

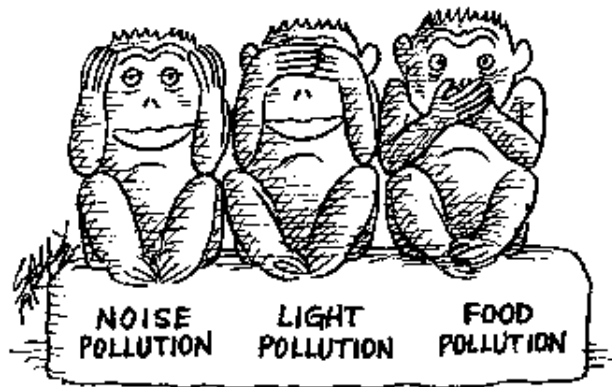
I believe in conspiracies

John Laughland says the real nutters are those who believe in al-Qa'eda and weapons of mass destruction

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Believing in conspiracy theories is rather like having been to a grammar school: both are rather socially awkward to admit. Although I once sat next to a sister-in-law of the Duke of Norfolk who agreed that you can't believe everything you read in the newspapers, conspiracy theories are generally considered a rather repellent form of intellectual low-life, and their theorists rightfully the object of scorn and snobbery. Writing in the *Daily Mail* last week, the columnist Melanie Phillips even attacked conspiracy theories as the consequence of a special pathology, of the collapse in religious belief, and of a 'descent into the irrational'. The implication is that those who oppose 'the West', or who think that governments are secretive and dishonest, might need psychiatric treatment.



The Three Ecologically-Aware Monkeys

In fact, it is the other way round. British and American foreign policy is itself based on a series of highly improbable conspiracy theories, the biggest of which is that an evil Saudi millionaire genius in a cave in the Hindu Kush controls a secret worldwide network of 'tens of thousands of terrorists' 'in more than 60 countries' (George Bush). News reports frequently tell us that terrorist organisations, such as those which have attacked Bali or Istanbul, have 'links' to al-Qa'eda, but we never learn quite what those 'links' are.

According to two terrorism experts in California, Adam Dolnik and Kimberly McCloud, this is because they do not exist. 'In the quest to define the enemy, the US and its allies have helped to blow al-Qa'eda out of proportion,' they write. They argue that the name 'al-Qa'eda' was invented in the West to designate what is, in reality, a highly disparate

collection of otherwise independent groups with no central command structure and not even a logo. They claim that some terrorist organisations say they are affiliated to bin Laden simply to gain kudos and name-recognition for their entirely local grievances.

By the same token, the US-led invasion of Iraq was based on a fantasy that Saddam Hussein was in, or might one day enter into, a conspiracy with Osama bin Laden. This is as verifiable as the claim that MI6 used mind control to make Henri Paul crash Princess Diana's car into the 13th pillar of the tunnel under the Place de l'Alma. With similar mystic gnosis, Donald Rumsfeld has alleged that the failure to find 'weapons of mass distraction', as Tony Blair likes to call them, shows that they once existed but were destroyed. Indeed, London and Washington have shamelessly exploited people's fear of the unknown to get public opinion to believe their claim that Iraq had masses of anthrax and botulism. This played on a deep and ancient seam of fear about poison conspiracies which, in the Middle Ages, led to pogroms against Jews. And yet it is the anti-war people who continue to be branded paranoid, even though the British Prime Minister himself, his eyes staring wildly, said in September 2002, 'Saddam has got all these weapons . . . and they're pointing at us!'

In contrast to such imaginings, it is perfectly reasonable to raise questions about the power of the secret services and armed forces of the world's most powerful states, especially those of the USA. These are not 'theories' at all; they are based on fact. The Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Office of Naval Intelligence, the National Reconnaissance Office, the Defense Intelligence Agency and other US secret services spend more than \$30,000,000,000 a year on espionage and covert operations. Do opponents of conspiracy theories think that this money is given to the Langley, Virginia Cats' Home? It would also be churlish to deny that the American military industry plays a very major role in the economics and politics of the US. Every day at 5 p.m., the Pentagon announces hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts to arms manufacturers all over America -- click on the Department of Defense's website for details -- who in turn peddle influence through donations to politicians and opinion-formers.

It is also odd that opponents of conspiracy theories often allow that conspiracies have occurred in the past, but refuse to contemplate their existence in the present. For some reason, you are bordering on the bonkers if you wonder about the truth behind events like 9/11, when it is established as fact that in 1962 the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lyman L. Lemnitzer, tried to convince President Kennedy to authorise an attack on John Glenn's rocket, or on a US navy vessel, to provide a pretext for invading Cuba [*see* Operation Northwoods]. Two years later, a similar strategy was deployed in the faked Gulf of Tonkin incident, when US engagement in Vietnam was justified in the light of the false allegation that the North Vietnamese had launched an unprovoked attack on a US destroyer. Are such tactics confined to history? Paul O'Neill, George Bush's former Treasury Secretary, has just revealed that the White House decided to get rid of Saddam eight months before 9/11.

