

9/11 Truth and the Silence of the IR Discipline

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Abstract

International Relations (IR) scholars uncritically accept the official narrative regarding the events of 9/11 and refuse to examine the massive body of evidence generated by the 9/11 truth movement. Nevertheless, as calls for a new inquiry into the events of 9/11 continue to mount, with the International 9/11 Consensus Panel and World Trade Centre Building 7 Evaluation inquiries having recently published their findings, and with a U.S. Federal Grand Jury on 9/11 having been announced, now would be an opportune moment for IR scholars to start taking the claims of 9/11 truth seriously. A survey of the 9/11 truth literature reveals that the official 9/11 narrative cannot be supported at multiple levels. Two planes did not bring down three towers in New York. There is no hard evidence that Muslims were responsible for 9/11 other than in a patsy capacity. Various U.S. government agencies appear to have had foreknowledge of the events and to have covered up evidence. Important questions regarding the hijacked planes need answering, as do questions about the complicity of the mainstream media in 9/11. IR scholars avoid looking at evidence regarding the events of 9/11 for several reasons. They may be taken in by the weaponized term, “conspiracy theory.” A taboo on questioning the ruling structures of society means that individuals do not wish to fall outside the spectrum of acceptable opinion. Entertaining the possibility that 9/11 was a false flag requires Westerners to reject fundamental assumptions that they have been socialized to accept since birth. The “War on Terror” has created a neo-McCarthyite environment in which freedom to speak out has been stifled. Yet, if IR scholars are serious about truth, the first place they need to start is 9/11 truth.

Keywords

9/11, 9/11 truth, international relations, false flag terrorism, intellectual responsibility

The consequences of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have been catastrophic. In addition to the estimated 3,000 people who lost their lives during the attacks themselves, millions more have been killed in the “War on Terror”; there has been an aggressive worldwide expansion of U.S. military power, including the introduction of drone warfare; the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been destabilized, leading to massive flows of migrants; international law has been violated (most egregiously with the Iraq War); domestically, there has been a draconian scaling back on civil liberties, including historically unprecedented levels of surveillance, arbitrary

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detention, and torture. All of this has worked to undermine the post-1945 liberal internationalist order and has contributed to mounting concerns about liberal democracies being transformed into police states. It would not be difficult to defend the claim that “9/11” represents the most significant political event of the post-Cold War era.

These consequences rest on the fundamental premise that the United States was attacked by Al Qaeda on 9/11. Upon that premise are erected the moral and legal bases of the War on Terror, that is, that “civilized” states have the right to defend themselves preemptively against terrorist barbarism in an age where terrorism is networked, transnational, and more threatening than ever before owing to new technologies of destruction. Yet, what if the fundamental premise were false? As Benjamin (2017) observes,

Were this claim ever to be proved false—were it ever to be shown that the United States was not in fact attacked by “others” on 9/11 but rather attacked itself (or let itself be attacked) for the purpose of blaming others and justifying international war—then its war would not be one of self-defence but of pre-meditated and carefully camouflaged aggression. (p. 373)

Legal responsibility for verifying the U.S. claim to self-defense, even if only retrospectively, rests with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN). However, both organizations “accepted without hesitation the American claim to have been attacked by elements of international terrorism” and continue to do so (Benjamin, 2017, p. 373).¹

Academia has followed suit. Despite the gigantic volume of academic literature on 9/11, “almost all such studies assume the correctness of the core US claim of self-defence and then proceed to nibble on issues lying around its perimeter” (Benjamin, 2017, pp. 374–375). Thus, debates revolve around the appropriate relationship between civil liberties and security, whether or not to treat 9/11 as an act of war or a crime, the ethics of torture and drone warfare (implicitly assuming the War on Terror itself to be just), and so on. Particularly in the International Relations (IR) literature, including the security studies and terrorism literature, there is little to no suggestion that 9/11 may have been a false flag operation² used to provide the pretext for illegal wars of aggression and domestic repression.

Prima facie, this seems odd given the long and well-documented history of false flag terrorism. In 1931, for example, Japan sabotaged a railway line that it operated in the Chinese province of Manchuria, blamed the incident on Chinese nationalists, and launched a full-scale invasion, occupying Manchuria and installing a puppet regime there (Felton, 2009, pp. 22–23). In 1933, the Reichstag fire, caused by the Nazis, was blamed on communists and used as the pretext for a witch hunt of political opponents (Hett, 2014). Operation Himmler in 1939 involved a series of false flag events, the most famous being the Gleiwitz incident, the day after which Germany invaded Poland (Maddox, 2015, pp. 86–87). In 1967, Israel bombed and strafed the United States ship (USS) *Liberty* and sought to blame the incident on Egypt in order to bring the United States into the Six-Day War (Mellen, 2018). The Apartheid regime in South Africa carried out stealth attacks against government officials and installations and blamed them on the African National Congress in an attempt to discredit the anti-Apartheid movement (Benjamin, 2017, p. 377). The Algerian government is thought to have covertly murdered civilians and blamed the murders on Islamic parties during the civil war of the 1990s (Benjamin, 2017, p. 378).

Is the United States above such behavior? Hardly. The sinking of the USS *Maine*, widely suspected of being a false flag, provided the pretext for the Spanish–American War of 1898 and the conquest of various Pacific islands (Anderson, 2016, pp. v–vi). Operation Northwoods, approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1962, contained proposals for all manner of false flag attacks to be blamed on Fidel Castro and used as the pretext for invading Cuba (Scott, 2015, pp. 94, 98). These included sinking a U.S. Navy ship in Guantánamo Bay, sinking boats carrying Cuban refugees,

staging terrorist attacks in Miami and Washington, DC, and making it appear as though Cuba had blown up a U.S. passenger plane by replacing the plane with a drone in mid-flight and secretly disembarking the passengers.³ The Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 was cynically invoked by President Johnson as the reason to launch air strikes and escalate the war against North Vietnam: it is known never to have occurred (Moise, 1996). In 1967, when Israel tried to sink the USS Liberty, President Johnson called back rescue ships and planes, indicating complicity in the attack (Mellen, 2018). Operation Gladio, orchestrated by the U.S. government via NATO, involved using far right and neo-Nazi groups to stage political assassinations and terrorist attacks against civilians in Western Europe and blame them on left-wing organizations (Ganser, 2005).

“Putting all these pieces together,” Benjamin (2017, p. 385) notes, “what emerges is a disquieting mosaic showing the very real possibility of a mass-casualty false-flag attack being executed to justify international war.” *Prima facie*, it is not inconceivable that certain elements of the U.S. government, possibly with links to other transnational actors, could have staged 9/11 in order to provide the pretext for the War on Terror. At the very least, this possibility should not be dismissed out of hand.

If it could be shown that 9/11 was a false flag, the implications would be of revolutionary significance. It would mean that the U.S. government, or at least a criminal cabal within it, knowingly committed mass murder against its own population and lied to the world about it in order to launch imperialist wars and crack down on domestic dissent. The U.S. government would then appear as a tyranny, and according to the Declaration of Independence, the American people would have the right to overthrow it.⁴

Despite the overriding importance of researching the events of 9/11, academia has all but turned its back on that endeavor. As emeritus professor Morgan Reynolds writes (2007, pp. 101, 114), “The response of the academic community when the official conspiracy theory of 9/11 was challenged [has been] primarily a deafening silence, with a few notable exceptions,” and “the academy, despite the security for many of tenure, has thus far not been much of a force for truth about 9/11.” According to emeritus professor Kees van der Pijl (2014, p. xii), “the event and its consequences have remained taboo as IR subjects.” Retired professor Graeme MacQueen, the erstwhile Director of the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University, remarks vis-à-vis research into the events of 9/11, “the universities are sleeping so soundly you can hear the snoring from outer space” (see Zuberi, 2013). For Dr. John D. Wyndham (2017), “The great silence on 9/11 from the universities indicates that they are presently unable to examine this subject openly” (p. 5). According to Andrew Johnson of the Open University, “For many who are more deeply embedded in the educational academic establishment it seems that they are unable to confront or dispassionately analyse the evidence for themselves” (Johnson, 2017, p. 15).

Instead, responsibility for safeguarding the truth about what took place on 9/11 (“9/11 truth”) has fallen to a global network of independent researchers who have examined the evidence for themselves and produced a massive, highly significant body of work.⁵ Admittedly, the quality of 9/11 truth research varies wildly, the so-called “9/11 truth movement” quickly fractured and is characterized by pervasive infighting, and a good deal of known misinformation is present within it. The rapid proliferation of [...] often conflicting (and sometimes absurd) narratives,” notes Ahmed (2005, xiii), arises from “the ongoing lack of proper academic research into 9/11 combined with the lack of a meaningful, full-scale independent inquiry.

