

The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks: 20 Years Later

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Abstract: In this paper, the author lays out significant but apparently little known facts related to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. Using information from the official investigations into the attacks, the author first establishes important realities of what happened on that day and leading up to it, including who carried out and funded the attacks. He then examines public opinion data to show what Americans believe about the attacks and US action afterward. The major purposes of the paper are to examine how much of the truth of the 9/11 attacks is known to the public and the degree to which Americans believe in conspiracy theories related to the attacks.

Keywords: 9/11, September 11, terrorism, public opinion, conspiracies, conspiracy theories

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Introduction

For several years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the author taught classes at the undergraduate and graduate levels about the attacks, what preceded them, and what followed in terms of domestic and international policy. Classes focused on what happened on the day of the attacks, who did it, and why, as well as how did the US respond through legal changes, as well as law enforcement, intelligence, and military efforts.

Some of the discoveries were, stated simply, shocking, especially since *all* of them were in the public domain (after all, the author is just a university professor without any top-level security clearance). Most notably were the discoveries that:

1. There is significant evidence (some of which is classified) that people with strong connections to Saudi Arabia may have helped fund and carry out the attacks (Graham, 2004); and
2. People in high level positions in the US government (including the White House) were, in some ways, counting on a devastating attack against the United States to help them achieve very specific political objectives (Thompson, 2004). Both of these topics are briefly addressed in the paper.

Such realities would logically lead to conspiracy theories given what we know about people's natural inclination to believe in them (Shermer & Gould, 2002; Uscinski, 2018; Weill, 2021). Indeed, nearly immediately, conspiracy theories related to the attacks sprung forth, including that elements of the US government either let it happen (LIH) or made it happen (MIH), that Saddam Hussein played some role in them, that Saudi Arabia funded the attacks, that some of the 9/11 hijackers trained at US military bases and/or were still actually alive after the attacks, and even that no commercial passenger airliners were used in the attacks, that bombs were placed at the World Trade Center, and a missile was fired into the Pentagon, (Author, 2010c).

For this paper, the author searched for public opinion data on the 9/11 attacks, using various databases, including Academic Search Premiere, Criminal Justice Periodicals Index, and Google. This led to the discovery of four areas of public opinion on which the author taught and wrote about. This paper focuses on those four areas of interest, all of which have public opinion data available, to get a sense of what Americans think is true about the 9/11 attacks. The paper includes a brief discussion of the methods of this research, examines findings from public opinion polls, and then draws conclusions.

It is important to note, at the outset, that there were two government or "official" investigations into the 9/11 attacks. The first was conducted by a joint inquiry by the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, in Congress (Joint Inquiry, 2002). The second was by the 9/11 Commission, appointed by President George W. Bush (9/11 Commission, 2004). Some very key findings from these investigations are shared in this paper, as they relate to the findings of public opinion polls examined. It turns out there are specific findings in these reports that sufficiently would promote conspiracy theories of the attacks related to 9/11.

Methods

The author began by reviewing his extensive files, books, websites, teaching notes, and own research writings on the 9/11 attacks. He made a list of 20 key truths about the attacks, limiting his focus to those he thought to be the most important from all those he had outlined and documented.

The author then searched for public opinion polls related to any and all aspects of the 9/11 attacks, using Academic Search Premiere, Criminal Justice Periodicals Index, and Google. The search used the terms "9/11 OR September 11" AND "public opinion OR poll." Surprisingly, the search only discovered four areas of polling related to the 20 overall truths identified by the author. The four areas are:

1. Did the United States have advance knowledge of the 9/11 attacks?
2. Was the United States government involved in the 9/11 attacks?
3. Was the truth about the 9/11 attacks covered up?
4. Did Iraq and Saddam Hussein have any role in the 9/11 attacks?

The analysis begins with the establishment of the key facts pertaining to each area, and is followed up by an analysis of the public opinion polls in each area. The goal is to show to what degree public opinion matches the facts.

Analysis

At least four major areas of interest related to the 9/11 terrorist attacks feature relevant public opinion polls, as noted above. The analysis first establishes the facts within each area of analysis and then compares and contrasts that with what Americans believe, as measured in public opinion polls.

1. Did The United States have Advance knowledge of the 9/11 attacks

The first area of exploration is whether the US government had advance knowledge of the 9/11 attacks. First, the key truth: The United States government was clearly aware not only of the threat of a forthcoming attack, but had also received very specific information with regard to the nature of the attack and some of the likely targets, and even some of the names of hijackers, in spite of what high-level government officials publicly stated about this issue.

The facts

Stated simply, the United States government received numerous, credible warnings of a forthcoming attack. Many of these are not classified and have been reported on by mainstream media organizations across the political spectrum (Author, 2010o; Thompson, 2004). The warnings are so numerous that they cannot be reported here in this paper, so the author has chosen a few, specific examples to make the point:

- April 2001—the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) sends warning to US airlines that Middle Eastern terrorists could try to hijack or blow up US planes and that carriers should demonstrate a high level of alertness.
- June 2001—German intelligence warns the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), British intelligence (M16), and Israeli intelligence (Mossad) that Middle Eastern terrorists are planning to hijack commercial aircraft to use as weapons to attack “American and Israeli symbols, which stand out.”
- July 2001—the FAA issues a warning telling airlines to use the highest level of caution and another saying “terror groups are known to be planning and training for hijackings, as we ask you therefore to use caution.”
- August 2001—Britain warns US of an al Qaeda attack involving multiple airline hijackings.
- August 2001—the “bin Laden Determined to Strike in US” memo is given to President George W. Bush, stating “bin Laden wanted to hijack US aircraft to

gain the release” of captives and tells of “suspicious activity in the US consistent with preparations for hijackings or other types of attacks, including recent surveillance of federal buildings in US” (Author, 2010o).

The above examples do not include the numerous warnings that came in prior to the Bush Administration, including very specific and disturbing warnings such as a 1999 warning from Britain’s M16 domestic intelligence agency that al Qaeda planned to use commercial aircraft in “unconventional ways possibly as flying bombs.” Nor do they include the evidence that the US government conducted war games exercises simulating hijacked airlines being used as weapons to crash into targets, including the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (Author, 2010o).

What is clear from the evidence is that public statements from Bush Administration officials about the attacks are inconsistent with this evidence. For example, on September 16, 2001, just five days after the attacks, President Bush said: “Never in anybody’s thought process ... about how to protect America did we ever think the evil doers would fly not one but four commercial aircraft into precious US targets ... never.” White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said, in May 2002, that “the President did not—not—receive information about the use of airplanes as missiles by suicide bombers ... Until this attack took place, I think it’s fair to say that no one envisioned that as a possibility.” That same month, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said: “I don’t think that anybody could have predicted that these people would take an airplane and slam it into the World Trade Center, take another one and slam it into the Pentagon, that they would try to use an airplane as a missile ... even in retrospect there was nothing to suggest that.” Further, in April 2002, Vice President Cheney advised Democrats in Congress to “be very cautious not to seek political advantage by making incendiary suggestions ... that the White House had advance information that would have prevented the tragic attacks of 9/11.” These statements are demonstrably false. Cheney also said that any serious probe of 9/11 foreknowledge would be tantamount to “giving aid and comfort to the enemy” (Author, 2010d).

