

A response to

The 9/11 Conspiracists: Vindicated at Last?

Alexander Cockburn

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This is a detailed response to Alexander Coburn's (AC) piece, attempting to respond specifically to his assertions with references to facts, eschewing the sarcasm often characteristic of his approach. His piece is similar to most of the hit-pieces that have been written attacking the 9/11 Truth movement since Popular Mechanics started the practice back in 2005, using sarcasm, ignoring or demeaning quite valid evidence cited by the movement, citing extreme or manufactured quotes, and echoing official statements that have long been debunked. -- Dick Atlee

We're homing in on the tenth anniversary of the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon. According to a survey conducted by Gfk NOP, one in 7 Americans and 1 in 4 among those aged 16-24 believe that there was a vast conspiracy in which the U.S. government was involved. But across those 10 years, have the charges that it was an "inside job" — a favored phrase of the self-styled "truthers" — received any serious buttress?

The answer is no.

The "serious buttress" evidence is actually overwhelming. It is hard not to assume that AC simply hasn't looked at it. He does almost nothing to address it on logical/factual/evidentiary grounds..

Did the twin towers fall because they were badly built, which resulted in a consequence of corruption, incompetence and regulatory evasions by the Port Authority, not to mention that huge planes loaded with jet fuel struck them?

No, shout the conspiracy theorists, they "pancaked" because Dick Cheney's agents — scores of them — methodically planted demolition charges in the preceding days. These agents inserted the explosives in the relevant floors of three vast buildings (moving day after day among the unsuspecting office workers), and then on 9/11 activated the detonators. It was a conspiracy of thousands, all of whom, a party to mass murder, have held their tongues ever since.

"Pancaking" was only alleged by FEMA. By definition, a demolition leaves no "pancakes." I'm not quibbling here -- the use of the term is an example of the carelessness (or failure to pay attention to evidence) that evident in such hit-pieces. Another example is "preceding days." Such work takes weeks. The possibility is not so far-fetched, given the access to the building by elevator engineers and the periodic electric outages and lockouts. But doing it in days would of course be impossible. No one is saying that. This is another characteristic of the hit-pieces -- trying to discredit the movement by "quoting" it incorrectly and absurdly, or pulling out obviously far-out claims (directed energy weapons, small nuclear devices, etc.) that few in the movement make.

Take the plane that struck the Pentagon. Many conspiracists say it wasn't a plane but a missile. Eyewitnesses of a large plane hitting the Pentagon are contemptuously brushed aside. There are some photos of the impact of the "object" — i.e. the Boeing 757, Flight 77 — that seem to show the sort of hole a missile might make. Ergo, the Pentagon wasn't hit by a 757 but by a missile.

What impact photos are these? The small entry hole that presumes the plane's wings vaporized before entering the building? Or the exit hole in the C-ring that supposedly was made by the plane's soft nose cone, that would have been totally destroyed on entry?

The missile argument is a red herring. Not a lot of serious people assert that. Bombs are far more likely, given the smell of cordite and the lack of a kerosene smell noted by witnesses who walked out of the wreckage.

And yet, images exist of the Boeing 757 hitting the Pentagon. They were taken by the surveillance cameras at the Pentagon's heliport, which was right next to the impact point. Chuck Spinney, now retired after years of brilliant government service exposing the Pentagon's budgetary outrages, tells me: "I have seen them both — stills and moving pictures. I just missed seeing it (the moment of impact) personally, but the driver of the van I just got out of in South Parking saw it so closely that he could see the terrified faces of passengers in the windows. I knew two people who were on the plane. One was ID'd by dental remains found in the Pentagon."

I'm puzzled by the alleged availability of any photos showing a recognizable plane hitting the building. I think I've seen all the publicly available videos (which were released only years after the event), and I've seen no such thing. AC does not address the issue of why the FBI has released none of the other camera material from the Pentagon. As to seeing passenger faces in a plane traveling at over 500 mph, or about 3 football fields a second, well, what do you think? As to the remains, no bodies or body parts were seen by those who walked out of the damaged area. The FBI supposedly took and identified these invisible body parts; the Arlington County coroner was frozen out of the operation.