Yet, recent developments suggest that 9/11 truth is increasingly a force to be reckoned with. In 2016, two U.S. presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Jill Stein, publicly cast doubt on the official 9/11 narrative, with Stein going so far as to call for a new investigation—a tacit recognition of the fact that many U.S. citizens do not believe the official narrative.⁶ On September 11, 2018, the findings of a 6-year inquiry by the international 9/11 Consensus Panel were published: The panel comprises 23 expert reviewers and follows the scientific best evidence consensus model (Griffin &

Woodworth, 2018). In November 2018, the U.S. Attorney in Manhattan announced that he would refer the findings of a report by the nonprofit Lawyers' Committee for 9/11 Inquiry to a federal Grand Jury. In July 2019, with the Grand Jury proceedings apparently stalling, the Board of Fire Commissioners of the Franklin Square and Munson Fire District in New York passed a resolution calling for "a comprehensive federal grand jury investigation and prosecution of every crime related to the attacks of September 11, 2001." In September 2019, a 4-year inquiry by a team at the University of Alaska Fairbanks into the destruction of World Trade Centre Building 7 (WTC 7) culminated in a 126-page report, concluding, "fire did not cause the collapse of WTC 7 on 9/11, contrary to the conclusions of NIST [the National Institute of Standards and Technology] and private engineering firms that studied the collapse" and "the collapse of WTC 7 was a global failure involving the near-simultaneous failure of every column in the building" (Hulsey et al., 2019, p. 2). Now would seem an opportune moment for academics to begin taking 9/11 truth seriously.

One scholar who has been at the forefront of 9/11 truth is David Ray Griffin, emeritus Professor at the Claremont School of Theology (CA), who since 2004 has authored numerous books on 9/11 and along with Elizabeth Woodworth was responsible for convening the 9/11 Consensus Panel. One of Griffin's important early interventions (2005) was to identify scores of omissions and distortions in *The 9/11 Commission Report* (the official account of what happened on 9/11). Even the 9/11 Commission's cochairmen, Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton (2006, Chapter 1), conceded that *The 9/11 Commission Report* was delayed, underfunded, obstructed, and "set up to fail." Much of it relies on testimony by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed that was obtained under torture.⁷ This begs the question of why the U.S. government was so unwilling to support a proper investigation into the events of 9/11 and why its eventual report, like the NIST reports of 2005 and 2008, lacks credibility. Fifty-one key claims made in those reports are systematically tested against best evidence in the investigation conducted by the 9/11 Consensus Panel and found to be unsupportable (Griffin & Woodworth, 2018; see also Ryan, 2007).

Therefore, there is no good reason to take the official 9/11 narrative at face value. When one considers all the negative consequences that have flowed from 9/11, however,

the discovery that the official narrative about 9/11 [i]s a lie [sh]ould be a discovery of first importance. And yet thus far the mainstream media and most members of the academy have refused to explore the evidence that has been presented for [the] alternative narrative [that the US government was implicated in the crime]. (Griffin & Scott, 2007, p. vii)

This remains true today. A near-total silence has descended over academia when it comes to questioning the official 9/11 narrative. This is especially worrying given the largely voluntary nature of that silence. There is no enforced consensus as there was, say, in Nazi Germany (the *Gleichschaltung* phenomenon). Instead, academics are choosing to self-censor, voluntarily conforming to an official 9/11 narrative that is hegemonic in the Gramscian sense.

Method

Challenging academic conformism vis-à-vis the official 9/11 narrative requires (a) showing that the academic literature does not adequately address 9/11 truth, (b) explaining why it should, and (c) explaining why it does not. There are methodological limitations on (a) and (b) in particular.

In terms of (a), there must be a limitation in the scope of the literature reviewed. For the purposes of this article, the literature is restricted to the discipline of IR, the one discipline that should be most conversant with false flag terrorism and the War on Terror. If IR scholars cannot or will not recognize the possibility that 9/11 was a false flag event, then there is little hope for other disciplines. IR is itself, of course, a vast and sprawling discipline; therefore, further restrictions in scope are

necessary. There will be no attempt to summarize the reams and reams of literature that all subscribes to the same premise, that is, that “Al Qaeda” attacked “Western civilization.” Rather, attention will be focused on showing that the IR literature has seldom critically interrogated that premise—including the self-styled “critical terrorism” literature. In principle, therefore, the argument could be refuted by pointing to IR literature that does treat 9/11 as a possible false flag event based on analysis of evidence regarding what actually took place that day.⁸

In terms of (b), persuading academics that 9/11 truth has validity runs up against the problem of source material. A vicious circle arises whereby (i) academics refuse to take seriously any literature that is not peer reviewed, (ii) there is scant peer-reviewed 9/11 truth literature relative to the enormity of the event, therefore (iii), academics assume that 9/11 truth is not worth taking seriously. It should be noted, however, that this is a sociological, rather than epistemological, problem. The fact that academics, for reasons discussed in the final section, generally choose not to pursue 9/11 truth does not mean that 9/11 truth cannot or should not be pursued. How, then, to persuade academics that 9/11 truth is worth pursuing?

First and foremost, the key findings of 9/11 truth need to be presented to an academic audience, so that academics are at least familiar with those findings and have an intellectual obligation to consider and respond to them instead of refusing to look at them. But, no less important, those findings also need to be intellectually credible. Sometimes this is achievable by pointing to irrefutable scientific evidence, for example, that the 110-story Twin Towers immediately left a debris pile no higher than their lobbies, that WTC 7 fell at freefall speed for 2.25 s, and that thousands of first responders have died prematurely of unexplained cancers.

It is also important to focus on sources that might reasonably be expected to command academic credibility and respect. Two such sources have already been identified, namely the 9/11 Consensus Panel and the Alaska, Fairbanks, investigations, both headed by full professors, spanning 6 and 4 years, respectively. In addition, there are some peer-reviewed journal articles relating to 9/11 truth (though not as many as there should be)⁹ as well as edited volumes such as those by Zarembka (2006) and Griffin and Scott (2007). Other sources worthy of academic consideration include texts written by emeritus professors, whose title signifies the high esteem in which they are held by the profession, for example, David Ray Griffin, Kees van der Pijl, Morgan Reynolds, and Peter Dale Scott. This article cleaves to such sources.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, there is a review of the IR literature on 9/11, showing that it fails to address 9/11 truth. Second, the key findings of 9/11 truth are presented in summary form, drawing only on the type of sources mentioned above in order to avoid charges of parochialism. Third, there is a discussion of why IR scholars ignore 9/11 truth. Finally, the conclusion considers the implications of taking 9/11 truth seriously.

The IR Literature on 9/11

No IR scholar has ever evaluated the evidence for the official 9/11 narrative against evidence for alternative hypotheses. Without systematically weighing evidence for competing theories against the available evidence, there is no logical way to argue that one theory is more or less consistent with the available evidence. Therefore, having failed to undertake the necessary academic due diligence, IR cannot claim to know what happened on 9/11. Instead, IR knowledge of events can be reduced to a quasi-religious belief in the official narrative.

The automatic assumption of IR scholars in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was that “Al Qaeda” was to blame. For example, Chris Brown (2002) writes that “the international community is engaged in a hunt for a specific terrorist group [Al Qaeda]”; explicitly ruled out is “the absurd rumour that the WTC was attacked by Mossad” (pp. 263, 266). Cox (2002, p. 261) points to “the role of Islam in international politics.” In a collection of responses by leading IR scholars published by *International*

Organization in January 2002 as *Dialogue IO*, not one questions the “Islamic fundamentalist” narrative. Halliday’s *Two Hours that Shook the World* (2002) is not actually about the 2 hours in which the Twin Towers were destroyed; rather, it is a summation of his earlier work on the Middle East. Elshtain (2003, Chapter 1) asks the key question, “What happened on 9/11?” yet makes no attempt to examine the empirical evidence in her relentless condemnation of Islamic fundamentalism. 9/11 Commission staff member Daniel Byman (2003) surveys scholarship on Al Qaeda and militant Islamism.

Surveying 10 edited volumes including 140 different authors on 9/11, Anderson (2004, pp. 304, 310) identifies “a surprising failure of intellectual nerve” and “loss of scholarly composure,” concluding, “The discomfort with the scientific posture of open-ended inquiry and the thirst for answers that would reflect what came to be called ‘moral clarity’ were evident in many of the intellectual debates of the day” (p. 323). In other words, instead of following the scientific method and looking at evidence, IR scholars lost their nerve and, in their need for “moral clarity,” fell into line with the Bush administration’s demand to be “with us or against us.” This belies the claims of the IR mainstream to be doing “hard science.”

After the initial avalanche of literature on 9/11, IR scholars quickly lost interest in the event itself as their attention shifted to its major consequence: the War on Terror. Five years after 9/11, Brenner (2006, p. 497) notes, “The response to September 11 has been comparatively muted. It has received little sustained attention, experienced no fervent debate, and has been largely excluded from any central focus that might have been anticipated.” Instead, IR scholars went about their business as usual. In a chapter titled “Implications of September 11 for the Study of International Relations,” Buzan (2003, p. 306) claims, “September 11 does not require major changes to the debates about IR theory or to the agenda of IR.” Instead of looking at the evidence concerning the events of 9/11 and realizing that it changes everything, IR scholars were content to maintain the status quo.