Both official investigations into the 9/11 attacks examined what was known by US officials prior to that day. The 9/11 Commission (2004: 254) wrote that the “system was blinking red.” The Commission reviewed a tiny fraction of what was known about what President Bush received in terms of threat warnings in the form of President’s Daily Brief (PDB), as well as the Senior Executive Intelligence Brief (SEIB) that is distributed within government to a wider range of officials. The Commission notes that a terrorist threat advisory from late June 2001 “indicated a high probability of near-term ‘spectacular’ terrorist attacks resulting in numerous casualties.” Further, other reports were titled “Bin Laden Attacks May be Imminent” and “Bin Laden and Associates Making Near-Term Threats” (9/11 Commission, 2004: 257).

Attorney General John Ashcroft was briefed in early July 2001 about an imminent, significant terror attack unlike anything done before. He then stopped flying commercial airlines due to what has been called in the media a very specific warning described as a 10

out of 10 in terms of specificity (which remains classified) (Author, 2010o). Senator Bob Graham (2004: 72), who chaired the Joint Inquiry investigation, notes that this move was “opposed to the commercial aircraft attorneys general normally take, despite the fact that senior FBI and CIA officials knew of no specific threat against the Attorney General.” At the same time, Secretary of State Colin Powell reportedly warned “members of the foreign service to be careful in making travel plans” (Institute for Policy Studies, 2021). All of this is suggestive that the US government was aware of some threat to commercial airliners.

According to the Commission, US intelligence would learn that the planned attack had been delayed by a couple of months, yet it continued to receive warnings such as a late July 31, FAA circular noting “reports of possible near-term terrorist operations . . . particularly on the Arabian Peninsula and/or Israel.” The FAA said it had “no credible evidence of specific plans to attack U.S. civil aviation, though it noted that some of the ‘currently active’ terrorist groups were known to ‘plan and train for hijackings’” (9/11 Commission, 2004: 259).

Richard Clarke, counterterrorism official in the White House, was sending multiple warnings throughout the White House about an imminent attack, pretty much all through the summer of 2001 (Clarke, 2004; also see Author, 2010b). Clarke claims Bush Administration officials ignored his loud and consistent warnings about a potential attack because they were focused on Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction rather than Usama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Clarke even wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* that proved claims about Saddam Hussein obtaining yellowcake uranium from Niger were based on a forged document; the identity of his wife as an undercover intelligence agent was then leaked as a form of payback (Clarke, 2004).

Additionally, the Joint Inquiry of Congress (2002: 7) wrote: “The National Security Agency (NSA), reported at least 33 communications indicating a possible, imminent terrorist attack in 2001. Senior U.S. Government officials were advised by the Intelligence Community on June 28 and July 10, 2001, that the attacks were expected, among other things, to ‘have dramatic consequences on governments or cause major casualties’ and that ‘[a]ttack preparations have been made. Attack will occur with little or no warning.’” The Joint Inquiry (2002: 323) also admits a “flood of warnings about possible terrorists attacks in the United States, some using airplanes as weapons, all of which developed in the spring and summer of 2001.”

What people think

Various polling organizations have examined whether Americans are aware of the fact that US intelligence received clear evidence prior to the 9/11 attacks that some kind of terrorist attack was coming. A 2004 survey by Zogby of more than 800 New York residents found that 41% of New York state residents and 49 percent of New York City residents believed individuals within the U.S. government “knew in advance that attacks were planned on or around September 11, 2001, and that they consciously failed to act” (Zogby, 2004).

A similar poll of 1,000 Americans by Rasmussen (2007) found that 22% of respondents believed that President Bush knew about the attacks in advance, and 29% said they believe the CIA knew about the attacks in advance. It is assumed that this is consistent with the evidence but there is of course no direct evidence about what President Bush knew or didn't know.

A Scripps Howard poll in 2007 of more than 800 Americans asked if respondents believed that "some people in the federal government had specific warnings of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, but chose to ignore those warnings." About one-third (32%) said they thought this was very likely, and 30% said it was somewhat likely. So, a majority of Americans in the poll believed the government was negligent in failing to act on intelligence warnings. Another 30% said that thought this was unlikely and 8% said they didn't know.

A 2013 poll by of more than 1,200 Americans by Public Policy Polling asked: "Do you believe the United States government knowingly allowed the attacks on September 11th, 2001, to happen, or not?" Only 11% said they believed this versus 78% who did not, and 11% were not sure (Bowman & Ruggm, 2013). Again, there is no direct evidence suggesting the US government allowed the attacks to happen, even though there is evidence that a dramatic attack would help them achieve certain political goals (more on this later in the paper).

2. Was the United States Government involved in the 9/11 attacks?

The second area of exploration is whether the US government actually played some role in the 9/11 attacks. First, the key truth: There is no direct evidence that the US government helped carry out the 9/11 attacks by either LIH or MIH. There is, however, enough circumstantial evidence for people to create conspiracy theories that are not inconsistent with this evidence.

The facts

There is no evidence that any agent of the US government was involved in the 9/11 attacks. The most stunning piece of information used by conspiracy theorists to suggest the possibility of US government involvement comes from the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). This conservative think tank, located in Washington, DC, issued its statement of principles in June 1997. They included shaping the new century to be favorable to American principles and interests, achieving a foreign policy that does the same, increasing defense spending significantly, challenging regimes hostile to our interests and values, and accepting the role of the US in the new world as the sole superpower (Author, 2010j). Immediately after its founding, PNAC began encouraging the US government to invade Iraq and topple the Saddam Hussein regime. For example, in January 1998, PNAC sent a letter to President Bill Clinton calling for war against Iraq and the removal of Saddam

Hussein because he was a hazard to the world's oil supplies. It called for the US to go it alone and says the US should not be crippled by the United Nations (UN) (Author, 2010g).

In part, the letter read: "Given the magnitude of the threat, the current policy, which depends for its success upon the steadfastness of our coalition partners and upon the cooperation of Saddam Hussein, is dangerously inadequate. The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy ... We believe the US has the authority under existing UN resolutions to take the necessary steps, including military steps, to protect our vital interests in the Gulf. In any case, American policy cannot continue to be crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN Security Council" (Author, 2010g).

Ten of the 18 signatories ended up in George W. Bush's first administration in 2000 (including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, Undersecretary of State Paula Dobriansky, Presidential Advisor for the Middle East Elliot Abrams, and Special Iraq Envoy Zalmay Khalizad). This obviously becomes relevant when you consider that the US did invade Iraq and topple the Saddam Hussein regime, but of course, only after 9/11 and after PNAC officials were in the White House (Author, 2010g).

