

Conspiracy theories on September 11th: A presentation of some open questions

Cornelia Beyer*

Abstract: There are diverging views on September 11, the background of the incidents, the involved people and motivations. Some of the surrounding questions and alternative interpretations may have a certain compelling power and could be explained as fitting into a bigger picture that presents itself, if one looks at the scene through a different glass. From this, some critics within the US deduct by reasoning, that the events might have different backgrounds and conspiracy theories might not be so much theories at all. I will present some speculations and some open questions regarding September 11, which do indicate, that the incidents are to be understood within a more complex picture than the official versions tell. These questions should be answered by the United States administration in order to calm down criticism and regain credibility.

Keywords: Verschwörungstheorien, 11. September: offene Fragen und alternative Interpretationen.

1. Introduction

»I believe the immediate task of the social scientist and all concerned individuals is to uncover what is dangerous to think and say. Or as Walter Benjamin put it best, in times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective.«¹

This article is about conspiracy theories within the United States that have grown and spread in the aftermath of September 11. As the saying goes, 'truth is the first casualty of war'. There are mostly two sides of the story, some of the even most abhorrent may show up to contain a grain of truth. Conspiracy theories are a phenomenon to be found in the popular sphere, even if they have their reach up to the political and scientific community. What I will look at in this text, are the criticism and scepticism that are uttered mainly within part of the general public, especially within the United States. Here, some kind of a social movement evolved, which does address the official and diverging versions of September 11 itself and is questioning the soundness and comprehensiveness of the official presentation.

2. Conspiracy theories regarding September 11

The events of September 11 did raise critical theorizing about the means, motives and backgrounds. Sceptical questions do have a stance within the United States itself, where they are mainly discussed by critics of the existing administration. They are not proven and their validity is thus to be left open for future research. Thierry Meyssan, French author and one of the intellectual fathers of the movement is stating the inherent belief in

fraud: »The facts, that we dispose of now, lead to the conclusion, that the incidents of September 11 were directed from the inside of the US-American state apparatus.«² In Germany, the author and journalist Mathias Bröckers published on the issue. After 9/11, within the United States, a net of conspiracy theories and theorists developed, starting at first with some critical reflections and interpretations by well known critical authors. In the meantime they did spread and today about 100,000 websites regarding sceptical questions, doubts and theorizing on 9/11 can be found. Networking and connections between the activists that deal with criticism and suspicions regarding September 11 has been a development both in the US and internationally with the establishment of www.september-eleventh.org and similar sites. Two major conferences took place, one in San Francisco and one in Toronto. Email lists and personal contacts as well as about 100,000 websites are used in order to raise awareness. The Strategy of the activists is among other things to raise a constituency, that is to reach possibly interested individuals, like firefighters and family members of the victims, and to reach potentially sympathetic individuals from the media, military and politics. Ian Neal, one of the activists in London is describing the strategy as follows: »We are aware that a group of concerned citizens calling for an IITC [International Independent Truth Commission] is unlikely to attract desired media interest, no matter how well we present the evidence backing the campaign. The most likely route for 9/11 to go mainstream is a result of high profile public figures backing the campaign. In the first instance it is this, and not the evidence per se, that is most likely to attract media and public attention.«³ Some of the sites provide contacts to journalists and media outlets in the US and all around the world in order to raise attention and lobby on the issue. In New York, the discontent with the discovering of the assumed true backgrounds of September 9/11 went so far as to organize a poll by private means – as the first in history – in order to count the number of New Yorkers that were not convinced of the official story. The results: »Half (50%) of New

* Cornelia Beyer, Dipl.-Pol., München.

1 Der Derian, J., '9.11: Before, After and In Between'. In: *Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, ed. The Social Science Research Council (New York City), online: http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/der_derian.htm, seen: 02 June 2004.

