

Conspiracy Theories – 5: Paranoia As Faith

[For the first four instalments of this series, see [here](#).]

The Soviet dictator Josef Stalin was notorious for his all-encompassing paranoia. And yet, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn pointed out in his novel **The First Circle**, even Stalin was not *entirely* lacking in the capacity to trust:

Distrust of people was the dominating characteristic of Joseph Djugashvili [Stalin]; it was his only philosophy of life. He had not trusted his own mother; neither had he trusted God, before whom as a young man he had bowed down in His temple. He had not trusted his fellow Party members, especially those with the gift of eloquence. He had not trusted his comrades in exile. He did not trust the peasants to sow their grain or harvest their wheat unless he forced them to do it and watched over them. He did not trust the workers to work unless he laid down their production targets. He did not trust the intellectuals to help the cause rather than to harm it. He did not trust the soldiers and the generals to fight without penal battalions and field security squads. He had never trusted his relatives, his wives or his mistresses. He had not even trusted his children. And how right he had been!

In all his long, suspicion-ridden life he had only trusted one man. That man had shown the whole world that he knew his own mind, knew whom it was expedient to like and whom to hate; and he had always known when to turn round and offer the hand of friendship to those who had been his enemies.

This man, whom Stalin had trusted, was Adolf Hitler.

And so, when Hitler suddenly invaded the Soviet Union, betraying Stalin's trust and their **non-aggression treaty** (including all the nasty little **secret clauses** under which they had plotted jointly to enslave Eastern Europe), Stalin

blindly and fanatically *refused to believe* Hitler was going to attack and even after the Nazi assault began still

refused to believe that Hitler had ordered the offensive.

[**Harrison E. Salisbury**, emphases in original.]

Stalin also refused to believe his own spies, such as the astonishing **Richard Sorge**, who had sent specific and timely warnings of Hitler's plans, complete with smoking-gun evidence in the form of photographs of diplomatic telegrams.

Stalin nevertheless preferred to believe Hitler.

Stalin's island of gullibility in his ocean of paranoia is not exceptional – in fact, it is the rule. For instance, conspiracy theorists today prefer to believe that the likes of Saddam and Osama and Arafat tell the truth while Blair and Bush and Sharon lie. For, despite Solzhenitsyn's understandable mockery, what Stalin trusted uncritically was not Hitler, it was his own explanation (or rather, his own conspiracy-theoretic non-explanation) of what makes the world tick. Hitler was a natural beneficiary though, because he shared the same explanation. And it was Stalin's blind faith in this false world view, his inability to modify it in response to new information, that betrayed him. That is why it is not really very surprising that a person for whose “only philosophy of life” was distrust, came to lay himself wide open to the biggest betrayal of all time.

Paranoids, cynics and conspiracy theorists think of themselves as the most sceptical, the least gullible of the human race, and hence also as the most secure against disappointment. “If you're a pessimist,” the saying goes, “at least you'll never be disappointed”. But that could hardly be more false. Just look at the world of disappointment that Hitler let himself in for when he deduced, from the depths of his cynicism, that Britain was all talk and would never fight. Just look how heartbroken all the cynics and pessimists on today's political scene are whenever things go well in Iraq or Afghanistan.

In reality, such people are not the least gullible in the world but the most. For their approach to understanding the complex and frightening world of human affairs is not characterised by the countless possible explanations that they have vowed to reject, but by the single conspiracy-theoretic mode of explanation that they have vowed to believe regardless of all evidence or experience or argument to the contrary. This is not scepticism in the rational sense of the word, it is faith. They have chosen to put blind faith in their conspiracy theories. But the world punishes blind faith. Tyrants in general tend to be paranoid, yet nevertheless, they nearly always end up disappointed as well. Stalin was relatively lucky in his disappointment: most of them die of it.

Part 6

Fri, 04/01/2005 - 14:14 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

ideology vs. conspiracy

I agree with this post. But I wonder what the relationship between conspiracy theory and ideology is. As written [here](#), any theory can be turned into an ideology, and any ideology can be turned into a

theory. Like conspiracy theories, a major selling point of ideologies is their apparent simplicity in making sense of complex phenomena. You have declared a war on conspiracy theories. Does this mean a war on ideology in general? Or does ideology have a legitimate place in the world of ideas that isn't going away?

by [Dan Strimpel](#) on Fri, 04/01/2005 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy of Ideology

Excellent.

Strimpel's question also is of note.

Ideology contains within it a fertile medium for growing bad ideas. The fertile medium is the ground of fixed unquestioned first principles. The seeds of conspiracy theory sprout in the manure of these dogmas.

by a reader on Sun, 04/03/2005 - 14:23 | [reply](#)

Conspiracies are elementary-- Tabloid BS--Paradise

It is elementary... Conspiracy Theories are just a quick way to make people question a particular person or party. If someone wants to find fault with a particular person or party to turn others against them, they think of ways they are trying to harm everyone... That is how most gossip starts in high school, elementary school, work places etc.... Democrats want to find fault with the Republicans... It is that simple.. But think about it, if Clinton had been elected, I am sure we, Republicans could somehow blame Clinton for the 911 attacks... perhaps linked to Monica Lewinsky too! Perhaps Hilary and Monica were having an affair and had to cover it up... Believe me.. If we tried hard enough.. we COULD link them somehow.. It is all Tabloid BS to me..

by [gadarInbabe](#) on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 22:55 | [reply](#)

wow, YOU are CRAZY!

do you understand that it is the MAINSTREAM that are the victims of a "conspiracy theory", not those you accuse?

the MAINSTREAM believe that:

- osama bin laden did 9-11
- he did so because "he didn't like our way of life"
- iraq was involved somehow
- nineteen hijackers fooled our trillion dollar defenses
- the buildings collapsed because jets hit them
- etc etc etc

all because Time magazine, the New York Times, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX etc told them so and never told them anything different!

THAT is a CONSPIRACY THEORY. And the people who cling

fervently to that theory are CONSPIRACY THEORISTS. That means most people. As in "**most people have been duped by the theory that bin Laden did it**".

It is only the minority who have done a little bit of their own research and realize the lies of the official media and government and see how they've scurried to cover up as much as possible who are NOT beholden to a fixed view of what happened. It is we who think for ourselves.

GWB's grandfather Prescott Bush substantially funded Hitler from 1924-1941. Karl Rove's grandfather was a Nazi engineer. Arnold Schwarzenegger's dad was an Austrian SS man. It is probably not a good idea for conservatives like you to start bringing up the Nazis in order to buttress your arguments.

by a reader on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

Put your theory on the table

I'd like the previous poster to explain to me what actually happened on the day of 9 / 11. Not a million reasons for why the widely believed theory is a conspiracy but what actually happened.

In particular I'd like to know about the passengers on all four flights, where are they now or how did they die? I'd also like to know about the 19 hijackers, did they exist and were they on the planes, did they in fact hijack it? I'd also like to know how their training was paid for and why they made suicide videos in Afghanistan explaining their reasons for the attack. If you can manage all that you can round it off with why Al Qaeda has now accepted responsibility for the attack.

You could also go for who was behind the attack on the USS Cole and the East Africa embassy bombings if you're feeling really bold.

by RK on Thu, 06/29/2006 - 13:41 | [reply](#)