The connection between 9/11 and the Iraq war become clearer when you consider the September 2000 PNAC report, titled, "Rebuilding America's Defenses." It was commissioned by future Vice President Dick Cheney, future Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, future Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and future Chief of Staff for Vice President Dick Cheney, Lewis Libby. It called for maintaining US global dominance, a military force in the Middle East, military control of space, regime change in China, North Korea, Libya, Syria, Iran, and other countries, the development of forms of biological warfare that can be used to target specific genotypes, and preparations for multiple theater wars. The report essentially called for Pax Americana, an American empire, with a greater emphasis on "Homeland Defense," preparation for multiple wars, and transformation of the US armed forces. The report asserted the US right to secure global hegemony, and this depended, in no small part, to a US presence in the Middle East. For example, the document stated ... "the United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein" (p. 14) (Author, 2010g).

The report also put forth the idea of an "axis of evil," a term President Bush would eventually use to describe three nations, the very three listed in the PNAC report. For example, the report stated "... adversaries like Iran, Iraq, and North Korea are rushing to

develop ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons as a deterrent to American intervention in regions they seek to dominate” (p. 4). Further, the report stated: “The current American peace will be short-lived if the United States becomes vulnerable to rogue powers with small, inexpensive arsenals of ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads or other weapons of mass destruction. We cannot allow North Korea, Iran, Iraq, or other similar states to undermine American leadership, intimidate American allies or threaten the American homeland itself” (p. 75) (Author, 2010g).

Incredibly, the report stated the US right to topple hostile regimes: “American military preeminence will continue to rest in significant part on the ability to maintain sufficient land forces to achieve political goals such as removing a dangerous and hostile regime when necessary” (p. 61). Additionally, the report also explicitly called for the militarization of space and the implementation of “Star Wars” type programs to achieve this goal, as well as increased defense spending to the tune of \$15 to 20 billion per year. Further, the report called for the establishment of more US military bases overseas to serve as “deployment bases” and “forward operating bases,” as well as expansion of US nuclear weaponry (Author, 2010g).

Finally, and most importantly, the report said all of these desired changes would likely take a long time to achieve, “absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor” (Project for a New American Century, 2000). This event, of course, the Pearl Harbor of our lifetime, came just one year later, and at a time when people affiliated with PNAC were in the White House (Author, 2010g).

This is what led to perhaps the most significant 9/11 conspiracy theory, suggesting that the US either LIH or MIH, as a “false flag” operation, in order to achieve its overall goals, including invading Iraq. A comparison of the PNAC document with President Bush’s National Security Strategy of the United States (September 2002) is telling. In it, President Bush asserted the US right to prevent any nation from challenging us economically, politically, or militarily (White House, 2003). According to Bernard Weiner, the similarities included three things. First, the policy of “pre-emptive” war—i.e., whenever the US thinks a country may be amassing too much power and/or could provide some sort of competition in the “benevolent hegemony” region, it can be attacked, without provocation. Second, international treaties and opinion will be ignored whenever they are not seen to serve US imperial goals. Third, the new policies “will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia” (Author, 2010g).

Note that, nothing in the above information provides any evidence whatsoever that the US government played any role or even intentionally allowed 9/11 to happen. What is clear, however, is that people who ended up working in the White House did lay out a set of military goals that would become reality after 9/11, and those people are the ones who implemented the desired policies. Those people also wrote that their goals would not likely be achievable without a dramatic attack, and that very thing occurred just months into their time in the White House. These facts are what likely led to the conspiracy theory that the US government

somehow LIH or MIH. It is unlikely many Americans know anything about PNAC, however. What people think:

Polls sought to find if Americans believe the US government played some kind of role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Hargrove, 2006). A 2006 poll, by Scripps Howard and Ohio University of more than 1,000 Americans, found that 36% percent thought it somewhat or very likely that U.S. officials either participated in the attacks or took no action to stop them because they wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East (Stempel, Hargrove, Stempel, & Guido, 2007; Torcgia, 2007). There is no direct evidence suggesting this is true, yet the idea that such an attack would enable the US to invade Iraq was suggested in writing prior to the 9/11 attacks, as noted earlier.

The poll above asked several questions related to 9/11. For example, it asked: Federal officials either assisted in the 9/11 attacks or took no action to prevent them because they wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East.” More than half (59%) said this was not likely, but 20% said they thought it was somewhat likely and 16% answered very likely. Again, more than one-third of Americans believe the US government was negligent (or worse). Another poll by Public Policy Polling of 1,000 Americans in 2009 asked: “Do you think President Bush intentionally allowed the 9/11 attacks to take place because he wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East?” Less than one in five people (14%) answered yes, while 78% answered no (Bowman & Ruggm, 2013). This is consistent at least with what is publicly known.

The Scripps Howard poll from 2006 also asked about specifics with regard to what happened on 9/11 in New York and Washington, DC. For example, the poll asked how likely it was that “The collapse of the twin towers in New York was aided by explosives secretly planted in the two buildings.” More than three-quarters (77%) said this was unlikely, but 10% answered somewhat likely and 6% said very likely.” It also asked how likely it was that “The Pentagon was struck by a military cruise missile in 2001 rather than by an airliner captured by terrorists.” A very large majority (80%) said this was not likely. Only 6% said this was somewhat likely and 6% answered it was very likely (Bowman & Ruggm, 2013).

A poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion (2010) of 1,000 Americans found that 15% percent of respondents said it was credible that the World Trade Center was brought down by a controlled demolition. The same percentage (15%) said they believed that United Airlines flight 93 was shot down, 13% said they did not think any plane hit the Pentagon, and 6% said they believed that no plane crashed into the World Trade Center.

This paper will not entertain conspiracy theories about the US government allegedly planting explosives, shooting down planes, and/or firing missiles into US targets. There have been numerous examinations into these issues, and no direct evidence that any of this is true has been found, at least in the opinion of this author.

In 2007, Zogby presented three theories about the attacks to 1,000 survey respondents. It stated and then asked the following:

There are three main schools of thought regarding the 9/11 attacks. The first theory is the official story, and maintains that 19 Arab fundamentalists executed a surprise attack which caught US intelligence and military forces off guard. The second theory known as Let It Happen argues that certain elements in the US government knew the attacks were coming but consciously let them proceed for various political, military, and economic motives; and the third theory Made It Happen contends that certain US government elements actively planned or assisted some aspects of the attacks. Based on your knowledge of 9/11 events and their aftermath, which theory are you more likely to agree with?

The poll found that 64% of respondents said they believed the official story, 26% agreed with the Let It Happen (LIH) theory, and only 5% agreed with the Made It Happen theory (MIH) (Bowman, & Ruggm, 2013). Thus, nearly one-third of Americans in the poll believed the government had some role in the attacks. The issues of LIH and MIH are revisited later in this paper.

To restate, there is no evidence that the US government actively planned or assisted in the attack. There is evidence consistent with this idea, but it rests on failures of US agencies to adequately track and apprehend the hijackers once they were in the country rather than evidence of an actual conspiracy. The failures of US government agencies to track known terrorists in the country is discussed later in the paper.

3. Was the Truth about the 9/11 Attacks Covered up?

The third area of exploration is whether the US government attempted to or actually succeeded in covering up parts of the truth about the 9/11 attacks. First, the key truth: There is no direct evidence that the US government covered up the truth of the 9/11 attacks. There is, however, enough circumstantial evidence for people to believe a cover-up of relevant facts must have been orchestrated by the Bush Administration.

