

The Ultimate 9/11 'Truth' Showdown

David Ray Griffin vs. Matt Taibbi

By [Global Research](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

Global Research, October 07, 2008

[AlterNet.org](#) 7 October 2008

A [poll of 17 countries](#) that came out September of this year revealed that majorities in only nine of them “believe that al Qaeda was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.” A [Zogby poll from 2006](#) found that in America, 42% of respondents believed the US government and 9/11 Commission “covered up” the events of 9/11. It’s safe to say that at least tens of millions of Americans don’t believe anything close to the official account offered by the 9/11 Commission, and that much of the outside world remains skeptical.

Over the years, [AlterNet has run dozens of stories](#), mostly critical, of the 9/11 Truth Movement. [Matt Taibbi](#) has taken on the 9/11 Truth Movement head on in a series of articles, and most recently in his new book, [The Great Derangement](#).

In April, I asked Taibbi if he would be interested in interviewing David Ray Griffin, a leading member of [Scholars for 9/11 Truth & Justice](#), Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Theology at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University and author of [seven of books on 9/11](#), about his recent book, [9/11 Contradictions](#). After months of back and forths between them and some editorial delays, I’m pleased to share their written exchange — all 24,000 words of it. What we have here are the preeminent writers on both sides of the 9/11 Truth argument; a one-of-a-kind debate. Because the questions and responses are quite long, I’ve woven them together in order. Enjoy. — *Jan Frel, AlterNet Senior Editor.*

1. Matt Taibbi (May 16, 2008): In your first chapter, you seem to imply — well, you not only imply, you come out and say it — that you think the real reason George W. Bush didn’t hurry to finish his reading of *My Pet Goat* might have been that “the Secret Service had no real fear of an attack.” In other words, they knew the plan in advance, and the plan didn’t involve an attempt on Bush’s life, hence “no real fear.” My question is this: if they knew about this whole thing in advance, why didn’t they plan to make Bush look a little less like a paralyzed yutz at the moment of truth? If the purpose of the entire exercise was propaganda, wasn’t it counterproductive to have the intrepid leader sitting there frozen with panicked indecision, a kid’s book about goats in his hands, at the critical moment of his presidency? What possible benefit could that have served the conspirators?

David Ray Griffin responds (June 12, 2008): Matt, I appreciate this opportunity provided by you and *AlterNet* to respond to questions about my writings on 9/11, especially my most recent book, *9/11 Contradictions*, which is addressed specifically to journalists (as well as Congress).

Before responding to your first question, however, I need to address a theme that is implicit throughout your questions. I refer to your claim, which you have spelled out in previous

writings, that those who believe 9/11 was an inside job must, to make this claim credible, present a complete theory as to how this operation was carried out.

You made this claim in the article in which you referred to “9/11 conspiracy theorists” as “idiots.” They must be idiots, you said, because “9/11 conspiracy is so shamefully stupid.” Saying that you could not give all your reasons for this claim, you wrote: “I’ll have to be content with just one point: 9/11 Truth is the lowest form of conspiracy theory, because it doesn’t offer an affirmative theory of the crime.” By “an affirmative theory,” you meant a “concrete theory of what happened, who ordered what and when they ordered it, and why.” In the absence of such a theory, you went on to claim, “all the rest,” including the “alleged scientific impossibilities,” is “bosh and bunkum.”

Recognizing that members of the 9/11 truth movement will argue that you are “ignoring the mountains of scientific evidence proving that the Towers could not have collapsed as a result of the plane crashes alone,” you replied: “[Y]ou’re right. I *am* ignoring it. You idiots. Even if it were not the rank steaming bullshit my few scientist friends assure me that it is, none of that stuff would prove anything.”

Your argument here has two problems (aside from your self-contradictory statement that scientifically disproving the official account of how the Towers fell would prove nothing). First, like most people who defend the official account of 9/11, you use the term “conspiracy theorist” in a one-sided way, applying it only to people who reject the official account of 9/11. But that account is itself a conspiracy theory — indeed, the original 9/11 conspiracy theory.

A conspiracy is simply an agreement between two or more people to commit a crime. One holds a conspiracy *theory* about some event (such as a bank robbery or a corporation defrauding its stockholders) if one believes that it resulted from such an agreement. A conspiracy *theorist* is simply someone who accepts such a theory.