2 Meyssan, T., *Kein Flugzeug traf das Pentagon* (Kassel: edito de facto, 2003), p. 161.

3 Ian Neals newsletter.

York City residents and two in four (41%) of New York citizens overall say that some US leaders 'knew in advance that attacks were planned on or around September 11, 2001, and that they consciously failed to act'.⁴

2.1 9/11 in focus

There are indeed some unclear and weakly proven points to be detected regarding the reports and explanations given by the government's information and the media. Investigations, mostly by private people but as well by researchers and journalists like the German author Mathias Bröckers and the French author Thierry Meyssan, have raised some startling questions. It has to be said that there is clearly a lack of official information addressing just these points that may be responsible for this kind of development. Partly, they do refer to alternative grand explanations of the position and meaning of the events within the contemporary history and politics of the United States.

2.2 The WTC story

Simon Aronowitz, a member of the 9/11 truth movement in London, said in a personal interview that there are claims that the buildings were not hit by Boeings, but by missiles. He refers to first videos, which seemingly show smaller objects hit the towers respectively the second plane, which reportedly lacks an explosion of the wings when it hits the tower. This is interpreted as indicating that the footage was manipulated. As well, there is extra equipment placed on the lower side of the second plane. All this leads him to the conclusion, that possibly there was a hologram generator in operation. Even if this may not be convincing, similar claims were raised directly after the incidents by architect Van Romero.⁵ He withdrew his statement very soon. Still one alternative interpretation is, that the buildings were hit by missiles and then pulled down.

2.3 What happened to the building WTC 7?

Eyewitnesses⁶ are cited as having seen a huge cloud of dust on the left of the twin towers, even before they broke down. There, the building WTC 7 was situated, which contained one of the offices of the CIA that was engaged in counterterrorism operations. It is now extinct, air pho-

tographs⁷ of Ground Zero do show: It has not only been damaged, like by falling pieces of debris, it is annihilated as completely as the towers themselves. The Northern tower did not strike the building. In between, the building WTC 6 is situated, which is struck but still standing, with only a small part of damage at one side.

Larry Silverstein, the leaseholder of the WTC, on the 10th of September 2002 told PBS that he had suggested to 'pull' the Seven WTC, »I said ... pull it. And they made that decision to pull.« This possibility was never presented to the public, it does not back conspiracy theories though either.

2.4 What hit the Pentagon?

Regarding the Pentagon, the French author and publisher and president of Reseau Voltaire,⁸ Thierry Meyssan, did write about the questions to be discussed and diverging explanations. With his work, he even gained international attention and was invited to the Zayed Center for Coordination and the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, a think tank of the Arab League, in order to speak about the findings he had made, his suspicions and theories. What he did was raising critical questions about the incidents and proofs especially regarding the reality of the crash of a Boeing on 9/11 into the Pentagon. He referred to the security measures – five or more defense missiles that are installed to protect the air space around the Pentagon and should not allow for the entrance of a Boeing or any other flight instrument into the airspace surrounding the building. As well, he did refer to the fact that the damage that was done at the building of the Pentagon seems to be not fitting the object. Second, he refers to the lack of debris to be found in front of the Pentagon and third to the scope of the impact with regards to the 'missile'. Debris is indeed missing, there are nearly no leftovers to be seen on the pictures to be found, different from any other airplane accident. His final conclusion is that maybe there never was a Boeing crashing into the Pentagon. In one of his speeches he cites an airline officer stating he had observed a flying object at his radar station, which has traveled with 800 km/h heading to the White House. It was then taking a sharp turn in direction to the Pentagon, where it presumably hit. A Boeing 757 does reach these velocities, but the specifics of the object had shown more resemblance with a military projectile. Witnesses are cited having heard a sharp noise, like that of a military object. As well, the kind and scope of the damage is, so Meyssan, rather indicating the use of some high-tech military technology than the rigid body of an airliner. Meyssan is proposing the explanation that the object of interest had not been a Boeing but instead an AGM (air-to-ground missile)-86C, an air-to-ground missile of the third generation equipped with uranium depleted missile heads and controlled per GPS (global positioning system). The latter enables logging and

4 Poll results online: <http://www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20040830120349841>, seen: 04 September 2004.

5 Van Romero is vice president for research at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NMTECH). He is an expert on the study of explosives and terrorism. Within hours after the attacks, Romero was telling the Albuquerque Journal that the collapse of the twin towers could have been caused by a small amount of explosive put in more than two points in each of the towers.