The facts

No one has any evidence proving a cover-up by the US government to hide the whole truth of the 9/11 attacks. Yet, there is enough evidence in the public domain to raise serious questions (Author, 2010k). First, there are several members of the 9/11 Commission with close ties to the airline and oil industries, raising an issue for some about the independence of the investigation. Second, President Bush refused to testify to the Commission, instead agreeing to “visit with” it but only for one hour and with the Vice President present, and with no media present in a closed session, and for only one hour. President Bush also refused to allow his National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, to testify (people previously in the White House have written books about their efforts to get her to take the threat of al-Qaeda seriously—for example, former National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism, Richard Clarke) (Author, 2010b). Bush also withheld the Presidential Daily Briefings

from the Commission, as well as 75% of requested documents from when Bill Clinton was President (this is important because this is when the first discussion of hijacked airplanes being used as weapons began and when the US government began instituting measures to prevent such an attack at public events, like the Olympics: these became known as the “Atlanta Rules” and were used even for the Bush inauguration) (Author, 2010i). Perhaps most relevant is the fact that 27 pages of the report by the bipartisan Congressional inquiry into the attacks were classified and a significant amount of information about the possible role that Saudi Arabia played in the attacks was classified, despite efforts by family members of those killed on 9/11 to have this information released (Author, 2010f).

It should be pointed out that the Chair of the Joint Inquiry by Congress alleged a cover-up by the Bush Administration. He claims that, as the Joint Inquiry got more specific in requested for witnesses and documents, the White House and intelligence agencies resisted. Graham (2004) claims that the White House classified materials and information, even that which was already known about by the media. For example, the contents of the August 6th PDB had already been broadcast and the name of an al Qaeda leader involved in the attacks had already been reported in the media, yet both were classified.

Graham (2004) also says that the White House dragged its feet by classifying too much information. To get access to the classified material, the Joint Inquiry had to go to CIA Director George Tenet, who simply deferred to President Bush. He asserts that the White House simply kept the materials classified until they could not be used in a public hearing.

Graham (2004: 214) gives very specific examples to back up his claims. For example, he notes that, after having the Joint Inquiry report for months, the CIA still had only read 200 pages of the 800 pages. Once they finished with it, huge parts of the text were blacked out: “Some of the very pieces of information that the CIA had declassified for the public staff statements of the Joint Inquiry were now reclassified ... the argument being that although the individual pieces of information were unclassified, assembling them as we had created a ‘mosaic’ that now had to be classified.” The report was finally released with all the blacked out material at least left in so that the public could see how much was left out.

The final report was finally released on July 24, 2003 (more than seven months after it as submitted) ... Yet: “Significant portions of virtually every section of the report had been censored” (Graham, 2004: 215). Graham (2004: 215-216) says “there was one area that did not need to be kept secret, and it was the one area that the White House simply refused to relent. This was, not surprisingly, the section of the report that related to the Saudi government and the assistance that government gave to some and possibly all of the September 11 terrorists. This section had been redacted in its entirety, all twenty-seven pages. Senator Shelby and I, after rereading those twenty-seven pages, independently concluded that 95 percent of that material was safe for public consumption, and that these pages were being kept secret for reasons other than national security.” Graham (2004: 228)

asserts: “I can say unequivocally that the information they contain raises serious questions about Saudi Arabia’s governmental support for at least some of the terrorists.”

Graham also asserts that President Bush directed the FBI (through 2002) to restrain and obfuscate the investigation of the foreign government support that some and possibly all of the September 11 hijackers received. Graham (2004: 231) asserts that: “The President has engaged in a cover-up, withholding from the American people the evidence that supplies the basis [for Graham’s charges] ... by misclassifying information as national security data.” While the information may be embarrassing or politically damaging, its revelation would not damage national security.” And Graham (2004: 202) concludes that, “the more we learned, the less curious the administration seems about what had happened on September 11. The more we pressed for information, the more resistant the White House became to giving it up. In my view, this behavior bore all the hallmarks of a cover-up.”

What people think

Four polls from 2004 and 2006 by CBS and the New York Times asked between 900 and 1,100 respondents: “When it comes to what they knew prior to September 11th, 2001, about possible terrorist attacks against the United States, do you think members of the Bush Administration are telling the truth, are mostly telling the truth but hiding something, or are they mostly lying?” Between 16% and 24% answered they thought the Bush Administration is telling the truth, between 10% and 28% thought they were mostly lying, and between 53% and 66% thought they were hiding something (Bowman, & Ruggm, 2013). The data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: CBS Poll on Whether the Bush Administration is Telling the Truth, Hiding Something, or Mostly Lying about 9/11

	<i>Members of the Bush administration are ...</i>		
	<i>Telling truth</i>	<i>Hiding something</i>	<i>Mostly lying</i>
Mar. 2004–Apr. 2004 CBS	24%	58%	14%
Apr. 2004 (early) CBS	21%	66%	10%
Apr. 2004 (late) CBS/NYT	24%	56%	16%
Oct. 2006 CBS/NYT	16%	53%	28%

There is no evidence that the Bush Administration or anyone in the US government was or is involved in a cover-up. Yet, it is true that there were potential conflicts of interests among investigators, members of the Bush Administration did not testify to the bodies investigating the 9/11 attacks, and some information (including 27 pages about the role

that Saudi Arabia played in the attacks) was classified, as noted earlier (Author, 2010f, 2010i, 2010m).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, a 2007 Zogby poll of 1,000 Americans found that 51% agree with the notion that “Congress should investigate the executive branch’s conduct prior to, during, and following the September 11 attacks,” while 46% disagreed (Bowman & Ruggm, 2013).

Another Zogby (2006) poll of 1,200 Americans asked:

Some people believe that the US government and its 9/11 Commission concealed or refused to investigate critical evidence that contradicts their official explanation of the September 11th attacks, saying there has been a cover-up. Others say that the 9/11 Commission was a bi-partisan group of honest and well-respected people and that there is no reason they would want to cover-up anything. Who are you more likely to agree with?

Nearly half (48%) of Americans answered they agree that the 9/11 Commission “concealed or refused to investigate critical evidence” and 42% said they had “no reason to believe the 9/11 Commission covered up anything.” There is no evidence that the 9/11 Commission concealed any information, although it is clear that certain areas of potential exploration were left unexplored, such as the possible role of Saudi Arabia in the attacks.

The same poll asked this question:

Some people say that so many unanswered questions about 9/11 remain that Congress or an International Tribunal should re-investigate the attacks, including whether any US government officials consciously allowed or helped facilitate their success. Other people say the 9/11 attacks were thoroughly investigated and that any speculation about US government involvement is nonsense. Who are you more likely to agree with?

Again, nearly half (47%) said they thought the attacks were thoroughly investigated, and 45% said they should be reinvestigated. Another 8% were not sure. A 2007 follow-up found that 57% of Americans thought the attacks were thoroughly investigated and 38% wanted the attacks reinvestigated.