This won't faze the conspiracists. They're immune to any reality check. Spinney "worked for the government." They switched the dental records. The Boeing 757 was flown to Nebraska for a rendezvous with President Bush, who shot the passengers, burned the bodies on the tarmac and gave Spinney's friend's teeth to Dick Cheney to drop through a hole in his trousers amid the debris in the Pentagon.

Another example of a hit piece putting bizarre words in the mouths of those they wish to discredit. Perhaps it is meant to be funny, but it is clearly trying to make a point.

Of course there are conspiracies. The allegations that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction amounted to just such a one. I think there is strong evidence that Franklin D. Roosevelt did have knowledge that a Japanese naval force in the north Pacific was going to launch an attack on Pearl Harbor. It's quite possible Roosevelt thought it would be a relatively mild assault and that it would provide the final green light to get the U.S. into the war.

This apparently is intended to state his bonafides as an evaluator of the credibility of conspiracy theories. It's interesting that he just can't quite give Roosevelt credit for being like Churchill, who doomed large numbers of his countrymen by not defending Coventry against an air raid, in order to protect the secret that the allies had cracked the German code and knew in advance of the air raid. What AC is in effect saying subliminally is that no American government would EVER do such a thing -- an assertion with not much support from history.

It's entirely plausible to assume that the FBI, U.S. military intelligence and the CIA — just as convincingly claimed in the latter instance — had penetrated the al-Qaeda team planning the 9/11 attacks. Intelligence reports that piled up in various Washington bureaucracies pointed to the impending onslaught and even the manner in which it might be carried out. The history of intelligence operations is profuse with examples of successful intelligence collection. It also shows the fatal slowness to act on the intelligence along with the eagerness not to compromise the security and future usefulness of the informant, who has to prove his own credentials by even pressing for prompt action by the plotters.

Sometimes an undercover agent will actually propose an action, either to deflect efforts away from some graver threat, or to put the plotters in a position where they can be caught red-handed.

And so AC disposes of all the evidence of high-level stifling of FBI staff investigations into the "hijackers," repeating U.S. intelligence agency insinuations that they were simply manipulating the plotters to see if they could make use of them. The possibility that the 19 were patsies that had to be protected at all costs in order to have an "Arab" story should not even be considered. It's inconsistent with the official narrative.

There is not the slightest need to postulate pre-placed explosive charges to explain why the towers collapsed at near free-fall speeds. As Pierre Sprey, a former plane and weapons designer who knows a great deal about explosions, told me: "To ensure the collapse of a major building requires very sizable demolition charges, charges that are large enough to do a lot more than emit the 'puffs of smoke' cited as evidence for the explosives hypothesis.

We don't postulate explosives. We deduce them from the evidence. I have a feeling AC would, if he ever looked at the evidence, dismiss the impossibly high temperatures and particles of nano-scale thermitic materials as of no import. What can you say to someone who won't look dispassionately at physically present evidence?

Another characteristic of such hit-pieces is the citing of individual "experts," while ignoring a large number of actually relevant experts. It isn't clear what a weapons/plane designer knows about high-rise engineering and nano-scale incendiaries. 1500 architects, engineers, physics, and chemists have gone on record supporting the evidence-based claim of demolition. It would be interesting to find 1500 such professionals who will go on record as having examined the evidence and found it to support the official story.

"Take a look at live and filmed explosive building demolitions.

We do it all the time, and use them in presentations. We love to show them. Try watching WTC7 if you can't accept the idea of a non-standard top-down demolition like WTC 1-2.

Each explosion is accompanied by a very visible shower of heavy rubble and a dense cloud of smoke and dust. Just that fact alone makes the explosives hypothesis untenable; no demolitions expert in the world would be willing to promise his client that he could bring down a tall building with explosions guaranteed to be indistinguishable from the effects of an aircraft impact."

I haven't seen showers of heavy rubble in the demolition sequences I've watched, but if AC wants heavy rubble and dense cloud of smoke and dust as evidence of demolition, he might try watching WTC 1 and 2 go down.

Unfortunately for AC's argument, quite a few major demolition experts in the world think the WTC story is one of controlled demolitions.

