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Top Ten Conspiracy Theories of 2002

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Top Ten Conspiracy Theories of 2002

Courtesy of Indymedia New York, Mike Ward of PopMatters lists the most outrageous top ten officially spun conspiracy theories of the year - Scoop Editor's Note: If you feel like a laugh then read this!

He forgot to mention the most outlandish conspiracy of them all (and the most widely accepted): 19 hijackers from a third world terrorist group armed with boxcutters forced 3 planes into 3 of the the nation's most important and symbolic structures with no assistance from US government/intelligence insiders.

By Mike Ward, PopMatters

For about thirty minutes after his chief of staff told him that America was under attack, George W. Bush continued to sit in an elementary school classroom listening to a second-grader tell a story about a pet goat. He did a marvelous job of looking completely unsurprised. Meanwhile, four hijacked jumbo jets were able to fly off-course across several states without encountering any opposition from the most powerful and responsive air force in the world.

Less then a month later, on the pretext of pursuing terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden, the Bush administration began what it called a "war" on the impoverished and already war-torn country of Afghanistan. It turns out this assault had been in the works well before September 11 took place.

Soon after replacing the Taliban government with one more to its liking (and, in what is surely a coincidence, resuscitating the world's most bountiful opium fields), the administration began agitating for a similar, but even more destructive, bombardment of the oil-rich nation of Iraq. This, although Osama bin Laden was still at large and no link between him and Saddam Hussein could be established.

For these reasons and hundreds of others, the year following September 11 has seen probably the most staggering proliferation of "conspiracy theories" in American history. Angry speculation ^ focused mainly on government dirty dealings, ulterior motives, and potential complicity in the attacks ^ has risen to a clamor that easily rivals what followed the Kennedy assassination. Some of these suppositions are patent balderdash. But many others are coherent and well argued, and cite disconcerting reports from the U.S. corporate media and respected overseas news desks to support their claims. Providing grist for the mill are such odd episodes as last year's partisan anthrax poisonings (using

U.S. army microbes) and the sniper attacks that recently plagued Washington, DC.

Following are the ten most alarming theories about September 11, the "war on terror," and the future of the world. Feel free to accept them as gospel, study them as symptoms of a traumatized culture, or scoff at them as anti-American propaganda: I'm only the messenger. Personally, though, at this point the only person I hold above suspicion in the matter of September 11 is that poor kid with the goat.

### 1. Great Game in the Caspian Sea.

Among the theories about the administration's real reasons for bombing and occupying Afghanistan, the one with the most traction argues that Afghanistan provides the best real estate for an oil and natural gas pipeline. Believers say that fossil fuels in the Caspian Sea, once part of the Soviet empire, are now up for grabs in a fierce contest between Russia and the West. To the winner will go control of much of the energy supply for East Asia. Sources cited in support of this idea ^ which has gotten ink in England's Guardian newspaper and the BBC, as well as offhand mention on U.S. Sunday talk shows ^ include Zbigniew Brzezinski's apology for empire, *The Grand Chessboard*, and a 1998 Taliban-damning report to Congress from the oil company Unocal. But the most telling evidence of all: now that Afghanistan is a satellite state of the Bush administration, the pipeline is actually being built!.

### 2. The Afghanistan/Enron Connection.

Rumor has it that in the months before Enron's collapse, Bush, Cheney, and the much-gossiped-about "energy task force" convened daily, high-priority meetings to try and engineer a bailout for Bush's most generous campaign contributor. At the peak of the Enron scandal and in the aftermath of the attack on Afghanistan, a fascinating document surfaced in conspiracy circles that told of a bank-breaking Enron venture: a power plant the firm had partly built in India. Plagued with cost overruns and accusations of employee mistreatment that led to violent labor disputes, the power plant became a cash sinkhole that threatened to send Enron into insolvency ^ unless the plant could tap into a pipeline network to be spun off from the Caspian Sea venture and recover some of its losses by operating on natural gas. A detailed and intriguing read, this document explains why Dick Cheney would sooner chug a quart of 10W-40 than surrender the minutes of those energy meetings.

