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9/11: A Personal Odyssey

A year ago, on the Tenth anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, I was asked to serve on a panel being convened in Toronto to hear testimony from a variety of experts on their assessment of what occurred on that terrible day. I was honored to join three notable individuals-- two professors and an international jurist. The panel was asked to summarize their conclusions based on the testimony given at the hearings.

No one is neutral about 9/11. We all have our ideas and images about what happened and who might be responsible. I was no exception. I had serious doubts about the official narrative not long after the event. But as an objective academic I believed I could hear testimony without prejudging my conclusion. To this end I reviewed carefully the reports of the two official Washington hearings on 9/11 and the two National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) reports on the causes of the collapses of the three steel framed buildings on that day. I also reviewed what materials I could find rebutting those who did not accept the official theories of the events and collapses.

Though proponents supporting the official theory had been invited to testify at the Toronto Hearings, none accepted. This was unfortunate. Personally, I would have been pleased to have had my doubts about the official story removed or at least modified. But this did not occur. I came away from the Toronto Hearings more firmly convinced than ever that the three WTC buildings had collapsed as a result of controlled demolitions. And the official account of 19 Muslim hijackers carrying out this extraordinary, world-changing event seemed even more implausible.

Over the years I have quietly posed my doubts to selected friends and colleagues only to be rebuffed or told again and again that nothing could change their minds about 9/11. This caused me to wonder whether I was simply paranoid or whether something in my own experience caused me to be immune to the belief pressures my colleagues seem to labor under. I regard myself as a fair-minded objective observer who deals in facts and evidence, not ideology or unwarranted suspicions.

Why was I able to question the official line when equally intelligent and fair-minded individuals could not go there emotionally or intellectually? I concluded that my immunity from cognitive dissonance derived from a number of factors:

As a university professor for over 30 years I have always tried to hew to facts and robust theories. I have also learned to be skeptical of pronouncements based solely on authority or rank. I learned in the army that generals and privates both put their pants on one leg at a time. Simple rank isn't a sufficient basis to believe someone. Expertise helps, but needs to be verified

and tested.

My education in architecture and structural design also provided a basis for making judgments. Early in my career I worked for seven years in an engineering office verifying that structures designed by architects were adequately designed to take the live and dead loads they would have to support.

And as a student of urbanism and planning in New York I also knew something of the motivations for building the World Trade Center and the unique design of the Twin Towers. I was also aware that they were nearing the end of their useful life.

Finally, and probably most important, as a retired professor I was insulated from pressures for challenging orthodoxy and political correctness. I couldn't be fired.

Despite my credentials I have been on the receiving end of boos and catcalls in public forums for voicing a modicum of doubt about 9/11. As a result I remained relatively quiet, especially in my own locality. Imagine the relief I felt when Architects and Engineers was formed and garnered the support of more than 1,700 licensed and/or degreed professionals knowledgeable about structural design. These include some of the most outstanding structural engineers in the country. They confirmed what I had seen in the visual evidence that the collapses we had witnessed could not have occurred simply from fires or the severing of some of the columns from the plane impacts. Those of us who have designed structures develop an intuitive sense of a structure and its ability to resist stresses. Of course, we analyze mathematically what we know and worry about to test our sense of what the structure must do to stand. None of the analyses I have seen supporting the official theory of collapse are in my opinion respectable engineering. This includes the very dubious reports produced by NIST and the cursory reports of the ASCE, sad to say. NIST will not even release the mathematical models on which they base their conclusions, citing risk to public safety. Their refusal to release their model computations and assumptions itself constitutes a risk to public safety since the public has a need and right to know why these buildings came down so as to avoid similar collapses in the future.