As to the "effects of an aircraft impact," what kind of aircraft impact (or gravity-driven collapse, for that matter) would

- * pulverize everything in the building (including the 110 acres of concrete and sheet-metal decking in each building) --*
- * everything, that is, except the structural steel columns, which were broken into convenient-size pieces,*
- * create huge quantities of molten iron/steel that remained molten for weeks, and huge quantities of spheres of previously molten iron in the dust,*
- * blow multi-ton steel chunks at 70mph hundreds of yards, and*
- * leave tiny fragments of human bones on the roofs of neighboring buildings.*

Perhaps AC is referring to the fact that the WTC 1/2 destruction seemed to start at the airplane impact points. He apparently is not familiar with wireless computer-controlled demolitions, which can be programmed/reprogrammed on the spot.

Herman Soifer, a retired structural engineer, summarized the collapse of World Trade Center Buildings 1 and 2 succinctly, in a letter to me, remarking that since he had followed the plans and engineering of the Twin Towers during construction, he was able to explain the collapses to his wife a few hours after the buildings went down.

"The towers were basically tubes, essentially hollow. Tubes can be very efficient structures, strong and economical. The Trade Center tubes effectively resisted vertical loads, wind loads and vibrations and could probably have done very well against earthquakes. However, the relatively thin skin of the hollow tube must be braced at intervals to prevent local buckling of the skin under various possible loads, otherwise the tube itself can go out of shape and lose its strength.

"For their interior bracing, the thin-walled tubes of the Trade Center towers depended primarily on the interior floors being tied to the outer wall shells. These floor beam structures were basically open-web joists, adequate for the floor loads normally to be expected. These joist ends

rested on steel angle clips attached to the outer walls.

"As the floors at the level of airplane impact caught fire, the open web joists, which could not be expected to resist such fires, softened under the heat, sagged and pulled away from their attachments to the walls. Their weight and the loads they were carrying, caused them to drop onto the next lower floor, which was then carrying double loads and also becoming exposed to the heat. Then that floor collapsed, and so it went. But as the floors dropped, they no longer served as bracing for the thin-walled main tubes. This loss of bracing permitted the walls to buckle outward in successive sections and thus the house of cards effect."

Interestingly, this engineer, like the 9/11 Truth movement, is contradicting the official government (National Institute of Standards and Technology, NIST) report, though for different reasons. NIST claimed that the sagging beams did not separate from the perimeter columns, but rather pulled them inward. It seems odd that sagging, which is expansion, would pull inward, which is usually done by contraction, but NIST's basic problem is that the temperatures/durations of which they reported finding evidence would have sagged beams at most 4", not ten times that as NIST claimed. This is a problem for NIST, as is the problem of asserting floor-by-floor impacts. Jolts from such impacts are required by the laws of physics -- conservation of momentum. But since no jolts can be seen in the collapse -- only steady acceleration -- there were no impacts.

And then there's that inconvenient 30-story chunk of the top of the South Tower, which tipped over as the collapse began. It certainly couldn't have been plummeting straight down the middle of the building, because it was still rotating outward as it disappeared in a cloud of dust. The fact that it was not found in pieces off to the side at the base of the building (having not interacted with the rest of the solid building that it allegedly demolished like a pile driver) indicates it was demolished in mid-air. Can you think of another explanation?

The conspiracists' last card is the collapse of the adjacent World Trade Center building No. 7 some hours after the morning attacks. But here again, as with the twin towers, the explanation offered by the U.S. government's National Institute of Standards and Technology, NIST, is more than adequate.

"Collapse was caused by the rupturing of the building's metal framework due to the thermal expansion of its floor beams, which were heated by uncontrolled fires because the water main that supplied the building's fire suppression system had been cut by the collapse of World Trade Center 1."

Unfortunately for NIST, they finally were forced to admit that the first 100' feet of the collapse was at free-fall -- not some fraction of free fall. Sadly, they neglected to acknowledge that the fact that this occurred rendered their entire scenario impossible.