Chapman University’s “Survey of American Fears” (2016) contains a question that relates not technically to a 9/11 conspiracy but instead to the possibility of a government cover-up. It asks respondents whether they agree with the statement that “The government is concealing what they know about the JFK assassination, Barack Obama’s birth certificate, alien encounters, the recent death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, the moon landing, the 9/11 attacks, plans for a one world government, the AIDS virus and global warming” (eight main areas, plus an additional “fake” topic they call “the North Dakota crash” (no such thing exists). According to Chapman University (2016): “The most prevalent conspiracy theory in the United States is that the government is concealing information about the 9/11 attacks”; 54% said they believe this. Thus, half of American believe the truth about 9/11 has been covered up.

Whether this is true or not is, of course, not known. By definition, cover-ups cannot be known because they are covered up. Yet, at least half of Americans believe a 9/11 cover-up occurred.

4. Did Iraq and Saddam Hussein have any role in the 9/11 attacks?

The fourth area of exploration is whether Saddam Hussein and Iraq had any role in the 9/11 attacks. First, the key truth: There is no direct evidence that Saddam Hussein or Iraq played any role in the 9/11 attacks, yet high-level government leaders in the US made statements suggesting they were involved in the attacks.

The facts

No one outside of US intelligence can assert that Saddam Hussein and Iraq played no role in the 9/11 attacks. What we can say for sure is, there is no publicly available evidence that they did (Author, 2010g). Further, there is clear evidence from 9/11 Commission and Joint Inquiry by Congress that there was no evidence that any contacts between members and leaders of al Qaeda ever became some kind of operational relationship, and that the two groups did not work together to carry out the 9/11 attacks.

There is plenty of evidence, also, to believe that President Bush and members of his White House started planning for war with Iraq before 9/11. Consider books by those involved both in preventing terrorism within the US government and those who investigated it—for example, Senator Bob Graham) (Author, 2010a). There is also clear evidence that, even on the day of 9/11, high-level officials in the White House started planning to attack Iraq. Consider Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (a PNAC affiliate), asking staffers on the very day of the 9/11 attacks for “the best info. Fast. Judge whether good enough to hit Saddam Hussein at same time. Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and things not” (Author, 2010g).

The Bush Administration then began planning for invasion and occupation of Iraq and its oil fields. Publicly available evidence suggests the White House used atypical means of gathering and presenting intelligence information, such as the Office of Special Plans, to try to demonstrate that Iraq played a role in the attacks, in spite of evidence from the CIA that this was not true (Author, 2010g). Senator Bob Graham even notes how the CIA had prepared a threat assessment on Iraq that did not justify a US invasion, so he requested it be made public. Yet, after the declassification process, the threat assessment had been vastly shortened, important limitations of knowledge as well as caveats had been removed, leaving a far different conclusion about the threat posed by Iraq than the original threat assessment (Graham, 2004).

In spite of likely not having any credible evidence that Saddam Hussein and Iraq actually had a role in the 9/11 attacks, members of the Bush Administration made repeated claims that, first, Saddam Hussein actively helped the 9/11 terrorists, and second, Saddam

Hussein’s Iraq posed a “grave and gathering threat” to the US and our allies (as claimed by President Bush). Consider the following examples. In October 2002, President Bush said, “Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases.” Later, Bush said: “The reason I keep insisting that there was a relationship between Iraq and Saddam and al Qaeda, because there was a relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda.” Vice President Dick Cheney said: “Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends against our allies, and against us . . . Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.” President Bush said: “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait of the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud” (Author, 2010g).

A study by the House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform found, in October 2002, that President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had made about 100 misleading or inflated statements about the threat posed by Iraq. So, there is at least no reason to be surprised if Americans believe Saddam Hussein played a role in the 9/11 attacks (Author, 2010g); the President of the United States and his people asked us to believe this.

What People Think

On the issue of whether Americans believed that the nation of Iraq and/or its President Saddam Hussein played any role in the 9/11 attacks, several polls examined this issue. For example, a Newsweek magazine poll of 1,000 Americans (Newsweek, 2007) asked this question at least five times: “Do you think Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq was directly involved in planning, financing, or carrying out the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001?” The responses from those polls are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Newsweek Poll on Whether Saddam Hussein was Involved in the 9/11 Attacks

<i>Date</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Unsure</i>
September 2003	47%	37%	16%
January 2004	49%	39%	12%
September 2004	42%	44%	14%
October 2004	36%	51%	13%
June 2007	41%	50%	9%

That between 36% and 49% of Americans believed that Iraq played a role in the 9/11 attacks when US intelligence clearly shows it did not is troubling. CBS News and The New

York Times (CBS, 2007) also have asked questions of between 900 and 1,100 Americans about the role of Iraq in the attacks, including this question: “Was Saddam personally involved in 9/11?” Results of those polls are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. CBS and New York Times Poll on Whether Saddam Hussein was Involved in the 9/11 Attacks

<i>Date</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
April 2003	53%	38%
October 2005	33%	55%
September 2006	31%	57%
September 2007	33%	58%

A 2013 poll of more than 1,200 Americans by Public Policy Polling asked: “Do you believe Saddam Hussein was involved in the September 11th, 2001, attacks on America, or not?” In this survey, less than one-third (28%) answered they thought Hussein was involved, versus 55% who said they did not, and another 22% said they were not sure (Bowman & Ruggm, 2013).

That nearly one-third of Americans believe any falsehood is troubling. In these polls, a large portion of Americans believed a falsehood, but at least the percentage of people answering yes generally declined over time. Still, it is perhaps not surprising that so many Americans believe a connection between 9/11 and Iraq when the Bush Administration worked so hard to create this impression.

Discussion

This paper examined public opinion polls related to the 9/11 attacks. After first establishing four key facts related to four issues pertaining the attacks, the paper then examined what Americans think about those issues.

The major questions addressed in this paper were:

- 1) Did the United States have advance knowledge of the 9/11 attacks? The answer is yes and public opinion polling suggests that a significant portion of Americans believe the US government had information about the 9/11 attacks before they happened and that it failed to act to stop them, but significantly less people believe the US government intentionally let the attacks happen.
- 2) Was the United States government involved in the 9/11 attacks? The answer is unknown but there is no evidence this is true. A significant portion of Americans believe it is likely that US officials either participated in the attacks or took no action to stop them (and the presumed reason is because they wanted the

US to go to war in the Middle East). Significantly less people believe the US government planted explosives in the World Trade Center, shot down a plane, or fired a missile at the Pentagon.

- 3) Was the truth about the 9/11 attacks covered up? The answer is also unknown although facts have come to light to suggest this might be true. At least half to more than half of Americans believe that the Bush Administration hid something from the 9/11 Commission, and nearly half believe the 9/11 Commission did not investigate critical areas of information. Just over half of Americans believe the government is hiding something about 9/11.
- 4) Did Iraq and Saddam Hussein have any role in the 9/11 attacks? The answer is no, even according to the official account of the attacks by the 9/11 Commission and Joint Inquiry by Congress. Yet, likely due to repeated statements by Bush Administration officials to the contrary, public opinion polls tend to show that sizeable portions of Americans believe Saddam Hussein's Iraq played some role in the 9/11 attacks.