Indeed, one ought to speak of a 'conspiracy of silence' about the role of secret services in politics. This is especially true of the events in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It is the height of irresponsibility to discuss the post-communist transition without extensive reference to the role of the spooks, yet our media stick doggedly to the myth that their role is irrelevant. During the overthrow of the Georgian president, Eduard Shevardnadze, on 22

November 2003, the world's news outlets peddled a wonderful fairy-tale about a spontaneous uprising -- 'the revolution of roses', *CNN* shlockily dubbed it -- even though all the key actors have subsequently bragged that they were covertly funded and organised by the US.

Similarly, it is a matter of public record that the Americans pumped at least \$100 million into Serbia in order to get rid of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, and huge sums in the years before. (An election in Britain, whose population is eight times bigger than Yugoslavia's, costs about two thirds of this.) This money was used to fund and equip the Kosovo Liberation Army; to stuff international observer missions in Kosovo with hundreds of military intelligence officers; to pay off the opposition and the so-called 'independent' media; and to buy heavily-armed Mafia gangsters to come and smash up central Belgrade, so that the world's cameras could show a 'people's revolution'.

At every stage, the covert aid and organisation provided by the US and British intelligence agencies were decisive, as they had been on many occasions before and since, all over the world.[1] Yet for some reason, it is acceptable to say, 'The CIA organised the overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadeq in Iran in 1953', but not that it did it again in Belgrade in 2000 or Tbilisi in 2003. And in spite of the well-known subterfuge and deception practised, for instance, in the Iran-Contra scandal in the mid-1980s, people experience an enormous psychological reluctance to accept that the British and American governments knowingly lied us into war in 2002 and 2003. To be sure, some conspiracy theories may be outlandish or wrong. But it seems to me that anyone who refuses to make simple empirical deductions ought to have his head examined.

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1. Essential reading on the history of United States intrusions in the affairs of others is William Blum's edifying and exhaustive *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*. This work contains 55 chapters spanning interventions throughout the world from 1945 to 1994 and three appendices, the third of which lists 40 U.S. government assassination plots of prominent foreign individuals since the end of WWII. See also Blum's 1993 work *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*. In a September 2002 article entitled "Why Terrorists Hate America," Blum closed with the words,

If I were the president, I could stop terrorist attacks against the United States in a few days. Permanently. I would first apologize to all the widows and orphans, the tortured and impoverished, and all the many millions of other victims of American imperialism. Then I would announce, in all sincerity, to every corner of the world, that America's global interventions have come to an end, and inform Israel that it is no longer the 51st state of the USA but now -- oddly enough -- a foreign country. I would then reduce the military budget by at least 90% and use the savings to pay reparations to the victims. There would be more than enough money. One year's military budget of 330 billion dollars is equal to more than \$18,000 an hour for every hour since Jesus Christ was born. That's what I'd do on my first three days in the White House. On the fourth day, I'd be assassinated.

See Also:

*Understanding Special Operations, And Their Impact on The Vietnam War Era
1989 Interview with L. Fletcher Prouty, Colonel USAF (Retired),
by David Ratcliffe, rat haus reality press, 1999.*

"People have asked about this business we euphemistically call 'special operations', that is the military services providing support to the clandestine activities of the government, usually clandestine activities that are at least nominally under the control of the CIA." (p. 76)

"When I was assigned to the Air Force Headquarters in 1955, the Chief of Staff General Thomas D. White directed me to create an office 'to provide the military support of the clandestine operations of the CIA' in accordance with the provisions of the National Security Council Directive #5412 of March 15, 1954, and to operate as the Pentagon 'Focal Point Office for the CIA.' . . . As Mr. Dulles told me later, 'I want a focal point. I want an office that's cleared to do what we have to have done; an office that knows us very, very well and then an office that has access to a system in the Pentagon. But the system will not be aware of what initiated the request -- they'll think it came from the Secretary of Defense. They won't realize it came from the Director of Central Intelligence.'" (p. 122)

"To really understand CIA, you have to remember that perhaps its best cover story is that it's an intelligence organization. It doesn't do much intelligence. Intelligence is gathered by other assets throughout the Government, also. The Agency has quite a bit; but that isn't why they were created. Covert operations is their big money deal." (p. 153)

"There is no law, there is no structure, for covert operations. The Government didn't confront that in 1947 when they wrote the law. There has been no revision of the law to accommodate that. . . . The single primary character of the CIA is Mr. Dulles. There's no question about it, it was his agency. Nobody else has left any mark like his. But you need to see that background to understand what the passage of the National Security Act really meant in 1947. What it says in law is what creates many of these controversies about intelligence today. Because there still is no law that says that the CIA is an intelligence organization -- it says that it is a coordinating agency. There is no law that says it is a covert operations agency." (pp. 129, 99)

"These activities don't take place within the CIA alone. And it's important to see the CIA that way. The CIA is always merged with the rest of the government that's taking part in these actions. Because this was true over such a long period of time, there were people who were very familiar with and well-trained for these operations. Every time a covert activity came up, they were involved again. This is the Secret Team. They can carry out these activities." (p. 187)