### 3. The Magic Passport Theory.

We can now add Mohamed Atta's reality-defying passport to the Arlen Specter Gallery of Improbable Projectiles. This incriminating item was thrown intact from a cataclysmic fireball and miraculously plucked from 1.6 million tons of debris in a matter of hours. The corporate media rarely mention the unlikelihood

of this. Many in the alternative press, though, are unafraid to draw an obvious, albeit taboo, inference: that the Atta passport is planted evidence. According to Washington, DC, peace activist John Judge, other potential plants include the Arabic-language flight manuals left in one of the hijackers' cars (with note: The discussion of the flight manuals begins at around 13:30). These manuals could serve no useful purpose at such a late stage unless the hijackers planned to finish learning how to fly during a half-hour ride to the airport. But as deliberately placed articles, they are as if a signed diary called "My Plan to Kill the President" had been unearthed in Lee Harvey Oswald's flat. Also high on the possible planted evidence list is a spiritual manifesto for the Al Qaeda kamikaze pilots, which, to journalist Robert Fisk, sounds an awful lot like it was written by a God-fearing Christian.

#### 4. Hijacker Oddities I.

Little-observed in the fine print of the FBI rap sheet on the September 11 hijackers was a clumsily phrased disclaimer admitting that the Bureau's document wasn't, ahem, necessarily a final draft (with note: "It should be noted that attempts to confirm the true identities of these individuals are still under way").

Ringleader Mohamed Atta's identity was a slam-dunk, of course, owing to the propitious recovery of his passport. But bear in mind how quickly the FBI conjured its 19 Enemies of the State while you ponder the strange case of Waleed

Al Shehri. In an article for the BBC, this Saudi Arabian national says that he turned up on the FBI list and feels that rumors of his death were greatly exaggerated. Not to be outdone, the British Daily Telegraph also ran an article on the subject, claiming to have found no fewer than four of the supposed September 11 attackers ^ alive, well, and hopping mad. Pending long overdue clarification from John Ashcroft's vaunted Bureau, one can hardly blame the conspiracy-minded for crying "patsy."

#### 5. Hijacker Oddities II.

Another theory about the hijackers' real identities takes as its departure an utterly bizarre and largely overlooked story on MSNBC.com, which says that some of the hijackers may have trained at U.S. Army bases. Yes, you read that right. Strange as it may seem, providing terrorists-slash- "freedom fighters" with lethal skills is a tradition in certain specialized arms of the American military and U.S. intelligence. The infamous School of the Americas, for example, helped to train the death squads that claimed so many innocent lives in Central America. Even so, the idea that the government might aid Osama's minions is completely beyond the pale, right? Perhaps. But remember the CIA and the military's record-breaking aid program to the Afghan Mujahedin movement, as outlined, for example, in John Cooley's Unholy Wars. Questions about hijacker links to U.S. intelligence got more complicated when the spook watchdog

magazine

CovertAction Quarterly claimed that many of the hijackers got into the country using CIA "snitch" visas. (This article can be found in CovertAction Quarterly's

Winter 2001, 41-44; the BBC conducted an interview with the author, Michael Springmann). As with many issues involving The Agency, this promises to be shrouded in mystery for a long time.

## 6. Insider Trades.

Remember right after the attacks when you couldn't watch TV for five minutes without hearing somebody say "put option"? The 9/11 insider stock trades got endless airplay on the major networks before Osama bin Laden became fixed in the

popular imagination, whereupon the media bent themselves to the task of establishing his guilt. Still, even if Al Qaeda placed the 4,744 suspicious transactions, wouldn't the story still be useful, if only to further illuminate the terrorist network's money machine? Apparently not, because the story didn't just fade away over time; it suddenly vanished. Once in a while, a TV news anchorperson would assure us there had been "nothing to" the rumors while failing to explain, if this was true, where the story had come from or why it had gotten so such attention.