According to the Bush-Cheney administration, the 9/11 attacks resulted from a conspiracy between Osama bin Laden and various members of al-Qaeda, including the 19 men accused of hijacking the airliners. This official account is, therefore, a conspiracy theory. (This is not a new point: I made it in my first book on 9/11, *The New Pearl Harbor*. I even made it in the title of my 2007 book, *Debunking 9/11 Debunking: An Answer to Popular Mechanics and Other Defenders of the Official Conspiracy Theory*.) Accordingly, insofar as you accept this official account, you are a 9/11 conspiracy theorist. And yet you evidently do not consider yourself an idiot. Rather, you save that description, along with the term “conspiracy theorist,” for those who reject the official conspiracy theory.

Looking aside from your selective name-calling, your one-sided use of the term would not be so bad except that it leads you to be one-sided in the demands you make: While demanding that rejecters of the official theory must provide an account of what happened that is both self-consistent and based on hard evidence, you do not seem concerned whether the official theory exemplifies those virtues. (I will illustrate this point in my responses to some of your other questions.)

In addition to this one-sidedness, there is a second problem with your claim that anyone challenging a theory must have a complete alternative theory: It is false. There are several ways to challenge a theory. You can cast doubt on it by showing that its alleged evidence does not stand up to scrutiny. You can show that a theory is *probably false* by pointing to

evidence that apparently contradicts it. You can *positively disprove* a theory by providing evidence showing that it cannot possibly be true. The 9/11 truth movement has done all three with regard to the official account.

To make clearer why your claim is unreasonable, I'll use a method that you like to employ: I'll make up a story.

You and your best friend entered a contest and, on the basis of something you considered unfair, he won the rather sizable cash prize. A week later, he is found dead, killed by an arrow. Although you are heartbroken, you are arrested and charged with his murder.

The police claim that, being angry because you felt he had cheated you out of money and glory, you used a crossbow to shoot him from the roof of a nearby building. You hire an attorney to defend you, even though you are confident that, since the charge is false, the police could not possibly have any evidence against you.

At the trial, however, the prosecutor plays a recording on which your voice is heard threatening to kill your friend. He plays a video clip showing you going into the building carrying a case big enough to hold a disassembled crossbow. He presents a water bottle with your finger prints on it that was found on the roof.

In defending you, your attorney, having pointed out that the water bottle could have been planted, then argues that, since you did not make that call and never went into that building, the police must have fabricated evidence by using digital (voice and video) morphing technology. When the prosecutor rolls his eyes, your attorney cites William Arkin's 1999 *Washington Post* article, "When Seeing and Hearing Isn't Believing," which points out that voice morphing, like photo and video manipulation, is now good enough to fool anyone. With regard to why the police would have tried to frame you, your attorney suggests that the FBI may have asked the local police to put you away because of critical things you had written about the White House.

The prosecutor, smiling knowingly to the judge, says: "Oh my, a conspiracy theory." He then adds that, even if your attorney's speculations were true, which he doubted, it wouldn't matter: Your attorney could prove your innocence only by providing a complete and plausible account of the alleged conspiracy: Who ordered the frame-up and when, who carried it out, and how and where they did this. Your attorney replies that this is preposterous: You would not possibly have the resources and connections to do this.

In any case, your attorney says, he has scientific proof that the police's theory is false: A forensic lab has shown that the arrow that killed your friend could not possibly have flown the distance from the building's roof to the location where your friend was killed. He then asks the judge to dismiss all charges.

The judge, however, says that he's inclined to agree with the prosecution, especially if you are charging the government with engaging in a conspiracy: You need to provide a complete account of this alleged conspiracy. Not only that, the judge says, wickedly quoting a passage from one of your own writings: "In the real world you have to have positive proof of involvement to have a believable conspiracy theory." You must, he says, provide positive proof that the FBI and police conspired to frame you.

Your attorney protests, saying that, in spite of the fact that his client had articulated this

requirement, it is absurd. The defense has done all it needs to do. Besides showing how all the evidence against the defendant could have been manufactured, it has shown that the government's theory is scientifically impossible.

The prosecutor objects, saying that the impossibility is merely *alleged*: He has some scientist friends who believe that the arrow could easily have traveled the distance in question.