I recently picked up a used coffee-table book of Magnum photographs taken on 9/11 (if you would actually want such a book on your coffee table). The photo on the cover reminded me of why I had doubted the official story practically from Day One. The cover shows WTC-1 at the beginning of the collapse of the top portion of the tower just above the impact zone. Cascades of banana peel-shaped debris are falling on all sides of the top section of the tower. Quite clearly, this is not a building simply collapsing, but a building being destroyed by powerful internal explosives. Soon after the photo was taken, the top portion of the tower disintegrated into great clouds of pulverized dust. A building simply falling through structural damage wouldn't do this. Could anything be clearer? The visual evidence is all that is needed to indict. But of course now there is far more additional evidence of a criminal act and a cover-up.

Think of a steel structure as a larger version of what those of us who grew up in New York used to call "monkey bars" in our local playgrounds: a three dimensional grid of steel pipes connected at each joint with welding or a tubular strap. Imagine a horde of kids standing on the top rungs of the bars of such a structure. The bars hold firm, of course. Now take an imaginary

hack saw or acetylene torch and cut through several of the vertical bars below the kids on top. Cutting two or three or even a half-dozen bars would not cause the structure to fail. The loads would be redistributed through the frame. That is what would have happened as a result of the structural failures suffered in the WTC event. To have a total failure of the steel frame you would need to cut most of the vertical bars below the loads. Steel structures are not houses of cards, as the NIST engineers would like us to believe. To bring them down you need to cut the under-supports or blow them up with high-energy explosives.

With the release of overwhelming evidence of a cover-up and the consensus among more than 1,700 building professionals expressing doubt about the official story it is nothing less than astonishing that the media, or at least that part of the media not under official control or pressure, refuses to look into the possibility that all is not as the official politically-correct storyline would have us believe. Why should this be so? Why should putatively independent reporters such as Amy Goodman and Chris Hedges, and otherwise courageous scholars like Noam Chomsky and the late Howard Zinn, absolutely refuse to touch the 9/11 mystery? Is it fear? I don't think so. My explanation is that these and other reporters and writers have a large investment in important issues outside of 9/11. I think they feel that taking on the challenge of 9/11 exploration might jeopardize their alternate agendas. The term "conspiracy theorist" is a reputation-destroyer for reporters as well as academics.

So what is to be done? Mainline but open-minded reporters and media won't go near honest 9/11 analysis until a certain threshold is reached which permits enquiry to go forward without reputational damage or other severe costs being incurred. Widely accepted dysfunctional myths are not easily unseated, especially those that hold the body politic together and underlie the social contract through trust of authority. But they can be exposed as myths through perseverance and confrontation with facts. I witnessed this in the old Soviet Union where I was privileged to have a Fulbright in 1978 to teach architects and planners in the shadow of the Kremlin. The fact is that the communist system in the USSR was built on a foundation of myths and lies about workers and power that had little relation to self-evident realities. Eventually the internal contradictions of Soviet Communism brought the whole edifice down.

Similarly, the truth of what happened on 9/11 will eventually come out and be accepted more widely. When the critical threshold is reached, fearful reporters will be emboldened to ask the hard questions. Progress is already being made. If a PBS station in Colorado has enough courage to broadcast in prime time the video, "Experts Speak Out," that is a giant step forward and gives other stations courage to follow suit. When a University in Tennessee is able to put on a civil and fair debate of the issues and evidence to a packed auditorium, other universities may now follow suit. When I hear from colleagues in Washington who quietly tell me that "you have more company here than you realize," I know that we are much further down the path in the pursuit of truth and justice than we were five or six years ago.

Yes, a new independent investigation is essential. No, this will probably not be possible within the US legal and political system. At least not yet. But there are other venues to be pursued. The international community is increasingly dubious of the official narratives and has a strong need and interest in uncovering the truth. And the international scientific community might yet find its voice. The US National Academy of Science and the Academy of Engineering and their

international counterparts have a strong vested interest in pursuing scientific and factual enquiries regarding critical issues. That is what they say their mission is. Could they not be persuaded to convene independent, honest panels to review and weigh the evidence that has already been gathered? Has anyone asked them?

Progress is being made daily. Eventually the truth will prevail. We must not give up now.

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