6 See for example: http://www.eionews.addr.com/psyops/plot_within_a_plot:part2.htm, seen: 02 June 2004.

7 E.g. Ali, A. *The Destruction of WTC and the Pentagon 18-Days After*, (2001). Online: <http://www.geocities.com/khanyasser/conspiracy.html>, seen: 02 June 2004.

8 Reseau Voltaire is a non-profit organization in France that is engaged in the promotion of civil liberties.

control of objects from outer space. Seen from aside, the missile is said to even resemble the shape of a passenger plane.⁹

Regarding questions on these points even photo collections can be found on the internet, which do show the Pentagon directly after the impact.¹⁰ The official explanation is, the plane had hit the building only with the nose – within the ruins the remains of the plane are said to have been found – and the rest of the body did explode with the impact, the aluminium skin vaporized in the heat.¹¹ Numerous sites found on the internet are showing the official video of the impact, where no plane is seen, but instead a white discharge, that could stem from a missile.¹² The stream leads from the right to the left over the picture on the ground towards the building. The video as well shows a first white and then orange explosion. As a French explosive expert is cited, fuel burning, like after the impact of an airplane, should show no white explosion. As well, it is questionable, how a Boeing could fly at five meters high, as the regarding projectile did, and thus hit the Pentagon at the lower front. In the same way, the impact made by an airplane would have been caused mainly by the turbines. There is a picture of the inner front of the building, where only one 'punch out' hole can be seen. In case of an airplane having caused the attack, there probably would have been two holes or a bigger one. The claim regarding the Pentagon is seemingly the most critical one. Simon Aronowitz had the information, that the FBI was confirming to the German officials that the Pentagon was indeed hit by a missile.

2.5 How did the suicide pilots do it?

In case of 9/11 the pilots must have been highly trained professionals, and at least four of them were needed. The accused hijackers Mohammed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi and Hani Hanjour had received training for pilots but some were regarded incapable by their trainers of flying even light single-engined machines. But high precision

was needed, had the planes only brushed the towers, they maybe would not have crumbled.

According to an interview that the American journalist and activist Jared Israel had conducted with the flight school Huffman Aviation (Atta and his comrades are told to have been trained at this school), the pilots have not been in any professional shape to fly a Boeing 757 or 767 or even to conduct the maneuver of precisely hitting the twin towers, as was witnessed. At this school, pupils are trained to fly small single-engine airplanes for four persons. The systems of the machines cannot be compared with the ones of a Boeing 757. Even the flight trainers would not dare – according to the interview – to try and handle the system of such a machine, least would they be able to control it with the necessary precision. Besides, Atta, the presumed pilot of flight number 11 has been an inattentive trainee. Another possibility for training are flight simulators. Rudi Dekker from Huffman Aviation is cited:

»Yeah, they wanted to that school, I have heard the name, they call it a jet center for simulator training, there is no way – this is not my opinion. My opinion is I don't think it is possible. I have spoken to many captains from the airlines and they say there is no way what the planes did they could have done that. They changed altitude. They changed speed. They changed direction. They had to know about the equipment to do what they had to do and there is no way that could have been done.«¹³

The alternative interpretation is referring to a quite distinct resolution of this problem: The planes were not even controlled by hand. This possibility is given: Remote control of a big jet plane is no speculation in itself. This technology does exist and this is known to the public.¹⁴ The technology was developed by Northrop Grumman for use of the Global Hawk, an automatic military jet with the wing span of a Boeing 737. It is said to have been in use already.¹⁵ Thus it would have been possible to control the flight system from the ground. The method enables to gain absolute control over the flying system. Specialists then can control the machine regardless of the will and intent of the crew, bring it back to ground and land at an airport of their choice. The aim is the avoidance of successful hijackings.