While the events of 9/11 themselves remained unexamined in IR scholarship, a “terrorism industry” sprang up with “countless books produced whose title ends in ‘since 9/11’” (Dunne, 2011, p. 970). But how many books in the terrorism industry include the phrase “on 9/11” in their title and critically examine what actually took place that day?

Dunne and Booth’s *Terror in our Time* (2012) is representative of the wider terrorism literature. With a picture of 9/11 debris on its cover, blame is pinned on “Al-Qaeda” and “Osama bin Laden” in the first two pages (pp. vii–viii). The authors do not see how they are uncritically lending intellectual legitimation to the official narrative and thus the War on Terror. On the contrary, they are quick to stress that they have no intention of questioning the official line: “It is not our intention in this book to criticise all that has been done by Western governments in the decade [since 9/11]” (p. viii). In fact, the “focus” of the book is “necessarily about the mobilisation of massive military power and state resources against [Al-Qaeda]” (p. 7). Precluding all possibility that 9/11 was a false flag, the authors assert, “This book is not about states as terrorists” (p. 7). Thus, the book is framed as an unashamedly noncritical study obediently serving Western state power.

Even so-called Critical Terrorism Studies has worked to maintain the taboo on 9/11 truth. “Discourses” such as Islamic terrorism, “temporalities” such as the supposed rupture “before” and “after” 9/11, and the politics of remembering 9/11 may all be critically interrogated (Jackson, 2007; Toros, 2017; Zehfuss, 2003). But a serious scientific investigation of what exactly took place on 9/11, how it was achieved, and who could therefore have been responsible remains strictly off limits.

Terrorism: A Critical Introduction (Jackson et al., 2011) illustrates the point. It lauds Critical Terrorism Studies as “theoretically and methodologically rigorous, sensitive to the politics of labeling, self-reflective about issues of knowledge and power, and committed to conflict resolution and human security” (p. 27). Yet, it would seem that greater self-reflexivity about issues of knowledge and power is required when it comes to 9/11. The authors refer to the “dominant 9/11 narrative [which] helped to establish [...] how audiences should interpret the events” (p. 70). They note,

“Potential challenges to the dominant narrative were [...] effectively countered by the Bush administration and their allies through vigorous public diplomacy campaigns, protracted appeals to patriotism, the discrediting of political opponents and the use of pressure groups,” all “aided by a generally docile media which either directly repeated the understanding of official sources or simply relied on those sources for cues on how best to interpret the attacks” (p. 71). Yet, rather than calling the official 9/11 narrative into question, or asking why the Bush administration went to such great lengths to close down alternative narratives, the authors merely show how the official narrative was constructed and propagated. Power is described, not challenged. In this “critical” introduction to terrorism, the phrase “false flag” is not mentioned.

Noam Chomsky, for decades one of the most prominent critics of U.S. foreign policy, refuses to entertain the possibility that 9/11 may have been a false flag operation used to legitimize illegal wars of aggression. According to Chomsky, bin Laden’s guilt was “plausibly surmised from the outset” and “In the case of bin Laden, no discussion is needed” (2011, p. 34; 2002, p. 146). The evidence produced by the 9/11 truth movement is “essentially worthless,” and the idea that the U.S. government could have known anything in advance about the attacks has “such low credibility, I don’t really think it’s serious”; besides, “even if it were true, who cares? I mean, it doesn’t have any significance” (2008b). Chomsky’s blind acceptance of the official 9/11 narrative and his “willful ignorance” of 9/11 truth (Ryan, 2013) contrast markedly with his earlier work on the manufacture of consent (Herman & Chomsky, 2010). As far as 9/11 is concerned, Chomsky remains comfortably within the spectrum of acceptable opinion and is an integral part of the consent-manufacturing apparatus.

Still today, renowned IR scholars automatically accept the official 9/11 narrative that “Al Qaeda operatives used box cutters so effectively to hijack commercial airplanes” (Mueller, 2018, p. 15). No mainstream IR scholar, it seems, “will tolerate let alone initiate serious research into the backgrounds and implications of the War on Terror” (van der Pijl, 2014, p. 234). The idea that 9/11 was a false flag is simply unspeakable, beyond the boundaries of the discipline (academic disciplines having been created precisely in order to discipline thought). In van der Pijl’s view, when it comes to 9/11, those IR scholars most proximate to state power—what he calls the “academic intelligence base”—“subscribe to an obvious hoax—one in a series that has already featured the Tonkin Gulf incident, Lockerbie, the genocide of Kosovo Albanians, Saddam Hussein’s ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and, today, Iran’s nuclear bomb programme” (van der Pijl, 2014, p. 234). This is a strong claim to make and one that requires examination of evidence in order to determine its plausibility.

9/11 Truth: Key Findings

There are certain key propositions that the large majority of 9/11 truth researchers would agree on, which academics would do well to start considering. Some of these points are given below. Most can be found in the results of the 9/11 Consensus Panel investigation (Griffin & Woodworth, 2018), which took 23 experts 6 years to agree upon, requiring an 85% consensus rate. The relevant chapter of that investigation is given in square brackets for further reference.

By problematizing the official 9/11 narrative, this section opens up inherent uncertainty regarding knowledge of 9/11. Because academics have never properly investigated the events of 9/11, it is impossible to say with any scientific assurance what actually took place on that day, meaning there is no scientific foundation for the War on Terror. Instead, what prevails is “anti-science,” whereby scientists charged by the U.S. government with investigating 9/11 “started with their conclusions and worked backwards to some ‘leading hypotheses’” (Ryan, 2007, p. 64). The 2008 NIST report on the destruction of WTC 7, for example, published 7 years after the War on Terror began, “has all the

emarks of attempted scientific fraud” (Wyndham, 2017, p. 3). Academics therefore have a scientific as well as a moral responsibility to investigate 9/11.

The following points raise questions that require further analysis rather than providing answers concerning what actually took place on 9/11. In order to address those questions, careful, systematic, and impartial research is required, which, on an issue of this scale, demands research projects, multiple articles, monographs, and more. In that respect, it is hoped that the academic community will finally pick up the gauntlet thrown down by the 9/11 truth movement.

Damage to the WTC

It is impossible that commercial airliners caused the complete destruction of the Twin Towers, which were built to withstand precisely such an impact [2]. Office fires, even if fed by jet fuel, could not have weakened these massive steel structures to produce the observed effects [2] (Ryan, 2007). Official claims that there were widespread infernos in the South Tower are false [5]. But if not planes and office fires, what did destroy the Twin Towers?

The claim of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2002, pp. 2–27, 35) that the floors of the towers “pancaked” down upon one another in a “progressive collapse” does not explain what destroyed the 47 massive interlocking steel box columns at the core of each tower (Jones, 2007, p. 58). It was not physically possible for the top floors to accelerate through the path of maximum resistance (the lower floors) at approximately two thirds the rate of gravity unless resistance from the lower floors suddenly disappeared [9]. If a gravity-driven collapse was not the mechanism by which the Twin Towers were destroyed, what was?

Video footage of the Twin Towers being destroyed shows massive steel I-beams being ejected large distances horizontally [4]. What caused this? The fact that the debris pile from these two 110-story buildings was barely above ground level [9] (Figure 1) is consistent with video footage and photographs showing that the towers were “turned mostly to powder in mid-air,” that is, before hitting the ground—“a remarkable, amazing phenomenon” (Jones, 2007, p. 48; Figures 2–4). Although massive amounts of energy were released in the process, evident in the initial dust cloud formation (see Figures 3 and 5) as well as the rapid expansion of the dust clouds to envelop the whole of lower Manhattan, no light was generated and the dust clouds were cool. What could have caused this?

Seismic signals recorded by Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Palisades, New York, reveal some significant anomalies. For example, the 0.7 and 0.9 Richter scale readings said to correspond, respectively, to the plane impact shocks on WTC 2 and WTC 1 occur *before* the radar-based impact times of the planes and are too low in frequency to correspond to plane impacts [8]. These signals require explanation.

WTC 7 was a 47-story building not hit by a plane on 9/11, yet at 5:20 p.m. that day it spontaneously descended, at freefall speed for the first 2.25 s [11], straight down into its own footprint, its roofline remaining near horizontal throughout, not damaging adjacent buildings. NIST claims that this “spontaneous collapse” was due solely to “office fires” plus a new phenomenon known as “thermal expansion”; if true, this would make WTC 7 the only large steel-framed, fire-protected building in history to have suffered such a fate [10, 14]. In reality, the only plausible explanation of WTC 7’s destruction involves the near-simultaneous failure of all 82 steel support columns (Hulsey et al., 2019). And even then, “Newton’s laws of motion and energy conservation considerations would have had to have been violated to explain that building’s total collapse within a debris pile several storeys high” (Korol et al., 2016, p. 25). How, then, was WTC 7 destroyed, by whom, and to what end?