In conclusion, a sizeable portion of Americans are skeptical of the official account of the 9/11 attacks, yet, a large portion of Americans also continue to believe falsehoods about them. That 20 years have passed since the attacks and yet, we still don't know all of what really happened and why, is a sad reality. Scholars who study the reasons that people believe conspiracy theories note that one reason conspiracy theories are created and spread across populations is because of a lack of important information about key events on which the conspiracy theories are based (Knight, 2008). So, perhaps the fact that two official investigations into the attacks—one by the 9/11 Commission and the other by a joint Congressional inquiry—did not provide all the necessary information to fully understand the attacks—is a significant reason why conspiracy theories related to the attacks came forth.

Clearly, a lack of quality, factual information about world events can generate conspiracy theories. Scholars note, for example, that “those who hold [false, harmful, and unjustified] conspiracy theories ... do so not as a result of a mental illness of any kind, or of simple irrationality, but as a result of a ‘crippled epistemology,’ in the form of a sharply limited number of (relevant) informational sources” (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009: 204; also see Hardin, 2002). Sunstein and Vermeule (2009: 211) suggest these people “know very few things, and what they know is wrong.”

While it may be comforting to call conspiracy theories stupid, there are also very credible and educated people who became part of the “9/11 Truth Movement” including 9/11 victims' family members who asked questions in writing for and made demands of US leaders, as well as even “Scholars for 9/11 Truth.” People, including professors from various academic disciplines, have pointed out serious problems with and questions related to the official accounts of the 9/11 attacks (see, for example, Morgan, & Henshall, 2005). One such question is addressed shortly.

Yet, there are other things noted by scholars examining why conspiracy theories begin, spread, and persist. Underlying personal traits such as political party affiliation, level of education, employment status, marital status, degree and type of religious faith, distrust in authority, authoritarianism, distrust of others, political cynicism, pessimism, degree of faith in government, fear of government, and personality traits including possibly paranoia, psychopathology, narcissism, degree of self-esteem, and even mental illness are all found in some ways to be related to the likelihood of believing in conspiracy theories (Chapman University, 2016; Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017; Douglas, Uscinski, Sutton, Cichocka, Nefes, Ang, & Deravi, 2019; Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009; Swami & Coles, 2021; van Prooijen & Vugt First, 2018; but see Andreas & Martin, 2019).

Probably the most significant unanswered question related to the 9/11 attacks is the likely relationship between the George W. Bush presidential administration and the Project for a New American Century, or PNAC, introduced earlier in the paper, and the possible role this had in the attacks (see, for example, Griffin, 2005). Knight (2008: 174) notes that conspiracy “theorists often point ... to *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*, a 2000 report by the neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century (PNAC), that refers to a “new Pearl Harbor” (an event that in conspiracy theorists’ eyes was either deliberately planned or allowed to happen).” The belief that the US government was somehow involved in the 9/11 attacks, either by letting it happen (LIH) or making it happen (MIH), “tends to rely on a portrait of a tight-knit cabal with the highest reaches of government, involving the CIA, perhaps even the president and his neocon cronies themselves, motivated by the lust for oil, money, or imperialist power” (Knight, 2008: 176).

This is obviously unlikely, and frankly, should be hard to believe, given some of the other things that conspiracy theories tend to believe. Sunstein and Vermeule (2009: 209) explain this idea, writing: “To think ... that U.S. government officials destroyed the World Trade Center and then covered their tracks requires an ever-widening conspiracy theory, in which the 9/11 Commission, congressional leaders, the FBI, and the media were either participants in, or, at best, dupes of the conspiracy. But anyone who believed that would undercut the grounds for many of their other beliefs, which are warranted only by trust in the knowledge-producing institutions created by government and society.”

Nevertheless, enough actual facts have been reported in mainstream media sources to make such a conspiracy at least believable, if not easier to believe. Consider, for example, three really notable examples of what different elements of the US government knew prior to the 9/11 attacks. Consider the following three examples, keeping in mind each of these has been reported on by the mainstream press (Thompson, 2004)!

First, in January of 2000, two men, Hijackers Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhdar, took part in a gathering of al-Qaeda operatives in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Both had already been identified by US intelligence as terrorist operatives for US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. The CIA also did not alert Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) so they could be denied entry at the borders. The CIA says it notified the FBI so that

these men could be put under surveillance if they entered the US, but the FBI says it never got any information from the CIA on these men.

Senator Bob Graham, who chaired the Joint Inquiry investigation by Congress, asserts that if al-Midhdar and al-Hazmi would have been put on the State Department watch list, both would have been denied entry into the US and could have been interrogated when they tried to enter the country, and if the FBI would have been alerted, it could have located the men in the US. Both men entered the US on January 8, 2000 through the LA Airport, which would have been prevented had the future hijackers been watch listed, and perhaps the 9/11 plot may have been discovered at this time.

The Joint Inquiry notes that Al-Midhdar could not fly well so he left the country and started recruiting the so-called “muscle hijackers.” While out of the US for 13 months, his multiple-entry visa expired and thus he applied for a new one at the consular office in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Since he had not been watch listed yet, he was stamped a new visa. The CIA knew he was a “major league killer who orchestrated the Cole attack and possibly the African bombings” (according to an email sent by a CIA officer to Director of Central Intelligence’s Counterterrorism Center in July 2001). CIA Director George Tenet admitted to the Joint Inquiry: “We had at that point the level of detail needed to watch list [al-Midhdar] — that is to nominate him to the State Department for refusal of entry into the US or to deny him another visa. Our officers ... did not do so.” This is a stunning admission of a significant failure of US intelligence.

Tenet would go on to be awarded, from President George W. Bush, the Presidential Medal of Freedom in December, 2004. One could wonder why someone who failed so significantly would be awarded the nation’s highest honor, unless the failure was worthy of award. This is the factual stuff on which conspiracy theories are often based.

These two 9/11 hijackers were aided by a man named Omar al-Bayoumi, a Saudi national living in the US. According to Graham (2004), his job was to keep an eye on Saudis in San Diego, especially college students engaged in activities that might threaten Saudi Arabia. Al-Bayoumi vouched for hijackers Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhdar (so that they would be accepted into the community and its mosque). Al-Bayoumi may have even picked up the two hijackers from Los Angeles, though he denied it and claimed he met the two men by chance in a Middle Eastern restaurant just miles from the airport.

Al-Bayoumi claimed the two men did not like it in Los Angeles and so he told them if they would like to move to San Diego they should just call him. Before picking up the two hijackers, al-Bayoumi met privately with an official from the consulate’s section on Islamic and cultural affairs, Fahad al-Thumairy, who was also a prayer leader at a local mosque in LA. Graham (2004: 12) says of al-Thumairy: “With a number of suspected terrorist ties, he was no friend of the United States. In fact, in May 2003, the United States would revoke al-Thumairy’s diplomatic visa, ban him from the United States, and put him on a plane back to Riyadh.”