The official version, though, is that would-be hijacker Zacarias Moussaoui had purchased flight deck simulators, the same is said about Atta. CNN was citing 'sources' having stated that such devices were bought at stores in Miami.¹⁶ They as well have been trained in Afghanistan. Another strange incident regarding the flights is, that the planes were not filled to sufficiency – only to about 25 percent, which is below the normal minimum for takeoff. Finally, conspiracy theorists claim that there is a connection between the at least five planes that were missing (there are accounts referring to up to 13 planes) and the numerous »wargames« (drills and simulations) going on that day. There are explanations for this as well: A procedure is

9 Meyssan, T., *Who was behind the September eleventh attacks?*, Presentation at the Arab League, Abu Dhabi, 08 April 2002. Online: <http://csf.colorado.edu/archive/2002/bdnow/msg02149.html>, seen: 02 June 2004.

10 See for example: http://www.asile.org/citoyens/numero13/pentagone/erreurs_en.htm, seen: 02 June 2004.

11 Meyssan, T., *Who was behind the September eleventh attacks?*, Presentation at the Arab League, Abu Dhabi, 08 April 2002: »When one examines the photographs of the façade, taken in the minutes following the attack (even before the Arlington civilian fire fighters had time to deploy), one sees no trace of the right wing on fire in front of the façade, nor any hole in the façade into which the plane could have been swallowed up. Apparently without the least fear of laying itself open to ridicule, the Defense Department declared that the jet engines, made out of tempered steel, had disintegrated under the shock of the impact – without damaging the façade. The aluminum of the fuselage is claimed to have combusted at more than 2,500° Celsius within the building and to have been transformed into gas, but the bodies of the passengers which it contained were so little burned that they were later identified from their finger prints. ... One must acknowledge the evidence: it is impossible that the attack against the Pentagon on September 11, killing 125 persons, was carried out by a jet airliner. ... To give credence to the fable of Islamic terrorists, the United States authorities invented kamikazes.«

12 Seen at: <http://www.apfn.org/apfn/flight77.htm>, 31 August 2004.

13 Israel, J., *Interview with Huffman Aviation casts doubt on official story*, 13 September 2001, online: <http://emperors-clothes.com/interviews/dekkers.htm>, seen: 02 June 2004.

14 Cited eg. in the German Spiegel online, *US-Sicherheitssystem: Entführte Maschinen landen selbständig*, 28 October 2001. Online: <http://www.anarchie.de/main-9661.html>, seen: 02 June 2004.

15 U.S. Airforce, online: <http://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/global/>, seen: 02 June 2004.

16 CNN, *Source: Records suggest Atta in NYC on Sept. 10*, 22 May 2002, online: www.cnn.com/2002/US/05/22/hijack.paper.trail/, seen: 02 June 2004.

known from the 1980s, called 'swapping'. Military jets fly in formation, in order to bluff the radar. Pilots are turning off the transponders and the planes cannot be detected afterwards. There are also ways to circumvent the aircontrol systems.

2.6 Why the failure of the anti-aircraft?

According to a report of ABC news (Peter Dizikes from September 13) some of the data of the Federal Aviation Administration do show that flight number 93 followed its normal flight route until it came close to Cleveland where it took an abrupt turn to the South.

Flight number 93 did change its course between 9:45 and 10:00 am. Both of the towers were hit six minutes after nine, the New York airports being closed for half an hour. At this time, each flight controller in charge should have known, that there was an emergency because of suicide pilots having hijacked commercial jets. This is one highly surprising situation: Halfway to San Francisco the plane is turning and heading for Washington. Here, the suspicion of hijacking should have been raised, but nothing happened. With regards to the flight number 93, the first of the reports do state that the plane was shot down. This was never confirmed to the public. There are numerous reports from citizens having seen a second jet, possibly an F-16 fighter, and having seen burning debris raining from the sky.¹⁷

The Pittsburgh Tribune Review from the same day wrote about debris that was found up to eight miles away from the spot, near New Baltimore. An information gap seems to spur further questioning: Why were the other planes, long after they left their flight route, not brought down, shot down? Why not earlier? These questions were raised by the representatives of the victims at the first public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.¹⁸