But perhaps more indicative of their lying was the fact that their model omitted the steel pins -- indicated in the building plans -- that connected the beams in question to the concrete floor they were supporting. These beams that supposedly expanded and pushed the girder off its footing on Column 7 could thus not have expanded to the necessary extent.

Even worse for NIST's case, the so-called uncontrolled fires that caused the expansion (that didn't happen) had burned out in the area of the alleged expansion a couple of hours before the building collapsed. NIST's fire models are completely inconsistent with the photos in their report.

And then there's the video of the collapse produced by their model, in which the building looks like a beer can being crushed and twisted. Anyone watching the absolutely straight down, straight edged collapse has to laugh at the incongruity. What does it say when you lie in such an utterly transparent fashion?

And to top it off, NIST refuses to let its scientists engage in public discussion of all the issues brought forward. The chief investigator for WTC 1-2 claimed no one had seen or reported molten metal. The chief investigator for WTC 7 initially claimed there was no free-fall. And NIST refuses to release the data used in their computer models, on the grounds of "public safety." All the tenets of high-rise engineering have now been called into question, and NIST won't allow anyone to look inside their black box. What are engineers supposed to do now?

The NIST team said that the smallest blast event capable of crippling the critical column would have produced "a sound level of 130 to 140 decibels at a distance of half a mile." Yet no noise this loud was reported by witnesses or recorded on videos. Sound at 130 to 140 decibels is about as loud as humans can tolerate.

NIST is fond of saying "not reported." What they mean is, they didn't try to find out if noise was reported, or else ignored what they found. There are many reports of explosions, including ground shaking ones. But in spite of everything about the collapse pointing at demolition, and the requirement in fire-induced collapse investigations that accelerants be searched for, NIST said they didn't look because there would be nothing to find. Such as the nanothermite, whose apparent existence AC declines to mention -- which is surprising, given the amount of disparaging invective one can imagine him heaping on the idea in the absence of paying attention to evidence. Nanothermite (developed at Lawrence Livermore National Lab, not by al-Qaeda) melts or vaporizes steel virtually instantly, greatly reducing the need for loud explosives.

High-grade steel can bend disastrously under extreme heat. As discussed in Wayne Barrett and Dan Collin's excellent book "Grand Illusion," about New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and 9/11, helicopter pilots radioed warnings 9 minutes before the final collapse of the South Tower and, repeatedly, as much as 25 minutes before the North Tower's fall.

It's interesting that helicopter pilots are such experts on the engineering of high-rise construction that they can predict an event that has never before occurred on the planet.

What Barrett and Collins brilliantly show are the actual corrupt conspiracies on Giuliani's watch: the favoritism to Motorola, which saddled the firemen with radios that didn't work; the ability of the Port Authority to skimp on fire protection; the mayor's catastrophic failure in the years before Sept. 11, 2001, to organize an effective unified emergency command that would have meant that cops and firemen could have communicated; that many firemen wouldn't have unnecessarily

entered the towers; that people in the towers wouldn't have been told by 9/11 emergency operators to stay in place; that firemen could have heard the helicopter warnings and the final mayday messages that prompted most of the New York policemen to flee the towers.

All this is absolutely true. But it has nothing to do with whether other heinous things were going on that day.

That's the real political world, in which Mayor Giuliani and others have never been held accountable. The conspiracists disdain the real world. They wanted to promote Bush, Cheney and the neo-cons to an elevated status as the arch demons of American history, instead of them being just one more team running the American empire, a team of more than usual stupidity and incompetence (characteristics I personally favor in imperial leaders). There are plenty of real conspiracies in America. Why make up fake ones?

AC is entitled to the limited universe of his "real political world." None of us find fault with that world, as far as it goes. But apparently he feels that if he is so sharp-eyed that he can see 10 conspiracies, he has seen them all.

I hope the above comments will help dispel the issue of "fakeness" about the doubts surrounding the official story. What actually happened, who did what, we don't know. But we have good evidence that AC's "real political world" of the official story didn't happen the way he claims it did. Which is why we in the 9/11 Truth Movement are calling for a new, truly independent, subpoena-powered investigation. We may yet get one in New York City -- <http://rememberbuilding7.org>.

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