a democracy the people decide what happens in society.

In a market economy the market - IE those with money - decide what happens in society.

This is an example of the government saying one thing while having an ulterior motive - and the American people do buy it.

It is to the majority of Americans' advantage to go along with it, since our exploitation of other countries (NAFTA) means cheap goods. However, we are still more likely to support government actions if we believe it is an issue of "good vs evil" instead of "might makes right."

By the standards above what I wrote here might be considered a "conspiracy theory" but what is the conspiracy? Who are the conspirators?

A collective blind eye to the emperor's nakedness is not a conspiracy. That corporations have influence over government policy, or that they wish to maximize profits at all costs are not conspiracies.

Fascism is absolute control of individuals by government.

We are working towards an economic version of that.

The number of companies is reduced while their ties to government are increased. Economic freedom is the stated goal, and economic freedom means unrestricted power for those with the most money.

by **Robert Paulson** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:22 | [reply](#)

Free exchange of ideas and goods

"What we want is free markets, which has nothing to do with democracy."

How can one exchange goods freely, if one cannot exchange ideas freely?

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:30 | [reply](#)

Freedom, Capitalism, and Democracy

Mr. Paulson's remarks mistake the relationship between freedom, capitalism and democracy. He denies that free market (capitalism) is related to democracy. He even goes as far as saying that by spreading free markets, Americans are "working toward an economic version" of Fascism, which he defines as "absolute control of individuals by government." Now, how could *free* market be a version of government control? He believes that is so because in a free market those with money rule, and they control the government too. This last statement is what makes this theory a conspiracy theory, for to do so, those with money (the conspirators) have to rule without violating anyone's freedom in the market, which requires a vast and coordinated conspiracy, hidden motives, and many dupes.

In reality, capitalism is the necessary condition of freedom and liberal democracy and the rule of law is the best system we have come up with in order to realize and protect individual freedoms (including economic freedoms) in our societies. Even if all the US did was to spread free markets, she would be spreading an essential component of any democracy worthy of the name and more importantly freedom.

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

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 12/28/2006 - 08:37 | [reply](#)