

Media Disinformation: The Facts About Ahmadinejad's UN Speech

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The Iranian leader did not accuse the U.S. of conspiring to murder thousands of its own people to create a pretext for launching wars as conveyed by the US media.

A large portion of the American people, on the basis of media reports, probably think that during his UN speech Sept. 23 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared that the U.S. government secretly arranged for the 9/11 attacks. He did not say that, however.

In its Sept. 24 article about the speech The New York Times headline read: "Iran Leader Says U.S. Planned 9/11 Attacks." The first paragraph declared: "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran made a series of incendiary remarks in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday, notably the claim that the United States orchestrated the Sept. 11 attacks to rescue its declining economy, to reassert its weakening grip on the Middle East and to save Israel."

On the basis of his remarks the U.S. led 33 nations in theatrical walk out from the General Assembly while he was talking. And the next day, in an interview with the BBC's Persian service, President Barack Obama said Ahmadinejad's 9/11 remarks were "offensive. It was hateful. And particularly for him to make the statement here in Manhattan, just a little north of Ground Zero, where families lost their loved ones, people of all faiths, all ethnicities who see this as the seminal tragedy of this generation, for him to make a statement like that was inexcusable."

On Sept. 25, the Times published a correction: "A headline on Friday with an article about an incendiary speech in the United Nations General Assembly by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran summarized his remarks about the Sept. 11 terror attacks incorrectly. In his speech, Mr. Ahmadinejad asserted various theories about the origin of the attacks, including the possibility that they had been planned by the United States. He did not say that the United States had planned the attacks."

The Times was one of many U.S. newspapers, TV and radio news reports that suggested Ahmadinejad accused the U.S. government of secretly instigating the attack — a conspiracy theory believed by some Americans and others. Following are the few paragraphs pertaining to this matter from the Iranian leader's text:

"It was said that some three thousands people were killed on the 11 September for which we are all very saddened. Yet, up until now, in Afghanistan and Iraq hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, millions wounded and displaced and the conflict is still going on and expanding.

“In identifying those responsible for the attack, there were three viewpoints.

“1- That a very powerful and complex terrorist group, able to successfully cross all layers of the American intelligence and security, carried out the attack. This is the main viewpoint advocated by American statesmen.

“2- That some segments within the U.S. government orchestrated the attack to reverse the declining American economy and its grips on the Middle East in order also to save the Zionist regime. The majority of the American people as well as other nations and politicians agree with this view.

“3- It was carried out by a terrorist group but the American government supported and took advantage of the situation. Apparently, this viewpoint has fewer proponents. The main evidence linking the incident was a few passports found in the huge volume of rubble and a video of an individual whose place of domicile was unknown but it was announced that he had been involved in oil deals with some American officials. It was also covered up and said that due to the explosion and fire no trace of the suicide attackers was found.”

Ahmadinejad did not suggest these were his views. He was incorrect to claim that a majority of Americans subscribe to a well known conspiracy theory that is strongly held by a minority in the United States.

In a 2009 poll conducted by Public Policy Polling, 14% of the American people believe “President Bush intentionally allowed the 9/11 attacks to take place because he wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East.” Many of the people who hold this view are war opponents, but it is not the perspective of the large majority of the U.S. peace movement.

In 2006, a Scripps Howard/Ohio University poll reported that “more than a third of the American public suspects that federal officials assisted in the 9/11 terrorist attacks or took no action to stop them so the United States could go to war in the Middle East.”

In a 2008 poll conducted in 17 countries by WorldPublicOpinion.org, majorities in nine countries blamed al-Qaeda. In all countries there were minorities which blamed the U.S. The percentage of many who blamed Washington was in single digits or teens but in Germany, for instance, it was 23%, South Korea 17%, Mexico, 30%, and Turkey 36%. The average of all countries as to the responsible party was al-Qaeda 46%, U.S. 15%, Israel 7%, Other 7% and Don't Know 25%.

So while not putting forward such arguments himself, Ahmadinejad exaggerated or misspoke regarding the proportion of those who think that the Bush Administration was involved in a 9/11 conspiracy that is evidently being covered up by the Obama Administration. If it was true, how could Obama not know? Many Americans, accustomed to Washington's long demonization campaign against Ahmadinejad and Iran, now believe the Iranian leader grotesquely accused the U.S. of conspiring to murder thousands of its own people to create a pretext for launching wars.

We have never believed the conspiracy theory, not least for two reasons:

- Washington hardly needs an excuse of such magnitude to launch a war against small and basically defenseless nations. U.S. governments frequently attack such countries, and the usual excuses of “spreading democracy” or “humanitarian intervention” suffice to deceive

the majority of Americans time and again.

- If Washington sought to stage a pretext for invading poor, bedraggled Afghanistan it didn't have to engage in one of the most complex and dangerous conspiracies ever devised in history. It would take thousands of government operatives from many departments to plan and execute the attacks on the Pentagon, World Trade Center and the failed attempt on the White House. And if just one conspirator talked, out of all the people involved, the blowback would have destroyed the Bush Administration, the Republican Party, the cover-up Obama Administration, and completely discombobulate the entire country for decades. It's simply unnecessary and illogical.

But there was a "conspiracy," of course. It was a state conspiracy to dominate the entire oil-rich Middle East, overthrowing regimes in Iraq, Iran and possibly Syria in the process, and also extend U.S. hegemony into Central Asia to compete geopolitically with China and Russia. This conspiracy is known as U.S. foreign and military policy, and most of the details are available in a great many public government and media reports, assuming one has enough knowledge to read between the lines when necessary.

It is a fact the Bush Administration used 9/11 as an immediate rationale for gaining a foothold in Central Asia, and partially used 9/11 to replace the Ba'athist regime in Iraq with a government responsive to Washington's diktat in preparation for regime change in Iran. But the U.S. had been active in Afghanistan since 1979, and could have found any number of pretexts to take out the Taliban. And the planning to overthrow the Baghdad government began during the Clinton Administration in the 1990s, and would have taken place with or without 9/11, especially after Iraq was so weakened by U.S./British/UN sanctions that it was a military pushover, until the unexpected guerrilla insurgency forced a stalemate.

From time to time President Ahmadinejad is his own worst enemy because of his incautious remarks. In judging him it's more important to watch what he does than what he sometimes says. He has taken no aggressive foreign action and there is no proof Iran is building nuclear weapons. His government's military strategy is entirely defensive.

While the Obama Administration continues to complain about Ahmadinejad's 9/11 remarks, little is said about his simultaneous call for early negotiations about swapping enriched uranium. And his agreement with Brazil and Turkey earlier this year to achieve the uranium swap Obama was demanding encountered derision from Washington when it was announced, followed by the increased sanctions the U.S. and Israel considered more important than a settlement.

For different reasons, the U.S. even more so must be judged by its performance, not its words. While Washington talks peace, it is fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen, vastly increasing its drone attacks, and is now deploying Special Operations forces in 75 countries, 15 more than last year. And while Obama usually speaks softly, he constantly wields — directly in Ahmadinejad's face — the big stick of a potential crushing attack by the U.S. and Israel.

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