

Conspiracy Theories and Science - Addendum 2019

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In my previous essay on this topic, I covered most of the important criteria for distinguishing conspiracy theories from legitimate scientific theories and reports. I offer here a few more observations to assist in clarifying this critical distinction.

Investigations – after the occurrence of major public events that arouse a great emotional outpouring – are not controlled scientific experiments. In these investigations, evidence is almost always not as complete or as contained as we would like, and methodology is not as controlled as would be desirable. This situation is just the basic condition that applies to virtually all major investigations – however careful, systematic and scientific. There are always “holes” in both the evidence and the methodology. To exploit these holes and claim that they are indications of a calculated cover up by the perpetrators and investigators is to pretend that an investigation is a controlled experiment – completely unrealistic and a fundamental fallacy in argument. This mistake is unfortunately a common characteristic of conspiracy theories.

Most major public events that evoke serious investigations include investigators from several different government agencies, internal technical experts from these and other departments that perform the designated analyses of the data collected, and outside independent experts who assist in the primary assessments and review and evaluate the results of the investigation. This is a complex process with a great many participants – internal and external – and many points of assessment for accuracy and completeness. And, if such investigations are to be credible, from the outset, they must be open to all reasonable possibilities and points of view. To claim that all of the involved parties are colluding in a conspiracy to guide the investigation to a singular overall result, which constitutes a “cover up” of the real cause and/or the true responsible parties, is to impune the ethical integrity of both government in general and academia in particular. This is an extraordinary claim, especially in a democratic nation with an independent and diverse academic community, and with a free mainstream press and full internet access for all. In spite of these facts, conspiracy theorists often make this extraordinary claim. Of course, investigations can “get it wrong,” but usually when this occurs, it is the result of major new evidence arising after the original investigation has concluded.

Conspiracy theories surrounding major public events often depend upon compounded conspiracy claims in their arguments – that is “nested” conspiracies. There can be the claims that relevant evidence is being

suppressed by controlling parties, that standard procedures are being intentionally violated, that investigators are being restricted from needed access, that investigators are colluding with one another to support the “official” interpretation, that analysts are colluding for the same reason, that undue political pressure is being applied to push the investigation to a particular conclusion, that the real responsible parties are colluding and keeping themselves hidden from view, that the mainstream media is colluding to suppress the evidence revealing the primary colluding agencies, individuals and institutions, etc. The problem for such “nested” conspiracy theories is that their validity depends on all of these interrelated conspiracies being accurate for the overall argument to be sustained. If one of these interdependent conspiracies is false, the argument collapses. As weak as most conspiracy theories are to begin with for other reasons, a great many conspiracy theories compound their weakness because they depend on nested conspiracies. Conspiracy theories are often extraordinarily vulnerable for this reason.

In my previous essay on this subject, I considered briefly the theories surrounding the 9/11 events which have given rise to so many different conspiracy theories. Explosives based demolition of the World Trade Center towers/complex is the center of most of these theories. These theories differ mainly in their identification of the responsible parties – one or the other or all of the U.S. intelligence agencies; Wall Street and the financial industry; Israel/World Jewish community; Saudi Arabia/Al Qaeda under Wahabi sect control; etc. In spite of how enormous and diverse each of these institutional and national governmental entities is in itself, some of these theories even propose a vast colluding cabal across several of these parties supported by a universally complicit mainstream media in America.

Apart from the many violations of scientific process and argument in these 9/11 theories, here are a few of the many other problems:

1) Anomalies for the demolitions theory itself:

a) If demolition is a central part of the plan of attack by all of the colluding parties, why does demolition apply only to the World Trade Center?

b) Why was the Pentagon not similarly set up with explosive charges and demolished since it was also under renovation and similarly accessible?

c) If the 4th airplane was intended for the White House, why was the White House not planted with explosive charges and demolished?

d) Why were no explosive charges or “military grade explosive residue” found in the Pentagon debris?

2) Inconsistencies/Anomalies:

a) Why are the colluding intelligence agencies [CIA, FBI, NSA] attacking their own – major divisions of the Defense Intelligence Agency in the Pentagon?

b) If the colluding parties are so vast and knowledgeable about just where to strike the World Trade Center towers, why did they strike the Pentagon in exactly its least vulnerable, newly renovated and least occupied section?

c) If the colluding parties are so vast and knowledgeable, why do they strike when the President is not in residence at the White House, or is the President also held to be one of the colluding parties?

d) If the colluding parties are so vast and knowledgeable and the airplanes are under automated pilot control, how is it that the 4th plane goes down in a Pennsylvania farm field as a consequence of an on board revolt by unarmed passengers?

Conspiracy theorists are notorious for not addressing the many aspects of the 9/11 attacks that do not support their demolition based theories. And to the extent that they do engage these issues, the scope of the responsible colluding parties that they must claim expands to the point of absurdity. Conspiracy theories fail mainly in not providing anything like adequate evidence to support their identification of the parties that they claim are responsible for developing and implementing the events in question. Generally the bigger the public event, the larger the scope of the responsible parties that conspiracy theorists have to claim beyond those identified in the “official” assessment of the event. In the attempt to justify these alternative parties as the ones responsible in addition to or instead of those identified in the official account, conspiracy theorists usually have to assert a cover up underlying the official account which is held to hide the “real” perpetrators. This cover up assertion is a primary indicator that the argument has moved into the conspiracy zone, especially when it is made regarding events in democratic nations with mainstream and internet media free to investigate and expose falsehoods and corruption.

True large scale conspiracies concerning major public events are extraordinarily difficult to sustain in America. In the U.S., responsible parties attempting to hide while promoting illegal, large scale conspiracies put themselves at great risk of exposure, prosecution, and time in prison. Even small attempts to hide the “truth” are usually exposed very quickly by fact checkers, leakers, whistle blowers, media investigators, and law enforcement. The examples are endless, and the current, ongoing exposure of the rampant falsehoods and corruption of the Trump administration is a case in point. Thus, the Trump effort to paint the mainstream media as “the enemy of the people” and all exposure as fake news.

Large scale conspiracies are rarely successful for very long in America. And theories concerning large scale public events that themselves rely upon conspiratorial assumptions and claims are almost always more fantasy than reality. Beware conspiracy theories masquerading as scientific investigations.