

## Conspiracy Theories – 6: Theories That Are Merely False

When Yasser Arafat died, the world's conspiracy theorists predictably went into a frenzy of accusing Israel of having poisoned him.

This was not a conspiracy theory.

Although it fits well into the conspiracy-theoretic world view because it shares some of the attributes of conspiracy theories, it lacks a key attribute by which we recognise conspiracy theories as irrational and as false. As we have **said in the first post** in this series, 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 (✓, sort of), and who therefore...
- lie, and suppress evidence, about their secret actions (✓), and...
- lie about the motives for their public actions (✗).

For the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to have had Arafat poisoned, he would not have needed to lie about his motives, only his actions. Sharon and his government had said many times that Arafat was a mass murderer and actively engaged in terrorism, so their publicly announced and defended policy of targeting such people **would in principle apply**. It was only out of expediency that they had decided not to kill him. This means that the operation, had it existed, would have required no **dupes**: the active cooperation of only a few senior officers, politicians, undercover agents, and possibly a military scientist or two would have been needed, and *all of them could have been informed of the operation's real nature and its real purpose*. Hence there would have been no need for the impossible task of **promoting dupes to conspirators**, which is an archetypal flaw of conspiracy theories.

Lest any readers misunderstand our example here, we must stress that it is not even remotely plausible that Sharon had Arafat killed. But that is because of the specific political, military and moral

circumstances, and not, as in the case of conspiracy theories,

because the idea is irrational in its form.

Fri, 07/29/2005 - 10:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## Yellow Cake

"an explanation of observed events in current affairs and history (✓)  
... which  
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Conspiracy theory:

I understand. Its like yellow cake and outing of Valerie Plame.  
Sometimes it really is Karl Rove and a plan of the influential to  
distort reality. Sometimes it is only a conspiracy theory about  
yellow cake and Saddam Hussein. On the surface both meet the  
criteria. The proof is in the pudding (or cake as it were).

by a reader on Fri, 07/29/2005 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

## Re: Yellow Cake

Neither the theory that Saddam's regime sought to purchase  
uranium from Niger, nor the theory that Karl Rove sought to  
discredit Joe Wilson by drawing attention to his wife's involvement  
in having him sent on his mission to Niger, is a conspiracy theory.  
Furthermore, both theories are highly **plausible**.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 13:02 | [reply](#)

## Conspiracy like Cake batter

So it would appear that both are highly plausible conspiracies  
convoluted and tangled together as each may be by the ingredient  
mix of truths and fictions. See above. It will be very hard to  
completely separate conspirators/players and their roles in this  
because of the juiciness of the yellow cake story and how it serves  
to connect the figments of recent history. The lessons in this are  
many. That's my theory and I am sticking to it until proved  
otherwise.

by a reader on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 18:08 | [reply](#)

## Simple minds take exception to conspiracies

A dictionary definition of a conspiracy theory is: A theory that  
explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret  
plot by usually powerful conspirators.

There is no mention of a requirement of dupes being involved.  
There doesn't have to be any dupes working on behalf of the  
conspirators.

You say in part 2, "That is one reason why, in practice, conspiracy theories are always false." Always false? Have you ever heard of price fixing? Corn syrup, milk, gasoline, all of these products have been price fixed in regions around the country. So there are groups of people who meet in secret and decide the price of products. Those are conspiracies! And they involve greedy capitalists! Those events really happened whether you want to believe them or not. I'll give you the fact that lots of the theories are out in left field and very unbelievable, but to bury your head in the sand and say no one conspires is just naive. Simple minded people just cannot contemplate how to put a conspiracy together so, in their minds, none exist.

And the government is never involved in secret projects on unsuspecting people, oh no, never. Ever heard of the Tuskegee Syphilis study, the CIA LSD study, or Project MKULTRA? These were secret plots by powerful conspirators. Or do you claim all of the subjects were just volunteers with full knowledge of what was to happen to them? If those people did not know the plot, then those projects fit the description of a conspiracy theory.

by a reader on Thu, 10/11/2007 - 21:47 | [reply](#)

## **Re: Simple minds take exception to conspiracies**

It seems that all the examples you have given are things that you disapprove of, but there is nothing in your dictionary's definition that requires that. According to it, anything done by two or more powerful people that has some effect and is not done live on television is a conspiracy. In fact, being powerful is not stated as a necessary condition, so any claim that two or more people have done anything at all, that has had any effect at all, counts as a conspiracy theory according to your definition.

Also, none of your examples are conspiracy theories by our definition. Therefore, pointing out the former has no bearing on whether the latter are ever true. It does not address our argument.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 10/15/2007 - 04:00 | [reply](#)