Figure 1. Debris at ground level immediately after the destruction of the Twin Towers. Photographer unknown. Source: http://www.drjudywood.com/articles/dirt/dirtpics/010913_5316_large.jpg



Figure 2. World Trade Centre I is mostly turned to dust in midair. Credit: Detective Greg Semendinger, New York City Police Aviation Unit. This image was not released until February 2010.



Figure 3. World Trade Center 2 does not slam to the ground. The upper half is turned to dust in midair while the lower half still stands. Some dust appears to go up while the rest goes down. Photographer unknown.
Source: <http://www.drjudywood.com/articles/DEW/dewpics/Image28.jpg>

Numerous eyewitness reports, including from those present within the buildings, testify to large explosions and destruction of the basement/lobby areas of WTC 1, WTC 2, and WTC 7 prior to the total disintegration of those buildings [1, 9, 17]. This, too, warrants further investigation.

“Islamic Fundamentalism”

An examination of empirical evidence renders it highly unlikely that 19 Muslim men armed only with box cutters were responsible for 9/11. For instance, there is no credible photographic or eyewitness evidence showing any of the alleged hijackers preparing to board any of the four planes involved [41, 42]. Given that there were over 300 security cameras at Dulles International Airport alone, this anomaly requires explanation.

The fact that the alleged hijackers, including the “religious fanatic” Mohamed Atta, had large amounts of money to spend on alcohol, cocaine, and lap dancers suggests that they were not devout Muslims, let alone “Islamic fundamentalists” [43, 44]. If so, this would undermine the premise of the War on Terror that Islamic fundamentalism was to blame for 9/11 and, with it, the basis for U.S. military action in a series of Muslim-majority countries. Further investigation into the role of Islamic fundamentalism on 9/11 is therefore required. Such an investigation should take into account the long history of U.S. and British support for Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East in order to create sectarian divisions and destabilize Arab and Iranian nationalist regimes (Anderson, 2016; Curtis, 2012).



Figure 4. Possible rocket exhaust trails as the tower is blown apart with incredible force. Photographer unknown. Source: <http://www.drjudywood.com/articles/DEW/dewpics/Image250.jpg>

The list of 19 men named by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the alleged hijackers is known to be problematic, not least because 10 of those men were verified as still alive after 9/11 (Kolar, 2006, pp. 12–13). When it was demonstrated that two of the alleged hijackers, said to have driven to Portland on 10 September, could not have been involved in 9/11, the FBI simply switched their identities with those of Mohamed Atta and Abdul Aziz al-Omari—yet there is no evidence that Atta was in Portland on that day [40]. In addition, there appear to have been two Ziad Jarrahs and two Mohamed Attas (Kolar, 2006, pp. 22–27) [44]. All of this is consistent with the use of patsies and doubles (simulated identities) in covert intelligence operations, pointing to the need for more 9/11 research along these lines.

According to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 14 of the 27 visas issued to the alleged hijackers plus eight conspirators were issued by the same U.S. consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (Eldridge et al., 2004, p. 7). This is the same consulate that, in the words of its former visa section head, was used in the 1980s to “bring recruits, rounded up by [the CIA and] Osama bin Laden, to the U.S. for terrorist training by the CIA,” likely financed by an illicit trade in alcohol (Springmann, 2001, pp. 41–42). This suggests that the Al Qaeda operatives blamed for 9/11 may in fact have been run by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). According to Scott (2007, p. 77), “the Al-Qaeda terror network accused of the 9/11 attacks was supported and expanded by US intelligence programs and covert operations, both during and after the Soviet Afghan War.” Links between Al-Qaeda and U.S. intelligence need to be researched further in the 9/11 context.



Figure 5. The destruction of the North Tower creates a “mushroom cloud” effect. Credit: New York City Police Foundation. Source: Sweet (2002, p. 20)

There is no hard evidence connecting Osama bin Laden to 9/11 [39]. However, there is copious evidence to suggest that bin Laden died in December 2001 (Griffin, 2009). The Osama bin Laden “confession tape” released by the Pentagon in December 2001 is demonstrably inauthentic (Griffin, 2009, pp. 22–36; Kolar, 2006). Claims that bin Laden somehow managed to evade the most sophisticated surveillance dragnet in history for almost a decade after 9/11 are implausible, but the suggestion that he served as a bogeyman in the War on Terror makes sense. Even when he was allegedly captured, he was killed and his body dumped at sea, meaning that no hard evidence of his death could be presented to the public. More research into the life and death of bin Laden is needed.

The Role of U.S. Government Agencies

The Federal Aviation Authority and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) were effectively paralyzed on 9/11 by their incredible decision to stage no fewer than 12 different “war games” exercises on the same day: the only day in post-1945 U.S. history when U.S. air defenses needed to be fully operational [27]. Fake radar blips were inserted into air traffic controllers’ monitors. Much of the U.S. air defense fleet was diverted to Canada and Alaska. Fighter jets had to be recalled from training exercises as far away as Las Vegas. A report of AA11 still being airborne following the impact on the North Tower was received. The Department of Defense and the 9/11 Commission failed to report all but one of those exercises [27]. Given abundant evidence of the chaos and confusion caused by the 9/11 war games, claims by senior officials that the exercises enhanced the military’s response to the attacks lack credibility [27]. A full investigation into the 9/11 war games is therefore required.

One of the world's most heavily defended buildings, the Pentagon, was struck after the South Tower had been hit, by which time it was clear that the United States was under attack. Official claims that the attack on the Pentagon could neither have been foreseen nor prevented do not withstand scrutiny [19, 20]. Official claims that the military was not prepared for hijacked domestic planes used as weapons are false [26]. In fact, multiple simulations had taken place between 1999 and May 2001 preparing for an airliner crash at the Pentagon [21]. How, then, was a successful attack on the Pentagon possible in the first place?

The official claim that U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was not in a position to do anything about the 9/11 attacks or the crash of United Airlines flight 93 is false [33]. The official claim that General Richard B. Myers, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was not present at the Pentagon during the attacks, is also false [34]. General Hugh Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, claimed to have returned to the Pentagon by 12:30 p.m. on 9/11 from a flight bound for Hungary, yet the evidence indicates he actually arrived 4 hours later, rendering him absent when most needed [35]. When Brigadier General Montague Winfield told ABC News in 2002 that the military had decided "to try to go intercept flight 93," the Pentagon sought to minimize his role by claiming that he not been Deputy Director of Operations at the National Military Command on 9/11; yet the evidence suggests he was [36]. Evidence points to General Ralph Eberhart having been "derelict in his duty," going incommunicado during the attacks and actively delaying the military's response to the attacks [37]. The role of senior U.S. military officials during 9/11 therefore requires further explanation and justification.

The FBI claimed to have recovered the fully intact passport of one of the alleged hijackers from Ground Zero despite being unable to retrieve any of the supposedly "indestructible" components of the black boxes from Flights AA11 and UA175 [25]. Although the Pentagon was ringed with closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras and there were also CCTV cameras at nearby buildings whose footage could be used to demonstrate conclusively what hit the Pentagon, the FBI confiscated all of it [21], belatedly releasing only two tapes in 2006 that do not appear to show a commercial airliner. Coupled with the missing airport CCTV footage of the alleged hijackers and the FBI's role in (mis)identifying them, research needs to be carried out into the possibility that the FBI was at the forefront of a cover-up.

The Secret Service, upon learning of the first impact on the Twin Towers, allowed President Bush to remain in a classroom in Sarasota, FL, for a further 10 min and then allowed him to deliver his regularly scheduled television address, thus advertising his location to potential suicide hijackers attacking the United States, for whom the President could have been a key target [29–30]. In Griffin's (2007) view,

This behavior makes sense only if the Secret Service knew that the planned attacks did not include an attack on the president. And how could this be known for certain unless the attacks were being carried out by people within our government? (p. 13)

The role of the Secret Service on 9/11 warrants further investigation.

The Environmental Health Agency, on the White House's order, claimed that the air around Ground Zero was safe to breathe, yet thousands of first responders have since died prematurely from cancers. In particular, thyroid cancer incidence is 2–3 times higher in WTC responders, firefighters, and New York City Department of Health exposed residents than in cancer registries generally (van Gerwen et al., 2019, p. 1600). The reasons for this cannot be explained by asbestos in the towers or by overdiagnosis owing to physician bias (van Gerwen et al., 2019, pp. 1602–1604) and therefore need to be properly investigated.