But conservative scandal-tracker Tom Flocco didn't give up on the hinky stock trades. In a series of articles, he follows the money back to a bigwig in the financial firm Deutsche Bank, who also was once executive director of (surprise!) the CIA. Some might question Flocco's credibility as an investigative reporter, I suppose ^ although credibility in the news business appears to be a dead letter anyway, if CNN could accidentally fabricate the 5,000 trades out of whole cloth to begin with.

## 7. The New World Order Will Not Be Televised.

Assuming you haven't stopped reading yet ^ either to start digging a bomb shelter in your backyard or to flip on FOX News for a much-needed dose of pro-war soma ^ you have to be wondering how these flabbergasting stories escaped the notice of America's intrepid newshounds. Examine this question for even a minute and you will stumble onto a proven, card-carrying evil conspiracy: it's called the U.S. Congress, and conclusive evidence links them to a truly terrifying document known as the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

This legislation is relevant post-9/11 because it allowed the megamergers of media conglomerates to become ultra-monstermergers. As a result, today a handful

of multinationals control most of what is said in the U.S. about military actions overseas and the reasons for them. At least one of these companies ^ General Electric ^ has financial stakes in the weapons racket as well, but this blatant conflict of interest gets as much coverage as the Telecommunications Act

originally got when it was on the floor of Congress: next to none. Some media observers and academics, like MIT's Noam Chomsky and Norman Solomon of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, have doggedly pointed out that the bloated media

emperor has no clothes. Too bad they stand little chance of appearing regularly on Face the Nation.

Not many people noticed when the rules governing what gets said about war and who gets to say it were exposed in Harper's Magazine, which ran a Florida News Herald memo outlining some of the carefully crafted talking points journalists must observe in discussing U.S. bombing campaigns. Among them: ignore or minimize innocent death. "If the story needs rewriting to play down the civilian casualties" caused by U.S. bombings, the Herald's copy desk decrees, "DO IT.... Failure to follow any of these or other standing rules could put your job in jeopardy" (1). Lesson? If you live in the U.S. and think you know what your government is doing to other countries and why, just because you watch cable or read a daily newspaper ^ think again.

#### 8. Iran/Contra Redux.

Near the end of 2002, a surprisingly lethargic debate was underway in the U.S. concerning the "war on terror"'s erosion of Americans' civil liberties ^ which many felt were already pretty meager anyhow, having been picked clean during two decades of the "war on drugs." The debate took a turn toward the paranormal when the corporate media briefly went agog over the Bush administration's citizen-stalking Information Awareness Office. By the time it got mentioned in the Washington Post, though, the IAO was old news to flying saucer buffs: Art Bell rival Jeff Rense had already run several articles scrutinizing the IAO's logo, which ^ with its all-seeing, Masonic pyramid-and-eyeball ^ seems meant to agitate the growing ranks of the understandably paranoid.

It takes only a few clicks on the IAO's homepage to learn that the agency is presided over by Iran/Contra luminary John Poindexter, just one weapons-running Reagan-era alumnus to find an honored seat in Dubya's star chamber. Also plucked from political ignominy is Elliot Abrams, who has gone from pleading no-contest to charges of perjury before Congress to helping lead the Bush Administration's Mid-East policy. These are only two of the administration's many questionable appointments ^ don't even get me started on Henry Kissinger ^ but Iran/Contra is a matter of special note to conspiracy trackers. Take the late Mae Brussell, a minor legend to some for her reflections on the Kennedy murder. She once provided scathing alternative assessments of Iran/Contra for her underground radio show, "World Watchers". Like Tom Flocco, Mae Brussell should be taken with some healthy skepticism. Even so, the rage behind her accusations ^ she links the Iran/Contra figures with wholesale drug dealing and the CIA with the Jonestown massacre ^ is a predictable result when bloody official policies are conducted absent anything resembling consent of the governed.