2.7 A passport and other traces

»Da sind Spuren wie von einer trampelnden Elefantenherde.«¹⁹

There is no claim that the hijackers were not there. But it was suspiciously looked at that the supposed hijackers had left so many traces on their last and deadly flight trip as well as before the preparations. They were registered with their full names at the flight school, they rented cars with their full names, booked hotel rooms and finally left a thick trace of documents and letters that

could not only provide with identification of the persons themselves, but even on the motives of the deed. The impression arises, someone may have created a 'paper chase' with the public.²⁰

For example Mohammed Atta, even if sloppy in his education was especially helpful for the investigations. He did leave his car at the Boston airport. Inside, the FBI found a script with orders – then said regarding the proceeding of the strikes as well as a copy of the Qu'ran. Atta left a note with the exact orders in Arabic with his luggage. The luggage was misdirected and found at the airport and the hand luggage was found in a locker at the airport. It is not clear why both were left behind, full of hints and proof and – last but not least – why he even took them with him.²¹ Second, the letter of departure as well as the orders show a form and contain formulations that are not credible: Some formulations do show a bad knowledge of the Arabic language and some of the orders cannot be taken as credible regarding Islamic practices or customs. The same note was found in the debris of flight 93. Another strange incident is that the plane itself did not survive the crash, not even the black boxes. The passport of one of the terror pilots was found near Ground Zero. Here, the question is raised, how it got there or – if there is no official explanation – if one should assume the impossible, that a piece of paper could survive the crash intact when even the black boxes were destroyed completely.²² The passport – so the alternative explanation – may well have been deposited there in order to give hints regarding the perpetrators.

Another very disturbing claim is that seven of the 19 hijackers are said to have been alive after the attacks:

»According to the U.S. government there were nineteen Arab terrorists in four airplanes which crashed on September 11 and among them at least seven have been identified as Saudi nationals. However, it is reported that Prince Naif, Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia announced that all seven were known and living well in their country. There are doubts about others, if they were real people or dead people's names At least one of them is known to have died a year earlier.«²³

Finally, Osama bin Laden himself, the officially acknowledged mastermind behind the attacks, did at first deny his role. See for example this part of an interview with the Pakistani newspaper Ummat from September 28, 2001:

»Neither I nor my organization Al-Qaida is involved in the attacks and the US has traced the attackers within America. ... We are against the American system but not the American people. Islam does not allow killing of innocent people, men, women and children even in the event of war.«

17 Was cited in USA Today, 14 September 2001, see also http://www.thepowerhour.com/911_analysis/flight-93-shot-down.htm, seen: 02 June 2004.

18 See for example Mindy Kleinberg speaking before the National Commission on the Terrorist Attacks on the United States of America. Online: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/hearings/hearing1.htm>, seen: 02 June 2004.

19 That is: 'There are traces like from a bunch of elephants', intelligence service expert and former German minister Bülow, A. v., Da sind Spuren wie von einer trampelnden Elefantenherde, Interview with the Tagesspiegel, 13 January 2002. Online: <http://uuhome.de/global/deutsch/wtc.html>, seen: 02 June 2004.

20 Cf. v. Bülow, cited above.

21 See: Galle, U., Was alles zu Beweisen werden kann ... Aussagen in den Medien zum Terroranschlag in den USA, online: http://home.mail.de/akin/bew_1.htm, seen: 02 June 2004.

22 Yousef, S., *Strange Case Of The Black Box And The Indestructible Passport* (2001), online: http://www.geocities.com/dwmsmw56/USA-Attack-items_of_interest.html, seen: 02 June 2004.

23 Ali, M. A., *The Destruction of WTC and the Pentagon 18-Days After* (2001), online: <http://www.geocities.com/khanyasser/conspiracy.html>, seen: 02 June 2004.

And: »The terrorist act is the action of some American group. I have nothing to do with it.«²⁴ Osama did claim the opposite later on.

Many more of these questions are providing fertile soil for conspiracy theorists' theorizing. There are references to connections between the bin Laden family, the intelligence services and the family of the Bushs, which raise additional suspicions.²⁵ As well, there is to be asked, if even the administration did or does have real proof of the origin and persons behind the attacks or if some of the proof was fabricated in order to present an enemy figure to the public. The proof of guilt and responsibility presented to the public is regarded as insufficient by the truth movement.