New York Mayor Rudolf Giuliani told ABC's Peter Jennings live on air that he had been informed in advance that the Twin Towers were about to collapse, yet he did not order their

evacuation and later denied foreknowledge of the event [28]. He did, however, evacuate the Office of Emergency Management housed in WTC 7 before 9 a.m. that morning, where he was based; that office appears to have been responsible for releasing information that the Twin Towers and WTC 7 would collapse [38]. Further research is needed into Giuliani's role in 9/11 (including the expedited clean-up operation) as well as official foreknowledge of the destruction of WTC 1, WTC 2, and WTC 7.

The reports by FEMA (2002), the 9/11 Commission (2004), and NIST (2005 and 2008) are known to be riddled with inaccuracies, omissions, and distortions. For example, the destruction of WTC 7 is avoided by both *The 9/11 Commission Report* and the 2005 NIST report. When the 2008 NIST report finally addressed WTC7, it came up with an explanation that relied on a non-peer-reviewed computer simulation that failed to imitate observed reality, the data for which were not released [13]. NIST also tried hiding structural schematics of WTC 7 that render its explanation of the collapse impossible [14]. And it tried to conceal the fact that steel exhibiting a peculiar "Swiss cheese" effect had been recovered from WTC 7 [15]. These reports are widely regarded as cover-ups in the 9/11 truth community, and their unreliable, perhaps fraudulent, status stands in need of explanation.

Key officials were not held to account for their failure to do their jobs on 9/11. These include Donald Rumsfeld [33], who was photographed on the Pentagon lawn instead of attending to his urgent duties as Secretary of Defense (he received the largest increase in defense spending since the Vietnam War). General Ralph Eberhart, who presided over NORAD's catastrophic failure to prevent the 9/11 attacks and lied under oath to the 9/11 Commission [37], was subsequently promoted to head of the United States Northern Command. Vice President Dick Cheney, who gave the order that the plane approaching the Pentagon *not* be shot down, but who could, contrary to the official narrative, have given the order for United 93 (Shanksville) to be shot down [31, 32], remained in post. Questions need to be asked as to why senior officials were rewarded, not punished, for their failures on 9/11.

Possible Indications of Financial Foul Play

Econometric analysis suggests that insider trading took place in the days leading up to 9/11 [51]. Poteshman (2006, p. 1725), for example, concludes, "there is evidence of unusual option market activity in the days leading up to September 11 that is consistent with investors trading on advance knowledge of the attacks." Wong et al. (2010, pp. 43–44, 1) find "credible circumstantial evidence [in] support of the insider trading claim," including "a significant abnormal increase in the trading volume in the option market just before the 9-11 attacks" and "evidence consistent with three bearish speculation strategies." Chesney et al., (2015, pp. 26, 29) identify abnormal options trades (i.e., those that "generate large gains, are not used for option hedging purposes, and are made only a few days before the occurrence of a specific event") on American Airlines, United Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Boeing, and KLM prior to 9/11. These studies, which have not been challenged, demand further investigation into insider trading based on foreknowledge of 9/11. Possible avenues of inquiry are suggested by Ryan (2010).

The day before 9/11, Donald Rumsfeld announced that the Pentagon could not account for an eye-watering US\$2.3 trillion of missing funds. The only section of the Pentagon to be hit on 9/11 contained the accounting offices, where the accountants were killed, making that money impossible to trace. As intelligence analyst Robert David Steele (2010) puts it, "On 11 September, whatever hit the Pentagon reputedly destroyed all the computers containing all the data needed to investigate the missing 2.3 trillion dollars" (p. 369, n. 23). There needs to be a full investigation into this missing money, especially in view of recent research indicating that an estimated US\$21 trillion cannot be accounted for in the financial records of the Department of Defense and the Department of Housing and Urban Development between 1998 and 2016 (Skidmore & Fitts, 2019).

Larry Silverstein signed a 99-year lease on the Twin Towers and Buildings 4 and 5 only 7 weeks before 9/11 (Port Authority, 2001). Whereas the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had insured the WTC complex *and* the three New York City area airports for a total US\$1.5 billion, Silverstein went to great lengths to get the buildings alone insured for US\$3.55 billion (Frankel, 2002). Following the destruction of the Twin Towers, he argued that the destruction of each tower should count as a separate event and spent years in the courts trying to claim a US\$7.1 billion payout from his US\$3.55 billion insurance policy, eventually walking away with US\$4.55 billion, the largest single insurance settlement in history (Bagli, 2007). Silverstein also held the lease on WTC 7, meaning he held the lease on five of the seven WTC buildings; all the buildings destroyed on 9/11 had a WTC prefix. Remarkably, Silverstein chose 9/11 of all days not to have his usual breakfast at the top of the North Tower, and both his children, who worked in the Twin Towers, also happened to be late for work that day (van der Pijl, 2019, p. 34). Further investigation is needed into the extraordinary good fortune of “Lucky Larry.”

The Passenger Planes

There is no evidence that United Flight 93 crashed in a field near Shanksville, PA, rather than having been shot down [23]. Nor is there evidence that it was the “hijackers” who turned off the transponders on three of the four flights; “instead, a spectrum of evidence exists to call into question whether hijackers were on the planes at all” [24]. For example, none of the four aircraft alleged to have been involved on 9/11 squawked the hijack code, even though there would have been ample time for either the pilot or copilot to do so [22]. The official account of what happened to the four planes’ black boxes cannot be trusted [25].

The “Let’s roll” campaign glorifying the heroism of the passengers of UA Flight 93 was based on a phone call made by passenger Todd Beamer whose authenticity is dubious [47]. The authenticity of reported phone calls by Barbara Olson from AA Flight 77 is also questionable [48]. Although cell phone calls from high-altitude airliners (flying above 20,000 ft) were next to impossible in 2001, the FBI and the 9/11 Commission did nothing before 2006 to cast doubt on press reports that six passengers had made cell phone calls, even though the times at which those calls were made place the aircraft involved at high altitude [49]. During the 2006 trial of Zacarias Moussaoui, the FBI altered its line, claiming that all but two of calls that had been reported as cell phone calls were actually made from onboard phones; not only is this claim refutable (e.g., by caller ID), but the fact the FBI altered its line calls its earlier credibility into question [50].

One of the alleged 9/11 hijackers, Hani Hanjour, is known to have been a terrible pilot barely able to fly a single-engine Cessna. The official claim that in a Boeing 767 he performed a complex 330° downward corkscrew manoeuvre, descending 7,000 ft in 3 min before slamming into the Pentagon at 580 miles per hour, is not credible [18]. Indeed, this extraordinary trajectory still requires a plausible explanation.

The Mainstream Media

CNN reported on the imminent destruction of WTC 7 for over an hour before it happened; MSNBC knew in advance that the building would come down; and the BBC reported 23 minutes prematurely that WTC 7 had already collapsed (with the building still standing in the background of the report) [16]. How did these news organizations obtain foreknowledge of the event? Why were they so keen to report what their sources were telling them instead of asking critical questions, such as how a steel-framed building could “collapse” in the first place? Why did the BBC not even bother to check that WTC 7 had in fact been destroyed?

After 9/11, the mainstream media lent unquestioning support to every aspect of the official narrative, propagandizing for war and then classifying Iraqi resistance to U.S. and British occupation

as Al-Qaeda terrorism (Chossudovsky, 2005, pp. 194–195). “As with *The 9/11 Commission Report* and the lead-up to the Iraq War,” Ryan (2007, p. 65) writes with respect to the 2005 NIST reports, “the major media simply parroted any explanations, or non-explanations, given in support of the official story.” What explains this abject failure of the “fourth estate” to hold power to account?

In the years after 9/11, the U.S. news media repeatedly showed footage of the Twin Towers being destroyed but not WTC 7 (Griffin & Woodworth, 2018, p. 37); as late as 2013, 46% of U.S. citizens were unaware that a third tower was destroyed on 9/11 (McLeod, 2013). The media also failed to report on the 9/11 war games (Four Arrows, 2006, p. 130). More recently, there was virtually no mention of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, report on WTC 7 (Hulsey et al., 2019) in the mainstream media. What accounts for such glaring omissions, which always work in favor of the official narrative?

Why is it that “a surprisingly large number of Left media outlets—most of them, in fact—have adopted the same stance on 9/11 as Chomsky’s: refuse to investigate 9/11, and discourage or ridicule those who do” (Zwicker, 2006, p. 218)? A well-known example is Amy Goodman, the face of Democracy Now, whom video evidence places near WTC 7 shortly before its destruction, yet who steadfastly refuses to discuss 9/11 truth.