Graham (2004: 13) summarizes all these events: "That a suspected Saudi spy would drive 125 miles to a meeting at the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles, where he would meet with a consular officer with suspected terrorist ties, and then drive another seven miles to the one Middle Eastern restaurant—out of more than 134 Middle Eastern restaurants in Los Angeles—where he would happen to sit next to two future terrorists, to whom he would happen to offer friendship and support, cannot credibly be described as a coincidence." This pertains to the alleged involvement of Saudi Arabia in the 9/11 attacks, and recall that 27 pages of the Joint Inquiry pertaining to Saudi Arabia were classified. Again, such factual information will logically lead to conspiracy theories.

Incredibly, less than a week after their supposed chance meeting, al-Bayoumi received a call from Nawaf al-Hazmi. He and al-Midhdar decided to move to San Diego and stayed at al-Bayoumi's place until they could find their own. Al-Bayoumi also offered to supplement the funds they were receiving from home. Eventually, al-Hazmi and al-Midhdar found an apartment at Parkwood apartment complex, almost directly across the street from al-Bayoumi. Al-Bayoumi secured the apartment for the two hijackers and paid the first two months rent for them. He also arranged a party for them to introduce the two hijackers to the Saudi community in San Diego.

Al-Bayoumi had various streams of money from Saudi Arabia, including the Saudi Kingdom itself, Ercan—a Saudi aviation services company—and the wife of spy Omar Bassnan, who was suspected of being groomed to replace al-Bayoumi in San Diego.

From January to May 2000, Congress reports that al-Bayoumi had a large number of phone conversations with Saudi officials in LA and DC.

One money trail to Omar al-Bayoumi was from Ercan (which contracted with Dallah Avco Aviation, a Saudi government contractor owned by Saleh Kamel, who is a member of the "Golden Chain" that provided money to Usama bin Laden and al-Qaeda regularly. According to the evidence, al-Bayoumi showed up for work once and the supervisor wanted to fire him. The supervisor was told that if he was not kept on the payroll, Ercan's contract would be terminated. When the company tried to end fire him, it got a letter from the director general of Saudi Civil Aviation which said it wanted al-Bayoumi's contract renewed as quickly as possible. His monthly stipend for this job was \$2,800 with allowances of \$465 a month. After inviting al-Hazmi and al-Midhdar to San Diego and getting them places to live, his monthly allowance rose to \$3,700. They stayed at that level until al-Hazmi left for Arizona.

Osama Bassnan, al-Bayoumi's friend, got money from the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC, for surgery for his wife. He got a check for \$15,000 but then needed more, so his wife made a separate request. She appealed to the Ambassador's wife (Princess Haifa al-Faisal, and the Ambassador is Prince Bandar), and began getting checks every month between \$2,000 and \$3,000. In 2000, Bassnan began signing over her checks to a woman named Manal Bajadr (the wife of Omar al-Bayoumi). This money ended up going to al-Hazmi and al-Midhdar, showing a likely source of funding

for the attacks from Saudi Arabia. Senator Bob Graham (2004: 168) says “to follow that stream of income is to trace a line from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the wife of one spy, to the wife of another, and ultimately to the hands of two plotting terrorists.”

As if this story is not alarming enough, it gets even more outlandish—in a way that could conceivably lead even rational people to start believing in sinister conspiracy theories. When al-Midhdar left the US in April 2000, al-Hazmi noticed that a man named Abdussatar Shaikh (a retired English professor from San Diego State University) had posted on the Mosque bulletin board that he had quarters in his home for a committed young Muslim. So al-Hazmi moved into his house. According to Senator Bob Graham (2004: 20): “Shaikh was on the payroll of the San Diego office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation as an agency asset. His job was to monitor the Saudi community in San Diego and report to the FBI any suspicious behavior he observed.” As Graham (2004: 20-21) says, incredibly: “Two future terrorists, both of whom would later be placed on the government’s watch list, were living under the nose of an FBI informant, and one would later actually live with him, yet the informant was never asked to draw more information from them, get closer to them, or gain their confidence.”

All of this information leads to possible connections between the CIA, FBI, Saudi Arabia, and the 9/11 attacks. It may help us understand why some people believe the US government was somehow involved in the 9/11 attacks, by LIH or MIH. It might also reasonably lead one to believe that Saudi Arabia helped carry out the attacks. Yet, there is more. Second, in February 2000, a man by the name of Zacarias Moussaoui flew into the US in Chicago and ultimately enrolled in flight training in Eagan, Minnesota to begin training on a Boeing flight simulator, in August 2001. Moussaoui was not a typical flight school student for he did not have a pilot’s license, was not employed by an airline, and had not logged any flight hours. His suspicious activities concerned flight school employees, including his extreme interests in operation of the plane’s doors and control panel and that he said he would love to fly from London’s Heathrow Airport to JFK Airport in New York; he also paid \$6,800 in cash. Employees discussed how much fuel is on a Boeing 747 and the damage such a plane could do if it were to hit something.

After being taken into custody after he caused suspicions among people at the school, Moussaoui was found to be in possession of two knives, padded gloves, and shin guards. FBI officials believed him to be making preparations to “seize control of an airplane.” Graham (2004: 24) notes that Moussaoui and his roommate were described, in writing, as “suspect 747 airline attackers” and he a “suspect airline suicide attacker,” who might be “involved in a larger plot to target airlines traveling from Europe to the U.S.” An email from an FBI agent specifically predicted that if Moussaoui hijacked a plane in New York it would have enough fuel to reach DC!

The error of the FBI in the Moussaoui case is that it did not get search warrants to search his materials because they did not believe they could link him to a foreign power, as required by Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Court at the time (Graham,

2004). To the knowledge of this author, no one has reported if any evidence was ever found linking Moussaoui to the actual 9/11 plan. Yet, that his training of apparently preparing for such an attack as that carried out on 9/11 did not help the US government prevent 9/11 may lead some to believe in outlandish ideas such as the government LIH or MIH.

Third, in July 2001, an FBI official in Phoenix, Arizona sent information electronically to others (the so-called “Phoenix memo”) in the Radical Fundamentalist Unit and the Usama Bin Ladin Unit at FBI headquarters, as well as others. The agent had first-hand knowledge “that there was a coordinated effort underway by Bin Ladin to send students to the United States for civil aviation-related training” (Graham, 2004: xiii). This official testified that he was aware of a plot by terrorists to crash a plane into the CIA. One of the people training at a flight school here was Hani Hanjour, a 9/11 hijacker, and he trained with someone specifically mentioned in the electronic communication.

This “Phoenix memo” was sent by Kenneth Williams, who first became concerned with Libyans with suspected terrorist ties working for US aviation companies in the 1990s. The continuing investigation of one man identified by Williams found six associates also involved in aviation training, including 9/11 hijacker Hani Hanjour. On at least five occasions, the two men were at the same flight school on the same day and at least once, they flew together.

Senator Bob Graham (2004: 47) says that “had William’s recommendations been acted upon promptly, liaisons with the flight schools would have found at least one and perhaps as many as three other hijackers still developing their flying skills.” That this did not occur may be another reason some people believe the US government either LIH or MIH.