Another concern is the knowledge, that existed in the dawn of September 11. There was insider trading²⁶ and there were hints from other intelligence agencies to the CIA, which did not react.²⁷ In this context, the former FBI deputy director and prosecutor of bin Laden, John O'Neill, resigned and complained about obstacles to his work imposed by the CIA.²⁸

3. Terrorism after 9/11 – Why is the anthrax case not explained officially?

Directly after September 11, there was hysteria about anthrax – there were five contaminated envelopes sent to the National Enquirer, the NBC, the New York Post and the bureaus of Senators Daschle and Leahy: it was related to terrorism, and Al Qaeda was brought in relation to it. Within the United States, though, the suspect was soon found to be virologist Dr. Steven Hatfill, an American contractor working for the CIA. He is »one of the few people in the United States who knows anthrax spores, information (he) gained from his two years at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases in Frederick, Maryland«.²⁹

Some scientists did point the suspicion out to the FBI, but the Bureau did not react.³⁰

Cause for the suspicion was, that the spores resembled exactly those of the laboratory, where the named scientist had worked. He had lots of experience with the material and had worked in the military service and from there he knew about how to use the spores as a weapon. He had been on site in the Rhodesian war, where the largest outbreak of germ warfare against guerillas was conducted.

4. Résumé

Some of the open questions presented here regarding the backgrounds and people behind September 11 are not fully answered yet and need elaboration. Derived theories are going thus as far as to claim that the incidents are to be explained not as a terrorist attack but as a »coup d'état«. Here, the MIHOP (make it happen) and the LIHOP (let it happen) faction are currently opposing each other within the United States truth movement as well as internationally. Speculations differ in their credibility. The pulling down of the twin towers is not credible, other speculations – like the one regarding the Pentagon – seem to have more compelling power. Even Rumsfeld referred in a slip of tongue to the Pentagon as being hit by a missile. The alternative interpretations and questions presented in this article have to be addressed and this did not happen in full up to now. The 9/11 commission – which was only installed after intense lobbying of victims' members did not address all open questions, focussing extensively on the terrorists' backgrounds, but also on the hijackings themselves and the homeland defense proceedings at September 11. Secondly, it is accused to have had a conflict of interest. Executive director Philip Zelikow was a member of the 2000 Bush transition team and had worked with Condoleezza Rice. This does not contribute to trust in the official version of events or explanations. In order to calm down the scepticism internationally and nationally and in order to claim credibility, the administration should address and try to answer leftover questions.

24 Pakistani Urdu-language Khabrain daily, 12 September 2002, online: <http://www.usamemorial.org/sept11062.htm>, seen: 02 June 2004. Tom Grant from the Foreign Policy Research Institute notes that „Polls show that most Arabs ... believe that the United States itself orchestrated the devastation in Washington and New York.«, online: <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/americanwar.20011026.grant.binladenmiscalculation.html>, seen: 04 September 2004.

25 E.g. Brisard, J.-C., *Bin Laden: The forbidden truth* (New York: Nation Books, 2002).

26 Flocco, T., *Profits of death – Insider trading and 9-11*, (2001), online: www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/12_06_01_death_profits_pt1.html, seen: 02 June 2004.

27 See for example Skolnick, S.H., *CIA had advance knowledge of a hijack plot. French CIA, Mossad foreign intelligence tip-offs ignored*, 12th September 2001, online: www.dailycatholic.org/issue/2001Sep/sep14_unv.htm, seen: 02 June 2004.

28 See: www.rememberjohn.com, seen: 02 June 2004.

29 Cienski, J., *Anthrax Probe Puts Spotlight on Researcher*. In: *National Post*, 05 July 2002, p. A12, cited online at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/MOO208A.html>, seen: 30 August 2004.

30 Borger, J., *Anthrax Killer Could Grow More Bacteria*, in: *Guardian Weekly*, 25 June – 03 July 2002. p. 4.