“Even while it was still unfolding,” notes King (2005, p. 47), “the attack on the World Trade Center of 11 September 2001 was described on numerous occasions as like something ‘from a movie,’” because “The images were, in some respects, uncannily similar to those offered by a number of Hollywood blockbusters produced in the previous decade.” MacGregor (2006, p. 206) makes a similar observation: “Numerous disaster movies, and conspiracy thrillers like *Arlington Road*, which concluded with a massive terrorist bombing in Washington, primed the American collective unconscious for 9-11.” To what extent was this deliberate, aimed at making the near-impossible (i.e., a massive attack on a U.S. city in the “unipolar” era), seem not only possible but perhaps even inevitable? An Internet search for “9/11 predictive programming” returns hundreds, maybe thousands, of possible foreshadowings of 9/11 in popular culture. Yet, despite the “vast scale of US government control in Hollywood,” resulting in “a vast, militarised propaganda apparatus operating throughout the screen entertainment industry in the United States” (Secker & Alford, 2017), the possibility that this industry could be used to condition the public response to false flag terrorism remains unexplored in the academic literature.

The Hollywood movies *World Trade Center* (2006) and *United 93* (2006) strongly reinforced the official narrative at the very time it was being called into question by an emergent 9/11 truth movement. The latter film claims to be based in part on cell phone calls whose authenticity is dubious [47] and ends by exonerating military leaders of all possible blame for the fate of Flight UA 93, even though the 8-mile debris field was consistent with a shoot-down and Vice-President Cheney could have given the shoot-down order in time [23, 32]. Studies exposing the overtly propagandistic nature of these films are needed.

Summary

The above points, while offering a highly condensed summation of what most 9/11 researchers would probably agree on based on an examination of the empirical evidence, barely scratches the surface of the bigger picture regarding 9/11. Nevertheless, they should be sufficient to make IR scholars critically reconsider their basic presuppositions regarding 9/11.

Reasons Why IR Scholars Ignore 9/11 Truth

Given the substantial body of evidence indicating that the official 9/11 narrative is false, why has none of it appeared in the discipline of IR? I propose three main reasons: (i) the weaponization of the

term “conspiracy theory”; (ii) the taboo on questioning the ruling structures of society; and (iii) a neo-McCarthyite political climate.

The Weaponization of Conspiracy Theory

IR scholars, like other academics, appear to have taken their cue from President George W. Bush (2001): “Let us never tolerate outrageous conspiracy theories concerning the attacks of September the 11th.” The knee-jerk reaction to anyone questioning the official 9/11 narrative is to brand them a “conspiracy theorist,” and amazingly this is true even within academia. For example, consider the following reviewer comments I received on a manuscript submitted to a different journal:

The 9/11 section is full of very dodgy information that does not stand up to even mild scrutiny. An example is the discussion of WTB7, where the author rehashes a famous discredited conspiracy theory. It is really no mystery why WTB7 collapsed (and why it was reported before the collapse). Hit by debris, and on fire for seven hours, it was eventually abandoned by firefighters, and subsequently collapsed.

These words, which parrot the official narrative and resort instinctively to the “conspiracy theory” smear, were written *after* the publication of the Alaska, Fairbanks, study which concludes that “fire did not cause the collapse of WTC 7 on 9/11” (Hulsey et al., 2019, p. 2). Where is the science here and where the superstition?

As IR scholars really ought to know, the term “conspiracy theory” is weaponized. Though in use beforehand, it was systematically propagated by the CIA through the mainstream media from 1967 in order to

deflect accusations that officials at the highest levels of the American government were complicit in [President] Kennedy’s murder. [...] The CIA’s campaign to popularize the term “conspiracy theory” and make conspiracy belief a target of ridicule and hostility must be credited, unfortunately, with being one of the most successful propaganda initiatives of all time. (deHaven-Smith, 2013, p. 25)

As Falk (2007, p. 120) points out, “this management of suspicion [through the ‘conspiracy theory’ label] is itself suspicious.” To dismiss 9/11 truth as “conspiracy theory” is not only intellectually lazy, supercilious, and uninformed, it is also the hallmark of vulnerability to a long-standing psychological warfare operation. Such an approach is unbecoming of serious scholarship.

There exists an intellectual tradition in the United States of seeking to discredit anyone who takes seriously the possibility of high-level conspiracies in U.S. politics. This goes back to Richard Hofstadter’s 1964 essay on the “paranoid style” of American politics (Hofstadter, 1965). While “there is nothing paranoid about taking note” of real “conspiratorial acts in history,” Hofstadter (1965) argues 1 year after the John F. Kennedy assassination, we should beware of conspiracy theories that “alert us to a distorted judgment” (pp. 29, 6). This tendency is not limited to “people with profoundly disturbed minds” but also describes “modes of expression by more or less normal people” (Hofstadter, 1965, p. 4). With the unstated assumption being that real conspiratorial acts do not take place in the U.S. political system, the implication is that any sane person who points to evidence of such acts must be “paranoid,” their judgment “distorted.”

That tradition became weaponized in 2009 when Harvard law professor Cass Sunstein, recently appointed as President Obama’s head of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, coauthored a paper advocating the use of anonymous government agents to engage in “cognitive infiltration of extremist groups, designed to introduce informational diversity into such groups and to expose indefensible conspiracy theories as such” (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009, p. 205). 9/11 truth is the primary target of the paper. “Government agents (and their allies),” the authors propose, “might

enter chat rooms, online social networks, or even real-space groups and attempt to undermine percolating conspiracy theories by raising doubts about their factual premises, causal logic, or implications for action, political or otherwise” (p. 224).

Although the premises, logic, and implications of Sunstein and Vermeule’s paper are comprehensively refuted by Hagen (2011) and Griffin (2011), it is clear that there has been massive infiltration of the 9/11 truth movement by agents seeking to subvert it (see Johnson, 2011, 2017). “Interference in ongoing research,” writes Johnson (2011, p. 233), has led to “depression of the quality of discussion” and “seemingly temporary and permanent changes in the behaviour of those involved in 9/11 research.” The fracturing of the 9/11 truth movement is not accidental but, rather, the result of deliberate attempts to undermine it. Techniques used include seeding misinformation, ridiculing certain authors, promoting nonsense theories, and outright censorship (in the case of Dr. Judy Wood). Of course, if elements of the U.S. government were complicit in 9/11, then pervasive efforts by “[US] government agents (and their allies)” (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009, p. 244) to subvert the 9/11 truth movement make sense.

The Power of Taboo

Certain topics are deemed off limits for sociopolitical reasons. The basic principle is never to discuss anything that is in conflict with the ruling structure of society, and that principle is enforced by systematic exclusion of such topics from consideration in mainstream media and political discourse, such that all debate and discussion remains confined to a spectrum of acceptable opinion (Herman & Chomsky, 2010; McMurtry, 1988). A “spiral of silence” then sets in whereby individuals, consciously or unconsciously unwilling to fall outside the spectrum of acceptable opinion, never question it (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). In anthropological terms, Chomsky notes (2008a, p. 177), “we are dealing here with a form of taboo, a deep-seated superstitious avoidance of some terrifying question [...]”

The contemporary taboo is 9/11 truth and the terrifying question is how power really works in the United States. For if 9/11 truth were to be

taken by influential arbiters of reality as accurate, as an increasing number of people here and abroad appear to believe, then it will exhibit the great vulnerability of American constitutionalism to fundamental subversion from within by the most extreme and ethically depraved members of its own political community. (Falk, 2007, p. 122)

The possibility that the U.S. political system, a self-proclaimed beacon of democracy, has been hijacked by psychopaths and war criminals is not something that most people are willing to entertain. “The conclusions [about US complicity in the attacks] are difficult to accept,” Chossudovsky (2005) recognizes, “because they point to the criminalization of the upper echelons of the State. They also confirm the complicity of the corporate media in upholding the legitimacy of the Administration’s war agenda and camouflaging US sponsored war crimes” (p. xxi).

Maintaining the taboo on 9/11 truth brings actors closer to the ruling power structure, conferring certain advantages from a class standpoint. This is a particularly important consideration when it comes to the failure of the “establishment-left,” to borrow MacGregor’s (2006, p. 194) apt term, to investigate 9/11. The establishment-left includes such intellectuals as Noam Chomsky, Mary Kaldor, Samir Amin, Michael Parenti, Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, Tom Nairn, Susie Orbach, and Stephen Lukes, who typically interpret 9/11 as “blowback,” i.e. a violent reaction by the disenfranchised and underprivileged of the world to U.S.-led globalization (MacGregor, 2006, pp. 193-6). The U.S. government is thereby absolved from any direct involvement in the attacks. Establishment-left positions are advanced by “an array of left-wing and liberal journals and websites, from

Counterpunch to *The Nation* and from *Socialist Register* to *The New Left Review*” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 194). To these Davidsson (2013, p. 310) adds *The Progressive* and *Le Monde Diplomatique*, noting, “some prominent leftist publications were not content with merely ignoring the issue of 9/11 [but] actually engaged in slander of [those] who [...] questioned the official account on 9/11.” The “probable reason” for this, he suggests, is that “leftist parties and organizations hope to join the fold of ‘the establishment’ in order to enjoy the ensuing material and psychological benefits,” including foundation funding and government largesse (Davidsson, 2013, p. 311). Psychologically, 9/11 truth can generate a sense of ontological insecurity as those waking up to it realize that key propositions that they have been socialized to accept are false. As one U.S. academic writes, questioning the official 9/11 narrative means that “everything changes.” Possible changes include:

loss of belief and trust in government; loss of belief in the value of democratic participation; loss of belief in my own tradition as a bearer of “civilization”; loss of belief in the power of dialogue and compromise as a basis of civil society; loss of belief in openness and transparency in public policy; loss of faith in my democratically elected government to act on values and principles compatible with my own, etc. (Smith, 2012, p. 348)

As the language of loss indicates, this is a lot for anyone to come to terms with, and too much for many Westerners to deal with, at least to begin with.