These three incidents are shocking when taken together. Yet, it remains true that none of this means that anyone within the White House or even US intelligence had access to all of this information. That fact alone greatly diminishes the possibility that the government let 9/11 happen (LIH) or made it happen (MIH); it likely did not have all of the necessary information to prevent the attack on that day. So, support for conspiracy theories related to LIH and MIH are likely tied to a lack of information that actually condemns anyone in the US government for their involvement in the attacks.

It is also possible that political partisanship directly impacts what people believe. Consider, for example, that most of the earliest conspiracy theories about the attack dealt only with the *what* part of what happened—for example, did a commercial airliner actually hit the Pentagon or was a missile fired into it?, were bombs used to help bring down the World Trade Center?, etc. (Knight, 2008). The US State Department even once maintained a website that disputes some of these “top September 11 conspiracy theories” (Knight, 2008). It was not until the beginning of the US war on Iraq in 2003 and George W. Bush’s re-election to President in 2004 that major conspiracy theories about the *who* part of the 9/11 attacks emerged—for example, did the US government allow, encourage, or participate in the attacks? This has led some scholars to reason that anti-war, anti-candidate,

anti-President, and partisanship sentiments might very well influence beliefs in conspiracy theories (Vankin, 1991).

Public opinion polls are consistent with this idea, as self-identified Democrats and liberals are more likely to believe in the LIH or MIH theories than self-identified Republicans or conservatives. For example, Byler and Woodsome (2021) cite a poll from 2006, showing that 52% of Democrats but only 18% of Republicans believed that people in the US government either assisted in the attacks (MIH) or allowed them to happen (LIH) so that they could go to war. They cite another poll from 2009 showing that 25% of Democrats but only 4% of Republicans believed that President Bush intentionally allowed the 9/11 attacks to happen (LIH) so he could lead us into war. Interestingly, however, a poll from 2016 found that 26% of Democrats and 21% of Republicans said it was definitely or probably true that the US government helped plan the 9/11 attacks (MIH). Another poll from 2020 found that 19% of Democrats and 10% of Republicans said they thought it was entirely or mostly accurate that senior officials in the Bush Administration had advance notice of the 9/11 attacks but did not stop them so they could go to war (LIH).

Knight (2008: 181) writes that “the reelection of Bush in 2004 and the slowly disintegrating American mission in Iraq ... prompted many Americans to rethink the official version of the road from 9/11 to war in the Gulf.” He continues, saying that “the troubling reality of contemporary events provokes the need to posit retrospectively a primal scene of conspiracy as a symbolically necessary origin for present woes.” Of course, that President Bush and other officials in his administration made false claims about Iraq’s involvement in 9/11, as well as having no clear warnings about the attacks, may have made believing negative things about them more likely. Knight (2008: 181) agrees, claiming that “revelations of spin doctoring and outright lying by federal officials have fueled the conspiracy theories.” And he gives what he calls the “obvious examples” that “include the claim about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; the too easy acceptance of apparently forged documents purporting to show that Saddam [Hussein] had attempted to purchase yellowcake uranium ore from Niger; the belated release in 2004 (under pressure from the 9/11 Commission) of the Presidential Daily Briefing [PDB] of August 6, 2001, which included the section: ‘Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US’; and recent reports that NORAD lied to the 9/11 Commission (Knight, 2008: 181-182).”

So, there may be some valid reason to believe a person you either think or know has lied to you might be involved in some other nefarious activities, even if that is not actually true. But, it is also claimed that people tend to believe in things that tend to reinforce the worldview they already hold, as a form of “biased assimilation” of evidence (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009: 234) or “confirmation bias” (Swami & Coles, 2021: 3). This may especially likely if believing in that thing may give them a sense of relief or other emotional satisfaction demanded by events as serious and traumatic as 9/11 (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009).

A couple final points about conspiracies must be made here. First, Knight (2008: 169) reminds us that “the official version of 9/11 is itself a conspiracy theory.” Specifically,

the two official investigations into the 9/11 Commission—one by the 9/11 Commission appointed by President Bush and the author by both houses of and political parties in Congress—concluded that the following people were involved in the attacks:

1. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (the alleged mastermind of what was called the “planes operation”)
2. Usama bin Laden (who approved a scaled-down version of the attacks)
3. Nineteen hijackers who were on the planes the day of the attacks
4. A 20th hijacker who never made it on one of the planes.

Thus, the official story of 9/11 is that *at least 22* people entered into an agreement to carry out the attacks, a conspiracy! One might refer to the official story then as a “genuine political conspiracy” (Swami & Coles, 2021), of which you would hope an informed citizen would be aware. Knowing the truth about 9/11 means believing a conspiracy theory.

Second, let’s also remember that President Bush and officials in his White House administration made prolonged and consistent efforts to make the 9/11 conspiracy even bigger by involving Saddam Hussein and Iraq. So, the Bush Administration itself peddled an additional 9/11 conspiracy theory, that “Saddam Hussein had conspired with Al Qaeda to support the 9/11 attacks” (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009: 239), even this claim was based on faulty, forged, and false information.

It is almost certainly false that President Bush had anything to do with the 9/11 attacks, but one can question why he would make up stories about Saddam Hussein and alleged links to al Qaeda, links that both official investigations ultimately rejected. Such questioning activities can even lead to conspiracy theories, including many that would be false.

Over time, people may develop a “monological belief system” whereby they come to see many things, even unrelated things, in the same light (Swami, & Coles, 2021). As an example, Chapman University’s “Survey of American Fears” (2016), discussed in the findings section of this paper, found “strong evidence that the United States is a strongly conspiratorial society.” They continue: “Only about a fourth of Americans (26%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with all nine conspiracy theories. The remaining three-fourths (74%) of the population finds at least one conspiracy theory somewhat convincing, if not more than one. Fully 10% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed with all nine conspiracies. Recall that one of the conspiracies they ask about is the “fake” topic they call “the North Dakota crash” (no such thing exists)—33% of respondents think the government is hiding something about this invented event!

The idea that Saddam Hussein played a role in the 9/11 attacks is false. The notion that the US government played some role in the attacks is also likely false. Interestingly, conspiracy theories related to those claims—Saddam Hussein enabled or carried out the attacks and the US government did it—are quite contradictory. This makes it hard to understand how people could believe that both are true, unless you invent a new conspiracy

theory that the US government worked with Saddam Hussein to carry out the attacks. The author will not touch that with a ten foot poll.

But consider figure 1. It shows Donald Rumsfeld, then special envoy of President Ronald Reagan, shaking hands with Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, Iraq on December 20, 1983 (Battle, 2003). Rumsfeld would go on to be Secretary of Defense under President George W. Bush, and would be the architect of the war on Iraq decades later. Incredibly, the Baghdad meeting with Saddam Hussein and Donald Rumsfeld was reported in the mainstream news (ABC News, 2006), yet this reporting did not apparently lead to public opinion polling on the issue of PNAC and its alleged role in 9/11. Still, a simple image, absent the important historical context, could easily lead to a new conspiracy theory.



Figure 1: Donald Rumsfeld Meets with Saddam Hussein in Iraq

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