#### 9. The Reichstag Fire and Operation Northwoods.

Now things get really weird. To those who scoff at the idea that the government

could have had foreknowledge of or complicity in the September 11 attacks, conspiracy researchers respond that attacks have been faked or manufactured plenty of times before, usually to maneuver the public into supporting a war they would otherwise oppose. The Nazi party, for instance, most likely set fire to the Reichstag building in order to pin the crime on the communists and galvanize the people behind their police-state tactics. They also forged a fake battle to justify their invasion of Poland (2). Sure, you say, but the Nazis were like that. Unfortunately, similar incidents pop up in the U.S.'s recent past, as well. Frequently mentioned examples include Pearl Harbor ^ which many, such as Day of Deceit author Robert Stinnett, feel was allowed to happen to prompt America's entry into World War II ^ and the weird Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Researchers discussing this issue often cite an interesting find: an internal Pentagon document from the early 1960s, which appears in James Bamford's book on military subterfuge, *Body of Secrets*, and puts the lie to the contention that the government would never manufacture incidents or attack its own people to lead the country to war. The Operation Northwoods memo is the result of a brainstorming session on ways to help sell military action in Cuba by fabricating or committing acts of violence and blaming them on Fidel Castro. Among its suggestions: shoot down a plane full of college students, sink an American ship ("casualty lists in U.S. newspapers would cause a helpful wave of national indignation"), or rig astronaut John Glenn's rocket to explode. The Northwoods memo invites us to rethink what some in the government might be capable of not only in terms of September 11 but also the Kennedy assassination.

After all, if spectacular murders of people like John Glenn are conceivable, is it so fantastic to plot the assassination of a sitting president?

## 10. Things to Come.

For many writers ^ like [www.rense.com](http://www.rense.com)'s Diane Harvey ^ the corruption of American empire is relevant, but only as a sidebar. The real problem stems from two incontrovertible facts: that reserves of oil and other non-renewable resources will someday run out, and that on its current course, the Earth is soon to become overloaded with people. If these twin problems go unaddressed, our species faces a gloomy fate. As the situation gets worse, governance in the traditional mode, based around at least the pretense of liberal democracy, will become impossible. Instead, naked power grabs will become the norm for wealthy elites capable of mounting them. "The people"'s job will be simply to provide money and labor for the war machines that make these imperial conquests possible; those who aspire to a role in their own governance beyond subsidizing imperial expansion will be brutally repressed.

Harvey and others feel that such a global transformation has already begun, and episodes like September 11 and the U.S. government's bizarre obsession with oil-laden Iraq are among its harbingers. But, you say, oil supplies look fine from where you sit. According to hard-on-the-eyes website, [www.dieoff.org](http://www.dieoff.org), the problem won't manifest itself all at once, when the world's oil wells suddenly dry up. It is instead happening incrementally, because the rate of production

has started to lag behind the world's increasing demand. Among numerous cases in point, [www.dieoff.org](http://www.dieoff.org) cites "The Coming Anarchy," an Atlantic Monthly article describing intolerable government repression in the long-neglected region of sub-Saharan Africa. Such will be the harvest of empire for our overextended world: warlordism, brutal dictatorships that verge on chaos ^ death, and in vast quantities. I don't know whether these predictions will come to pass. But after this past year, I find the possibility an awful lot easier to imagine (29).

## Honorable Mentions

The top 10 conspiracy theories, speculations, and plain odd things I didn't have space to discuss here:

1. The Mel Carnahan and Paul Wellstone plane crashes.
2. Jeb Bush's 7 September 2001 martial law declaration in Florida (Executive Order 01-261).
3. The Flight 93 debris patterns and the ease with which the Flight 93 story that circulated in the major media fits into an archetypal "hero" narrative.
4. Warren Buffett, who ^ among with several other World Trade Center executives ^ went to Offutt AFB before the attacks on the morning of September 11. This is where Bush went after the attacks began.
5. Potential CIA links to the coup in Venezuela.
6. Cynthia McKinney's insinuation of possible government complicity in September 11 on the floor of Congress.
7. The Phoenix memo and the curious case of the FBI whistleblowers.
8. The idea that the anti-aircraft missiles used when Bush visited Genoa, Italy, we intended to thwart a kamikaze attack.
9. The Bin Laden family's clandestine flight out of the United States in the days after September 11.
10. Bush's 6 August 2001, comprehensive briefing, "Bin Laden

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