Neo-McCarthyism

There is a long-standing connection between U.S. wars and the suppression of academic freedom:

All too frequently a call to arms abroad against the latest threat to American hegemony has a domestic battleground as well. From World War I to the nationalistic excesses following the September 11 attacks, public and private entities have tried to purge free speech from the academy without which the pursuit of truth would be futile. (Kirstein, 2009, p. 70)

After 9/11, governments in the U.S., Britain, and elsewhere “legislated extremely rigorous limits on dissent regarding the War on Terror” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 195). Academic silence on 9/11 truth can, accordingly, be attributed to “the disciplining effect of the War on Terror and the state of emergency, which [...] is even stronger than McCarthy-era anti-communism” (van der Pijl, 2014, p. 229). The neo-McCarthyite climate of fear and intimidation that descended over academia after 9/11 has “greatly impeded the acceptance and publication of research papers that question or contradict the official account of that event” (Wyndham, 2017, p. 3).

Academics are faced with clear disincentives when it comes to speaking out on 9/11. For example, when William Woodward, a psychology professor at the University of New Hampshire, expressed his view that the Bush administration allowed 9/11 to occur in 2006, students and state legislators call for him to be fired. The same thing happened to Kevin Barrett, a University of Wisconsin–Madison professor, who believed that the Bush administration had orchestrated 9/11 in order to justify military operations in Iraq (Rosborough, 2009, pp. 565–566). Professor Steven E. Jones, an influential name in 9/11 truth, was allegedly edged into retirement by Brigham Young University in 2006. Dr. Judy Wood left Clemson University in 2006 for reasons that remain unclear, but it appears that her 9/11 research was incompatible with holding an academic post. Dr. Daniele Ganser was dismissed by ETH Zurich in 2006 for “spreading nonsense conspiracy theories” about 9/11, to quote his erstwhile line manager, Professor Kurt Spillmann (cited in Schawinski, 2018, p. 41). When Morgan Reynolds raised evidence-based doubts about the official narrative in 2007, he

was singled out for censure by University of Texas at Austin President and former CIA director Robert Gates (Reynolds, 2007).

The pressure on academics to lose their jobs for speaking out about 9/11 has been mirrored in other sectors. Kevin Ryan, a former site manager at Underwriters Laboratories (which certified the WTC steel), was fired in 2004 after publicly challenging the official claim that “jet fuel” caused the destruction of the Twin Towers. Cate Jenkins was dismissed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2010 after speaking out about the agency’s role in covering up the levels of toxicity in the WTC dust. When a federal court ruled that Jenkins had been unfairly dismissed and ordered the EPA to reinstate her with back pay, the EPA kept her on paid administrative leave and refiled the same charges against her in 2013 (Corbett, 2019). Michael Springmann, who blew the whistle on the role of the Jeddah consulate in supplying U.S. visas to terrorists, suddenly found, in his own words, that he “couldn’t get a job anywhere” (cited in Corbett, 2019).

While the disincentives against 9/11 truth are great, so too are the incentives to toe the official line. Falk (2007, p. 127) sums it up: “Never before has it been as imperative to struggle for a true rendering of the 9/11 reality, and never have the incentives been greater to prevent such a rendering.” For example, explosives expert Van Romero, who changed his tune from “explosives devices inside the buildings [. . .] caused the towers to collapse” to “certainly the fire is what caused the building to fail” went on to win \$15 million of federal research funding (Reynolds, 2007, p. 112).

Sceptics sometimes question why there are so few academic journal articles on 9/11 truth, as though knowledge could only be genuine if stamped with the imprimatur of peer review. But when the institutional environment of academia is so hostile to 9/11 truth—for political rather than intellectual reasons—then the paucity of peer-reviewed scientific literature on the events of 9/11 comes as no surprise:

As 9/11 research has shown in perhaps magnified form, the formal peer review process can be used as a weapon to bury opposing views and stifle independent research whose natural conclusions are in opposition to established or official narratives and vested interests. The tendency to look down upon or disparage a paper that has not gone through or survived the formal peer review process is widespread but often unwarranted (Wyndham, 2017, p. 6).

Indeed, it is certainly true that some extremely important 9/11 research exists in non-peer-reviewed format (see Footnote 5). To the extent that the peer review system has worked to stifle 9/11 truth, as Wyndham alleges, it even stands to reason that some of the most important 9/11 research may not have been peer reviewed.

Universities, the supposed guardians of legitimate knowledge, remain the one place where research into the events of 9/11 is generally forbidden. No doubt such research would displease corporate and state funders, as well as the sizable portion of students, staff, and the general public who, having never independently investigated the events of 9/11, uncritically accept the official narrative. Contrary to ideas about academic freedom, the reality has been that barely a word threatening official orthodoxy on 9/11 may be uttered in academia. Those academics who have spoken out have tended to be emeritus or retired professors with little to lose career-wise, for example, David Ray Griffin, Peter Dale Scott, Morgan Reynolds, Graeme MacQueen, Richard Falk, Robert Korol, Eric Larsen, John McMurtry, and Kees van der Pijl.

Van der Pijl found himself on the receiving end of the new McCarthyism in 2019, when he resigned his emeritus status at Sussex University after the university threatened to withdraw it because of a tweet in which he alleged Mossad involvement in 9/11. He accompanied his decision with a full-length academic paper providing supporting evidence for his claim, noting that criticism of the state of Israel does not equate to anti-Semitism and claiming that the university’s attempt to

censor him amounts to an attack on free speech and academic freedom (van der Pijl, 2019). Whatever one thinks about van der Pijl's views on 9/11, the latter points are surely valid.

Dr. Piers Robinson was attacked by the *Huffington Post* in 2018 for suggesting that the 9/11 Consensus Panel findings present "a serious challenge for mainstream academics and journalists to start to ask substantial questions about 9/11" (York, 2018). Eight months earlier, the *Times* had tacitly called for Robinson and his colleagues in the Syria Media Propaganda Working Group to be fired, comparing them to holocaust deniers that a history department would not employ (Keate et al., 2018). In April 2019, the Sheffield University student newspaper *The Forge* alleged Robinson was "engaging in denial" of anti-Semitism allegations within the Labour Party after he signed a petition saying it was "being used as a weapon to silence those who speak out against injustice" (Somerville, 2019). Academics who dare to challenge official narratives can, it seems, expect to find themselves subjected to a media smear campaign as part of a coordinated effort to discredit them.

Conclusion

There is something sinister about the refusal of academics to subject the events of 9/11 to critical examination. While a sizable and growing proportion of the world's population has long had doubts about the official 9/11 narrative,¹⁰ academia has maintained a rigorous regime of self-censorship. It is no exaggeration to claim that "the willful avoidance of the questions surrounding 9/11 by the academic community verges on the pathological" (Davidsson, 2013, p. 309). Nowhere is that more true than in the discipline of IR, where the official narrative on 9/11 is accepted virtually without question.

Although IR scholars are meant to be trained experts in such phenomena as false flag terrorism, there is a sense in which they might be forgiven for not exploring the possibility that 9/11 was a false flag in the immediate years after the event. After all, 9/11 truth did not begin to gain traction until around 2005–2007, when Griffin (2005) discredited *The 9/11 Commission Report*, organizations such as Scholars for 9/11 Truth (2005), Pilots For 9/11 Truth (2006), and Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth (2006) were founded, and Dr. Judy Wood and Dr. Morgan Reynolds brought Qui Tam cases (2007) against Applied Research Associates and Science Applications International Corporation for their allegedly fraudulent role in the production of the NIST reports. However, the longer that time goes on, and more people around the world come to understand that there is something deeply suspect about the events of 9/11, the more inexcusable it becomes for academics to continue to turn a blind eye to those events. The burden of proof today is on academia to defend the official narrative against the allegations that have been made against it. This requires engaging with 9/11 truth rather than ignoring it.

Should academics prove unable to defend the official narrative, several major consequences would follow. First, the possibility that 9/11 was a false flag would have to be taken seriously. "What the 9/11 attacks showed more than anything," writes Hastings Dunn (2013, p. 1243), "was a willingness on the part of the perpetrators to think creatively and to employ technologies and tactics that were entirely unconventional in order to achieve strategic surprise, shock and destruction." Absolutely, but who were the perpetrators and what technologies were involved? What kind of technology, for example, can turn a 110-story steel-framed skyscraper mostly into dust in a little over 10 seconds, and who would have had access to such technology?

