



"Ground Zero," photograph by Peter Morgan

The Last Castle

*Never waste the opportunity
offered by a good crisis.*

Machiavelli

AN ENDLESS STREAM OF ALLEGED conspiracy theories about the infamous World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001 began to proliferate even before the smoke from the Twin Towers had cleared.

Speculation ranged from the reasonably plausible (the government—if perhaps not directly responsible—was given ample warning by intelligence agencies that attacks were imminent but chose to ignore it) to the frankly bizarre (missiles were flown into the Towers and the Pentagon, disguised by holograms to make them look like airplanes).

In fact, polls indicated that even ten years after the attacks, up to 15% of Americans still suspected that the Towers had been brought down by controlled demolition.

It didn't help that the official government explanation—presented within hours of the attacks—was itself scarcely credible:

How could 19 reprobate Islamic terrorists successfully commandeer four commercial airliners, armed only with small knives, box cutters, pepper spray, and fake explosives?

How could inexperienced pilots—men who had failed certification to fly even a two-seater Cessna—pilot sophisticated aircraft well enough to crash them into the Twin Towers and Pentagon, a feat that many experienced commercial pilots claimed would be nearly impossible even for them?

And how could the government know, immediately following the attacks, that they were carried out by al-Qaeda terrorists, directed by a bearded man reportedly on dialysis, hiding in a cave halfway around the world with a laptop and satellite phone?

It may never be known definitively who was behind the events of 9/11, but one time-honored way to approach such a complex, controversial subject is to employ the legal strategy known as *cui bono* (*who benefits?*).

Certainly many individuals benefitted. Osama bin Laden—despite strongly denying any involvement—was catapulted to international terrorist stardom before allegedly being killed in 2011 in Pakistan. (Curiously, bin Laden’s family was permitted to exit the U.S. days after the attacks, despite all aircraft being grounded.)

Larry Silverstein, lessee of the WTC, walked away with over \$4 billion in profit after taking out a huge insurance policy on the complex just six weeks prior to 9/11.

Public and private entities also benefitted: The SEC and Pentagon conveniently lost evidence relating to ongoing investigations into securities fraud and \$2.3 trillion of missing funds in the destruction of Bldg. 7 and the Pentagon, and the oil and weapons industries took over oil fields and supplied arms in the resulting Middle East wars.

But these players all pale in comparison to the greatest beneficiaries of the 9/11 attacks: warhawks in Israel—America’s staunchest foreign ally in the perennially unstable Middle East—and Neocons and other authoritarians in the Bush Administration.

9/11 spurred the U.S. to attack enemies of Israel, diverted attention away from Israel’s disgraceful treatment of Palestinians, and justified supporting Israel with additional financial aid and advanced weapons sales.

Indeed, asked on the day following 9/11 to comment on the attacks, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu replied, “It’s very good”—before adding hastily, “Well, it’s not *good*, but it will generate immediate sympathy [for Israel].”

Hours after the attacks, the FBI arrested five Israeli nationals—later referred to as the ‘Dancing Israelis’—who appeared to be celebrating the attacks while filming them from the roof of a rented moving van. (Despite the FBI concluding that the men were involved in an Israeli intelligence operation, they were later quietly deported.)

More damningly, the attacks of 9/11 provided the “catastrophic and catalyzing event...a new Pearl Harbor” proposed by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a think tank organized in 1997 by neocons surrounding future President George W. Bush—prominent among them Bush’s Vice President, Dick Cheney, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

PNAC’s seminal report recommended a huge increase in arms spending, executing ‘preemptive’ wars to control global energy resources, and initiating an unprovoked attack on Iraq in the event of Bush’s election—all of which subsequently came to pass.

In the wake of 9/11 and Bush’s oxymoronic ‘War on Terror’—and in particular with the Patriot Act and the creation of a new Dept. of Homeland Security—law enforcement and intelligence agencies were granted sweeping and unprecedented new powers to spy and collect data on American citizens, powers that remain in place to this day.

One might even say that the ‘temporary, emergency’ measures justified by the attacks allowed for a sort of controlled demolition of the last fortress protecting the freedoms of Americans: the *Bill of Rights*.

While New York’s World Trade Center has since been rebuilt in a new (and arguably much improved) manner, it remains to be seen if the American people will ever one day demand the reconstruction of their similarly demolished personal freedoms. ■