Second, an inability to defend the official narrative would necessitate reflection on why that narrative has for so long been uncritically accepted among scholars who pride themselves on their ability to think critically. Certainly, they should not be taken in by far-fetched conspiracy theories such as the one put forward by the Bush administration.¹¹ A certain humility would be required in order to recognize that so-called conspiracy theorists, often without academic credentials, have done

far more to uncover the truth about 9/11 than academia. In that respect, academia would stand deeply discredited.

Pedagogically, far greater attention must be paid to false flag terrorism, in particular as perpetrated by Western states. For

If, as increasing numbers of people are claiming, 9/11 was a false flag operation, then this is something that needs to be exposed. And if false flag operations can have the kind of impact upon society that 9/11 had, then clearly these kinds of operations need to be studied far more. They should be the subject of extensive public debate, and leading figures from various disciplines need to apply their expertise to studying and analyzing these events. Only by subjecting them to such attention will we put an end to these appalling crimes (Everett, 2008, p. 387).

One implication of this is that “Critical Terrorism Studies” can no longer play down the use of false flag terrorism by Western states. After all, if IR’s failure to foresee the end of the Soviet Union led to a decade of soul searching, how much worse would be missing false flag terrorism on 9/11?

If 9/11 was a false flag event, then academics have been complicit in maintaining the pretense that it was not. By extension, they are complicit in the horrific consequences that have flowed from 9/11 because they have failed to challenge the Great Lie on which everything was based. Admittedly, remarks MacQueen, “It takes a certain intellectual courage to question a story that is being promoted so heavily by virtually every government in the world, as well as the mainstream media” (see Zuberi, 2013). Yet, there is a moral imperative to tell the truth when so much murder and suffering is based on lies. As George Orwell is reputed to have said, in a time of universal deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

Let us assume for a moment that the only Muslims involved in perpetrating 9/11 were patsies—which is reasonable based on the evidence—and that 9/11 was blamed on Muslims in order to legitimize U.S. military interference in a string of Muslim-majority countries. What would this imply about the discipline of IR? “By selling out to the self-fulfilling fiction of Islamic terrorism,” claims van der Pijl (2014, pp. 189, 229), “the discipline of IR today has itself largely degenerated into a mercenary, ‘embedded’ auxiliary force”—a process that has been catalyzed by foundation funding flowing to research on “Islam,” with ideas about terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, and so on frequently taken for granted. IR would appear as little more than a sophisticated propaganda instrument, offering a thousand different ways of camouflaging real power relations.

If 9/11 were a false flag, this would cast the pre-9/11 work of certain IR scholars with known links to the upper echelons of U.S. state power in a new light. For example, if “Islamic terrorism” is a manufactured pretext for U.S. military interference in Muslim-majority countries, then what are we to make of Huntington’s (1997, p. 58) prophetic drawing of the battle lines between “the West” and “Islam,” including reference to “half a dozen young men [...], between their bows to Mecca, putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner”? Or Richard Betts’ warning that “enemies might attempt to punish the United States by triggering catastrophes in American cities,” specifically citing the threat of a “radical Islamic group” (cited in Lipschutz, 1999, p. 423)? Huntington and Betts’ ties to the CIA were exposed in the 1980s.

If Davidsson (2013, p. 312) is correct that “whoever conceived the mass-murder of 9/11 did so in the long-term interests of Empire,” with 9/11 being staged to win popular support for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and other Eurasian countries, then what are we to make of Brzezinski’s (1997, p. 210, 25) argument that the “geostrategic imperatives” of “American primacy” require gaining control of the oil-rich areas of Central Asia but that persuading a skeptical U.S. population of the plan will prove “difficult [...] except in the circumstance of a truly massive and widely perceived direct external threat,” viz. “the shock effect of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor”?

How should we interpret Carter et al.'s (1998, p. 81) prediction of a "transforming event" that would, "like Pearl Harbour [. . .] divide our past and future into a before and after," involving "loss of life and property unprecedented in peacetime," and necessitating "draconian measures, scaling back civil liberties, allowing wider surveillance of citizens, detention of suspects, and use of deadly force"? Deutch was CIA Director in 1995/1996 and in 1997 he cochaired the Catastrophic Terrorism Study Group with Carter. Zelikow was lead author on the 2002 USS National Security Strategy and Executive Director of the 9/11 Commission.

Is it mere coincidence that the Project for a New American Century (PNAC, 2000) claimed that the rebuilding of America's defenses (specifically involving a new U.S. Space Command) would be a drawn-out affair "absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor"? Or that a commission on the establishment of a U.S. Space Command chaired by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (a signatory on PNAC's founding document) asked in January 2001 whether the necessary funding would occur only after a "Space Pearl Harbor" (cited in Griffin, 2007, p. 15)?

The disturbing possibility raised by these premonitions of a new Pearl Harbor linked to Islamic terrorism and associated with the very measures that would later be implemented as part of the War on Terror, is that the IR discipline may have helped to frame the War on Terror narrative in advance.

Van der Pijl (2014, p. 234) is pessimistic about the prospects for the IR discipline to renew itself:

A discipline led by scholars of this moral calibre cannot be expected to restore its intellectual integrity. Under conditions of the growing precariousness of academics at all levels, few of the rank and file can afford to take their distance from such leading scholars either.

Yet, it is important not to lose sight of what is achievable. As MacQueen observes (see Zuberi, 2013),

When you think about the potential power of universities—not a formal, political power, but an informal power that comes through credibility, high status in society, and influence—they *could* be stopping this whole thing in its tracks. But they're not.

Imagine if academics did start to cast off their cognitive and ethical shackles and come out against the official 9/11 narrative. That would lend considerable weight to the public crescendo of calls for a new 9/11 investigation. Consider the potential consequences:

If the official account were falsified and the event adjudged a false-flag attack by a transnational criminal cabal, several things would happen. The War on Terror would come to an immediate halt. Indictments would be issued and criminal trials held until justice was served. Forgiveness of the Muslim world would be sought [. . .] And not an ounce of additional police-state control of innocent citizens anywhere in the world would be needed in order to achieve these worthwhile goals. (Benjamin, 2017, p. 392)

Perhaps this is a rose-tinted view of how things could be. Perhaps the reality would be something closer to civil war in the United States, for if "the ruling elite stands united behind the cover-up [. . .] an independent investigation of this crime cannot take place absent a regime change" (Davidsson, 2013, pp. 314-5).

At any rate, if academics are serious about pursuing and defending the truth, the first place they need to start is 9/11 truth.

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Notes

1. In the case of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the legal basis for invoking Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in order to invade Afghanistan appears to have been a U.S. State Department dispatch instructing allies how to present the official 9/11 narrative and not forensic evidence demonstrating that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated from abroad (Harrit, 2018).
2. The term “false flag” originally referred to the displaying of the flag of an enemy country in an attack in order that the enemy might wrongly be blamed for the attack. However, it has come to be used for any attack that is deliberately disguised as the work of an official enemy.
3. The original Operation Northwoods documents were declassified in 1997 and can be found at <https://documents.theblackvault.com/documents/jfk/northwoods-NARA-FullDocument.pdf>
4. “[W]hensoever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [to secure the unalienable Rights of the governed], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government [. . .].”
5. See, for instance, Avery (2015), Corbett (2015, 2018, 2019), Davidsson (2013), Gourley (2013), Mazzucco (2013), Meyssan (2002), and Wood (2011).
6. According to Margolis (2011), “Polls show that fully a third of American respondents believe that the U.S. government and/or Israel were behind 9/11.”
7. The footnotes to The 9/11 Commission Report contains 211 references to “interrogation of KSM” and “interrogations of KSM” (Khalid Sheikh Mohammed).
8. Even the most critical international relations literature regarding 9/11—for instance, Falk (2007) and van der Pijl (2014)—raises doubts about the official narrative but does not examine empirical evidence concerning the events of the day itself.
9. A useful list of critical peer-reviewed literature on 9/11 can be found at <https://911inacademia.com/journal-papers/>. There is also the *Journal of 9/11 Studies*, though this is itself the subject of controversy within the 9/11 truth movement and has only published two articles in the last three years.
10. Griffin (2005, pp. 2–4) cites a range of international opinion polls showing that even in the years immediately after 9/11, significant proportions of the populations of the United States, Canada, and Germany had doubts about the official narrative. According to a *CBS/New York Times* poll taken in April 2004, for instance, “an astonishing 72 percent of the American people believed the Bush administration to be guilty of a cover-up, at least to some degree, of relevant information it had prior to the attacks of 9/11” (Griffin, 2005, p. 3).
11. For a well-known 5-min satire of the official narrative, see Corbett (2011).

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