The judge convicts you of murder.

Having shown you, I hope, that your demand for a complete theory, with positive proof, is unreasonable, I turn to your first question: "[If the Secret Service] knew about this whole thing in advance, why didn't they plan to make Bush look a little less like a paralyzed yutz at the moment of truth?" That's a good question, one that I myself asked near the end of *The New Pearl Harbor*, in a section entitled "Possible Problems for a Complicity Theory." Perhaps anticipating that you would come along, I pointed out that critics of the revisionist theory of 9/11 may well make the following claim:

[T]hese revisionists must do more than show that the official account is implausible. They must also present an alternative account of what happened that incorporates all the relevant facts now available in a plausible way. Furthermore, these counter-critics could continue, insofar as an alternative account is already contained, at least implicitly, in the writings of the revisionists, it could be subjected to a great number of rhetorical questions, to which easy answers do not appear to be at hand.

I then offered a series of such rhetorical questions, one of which was: Why would the president, after officially knowing that a modern-day Pearl Harbor was unfolding, continue to do "the reading thing"? And why would the president remain in his publicly known location, thereby appearing to demonstrate that he and his staff knew that no suicide missions were coming their way? Would not the conspirators have orchestrated a scene that made the Secret Service appear genuinely concerned and the president genuinely presidential?

I then pointed out that this and the other questions suggest that to accept the complicity theory would be to attribute a degree of incompetence to the conspirators that is beyond belief. But the truth may be that they really were terribly incompetent. With regard to the occupation of Iraq, the incompetence of the Bush administration's plans — for everything except winning the initial military victory and securing the oil fields and ministries — has been becoming increasingly obvious. [This was written in late 2003.] Perhaps their formulation of the plan for 9/11, with its cover story, involved comparable incompetence. Perhaps this fact is not yet widely recognized only because the news media have failed to inform the American public about the many tensions between the official account and the relevant facts.

Moreover, I argued, whatever difficulty these rhetorical questions pose for a complicity theory, the problems in the official theory are far greater. After illustrating this point, I concluded:

Seen in this light, the fact that a complicity theory may not at this time be able to answer all the questions it might evoke is a relatively trivial problem. Furthermore, the fact that the

revisionists cannot yet answer all questions would be important only if they were claiming to have presented a fully conclusive case. But they are not.

In my later writings, I emphasized this point — that I am not attempting to provide a complete theory, partly because to do so would require groundless speculation, partly because there is no need. I did, however, state what I found the evidence to show on various matters, such as the fact that the World Trade Center buildings could have come down only through the use of explosives. I also clearly stated, after the first book, that I believed that 9/11 was an inside job, that the Air Force had been ordered to stand down, and that Dick Cheney was at the center of this operation. But this is very different from trying to offer a complete theory.

In the preface of the book about which you are asking questions, moreover, I pointed out that it contains not theory but simply an exposition of 25 contradictions within the official story.

One of these contradictions involves the story about Bush at the school. On the first anniversary of 9/11, the White House started telling a new story about what happened, saying that right after Andy Card told the president that a second WTC building had been hit, meaning that America was under attack, the president waited only a couple of seconds before getting up and leaving the room. The White House even got the teacher who was in the classroom to write two stories that repeated this lie.

Obviously the White House had come to believe that Bush's having remained in the classroom was a liability, not a benefit. (Some reporters had asked why the Secret Service had not hustled Bush away, thereby implicitly suggesting that perhaps the attacks were no surprise.)

Why the Secret Service had allowed Bush to stay, I wouldn't know. Perhaps it was thought essential that Bush make his scheduled address to the nation at 9:30. Or perhaps the planners were simply not very bright.

After the video surfaced on the Internet in 2003, in any case, the White House confirmed, when asked by a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, that Bush had in fact stayed for several minutes, explaining that his "instinct was not to frighten the children by rushing out of the room." The reporter evidently did not ask the White House why it had tried to get away with a lie.

The 9/11 Commission did not report that the White House had put out a false account in 2002. It did, however, ask the Secret Service why it permitted Bush to remain in the classroom. The Secret Service replied that "they were anxious to move the President to a safer location, but did not think it imperative for him to run out the door." The Commission evidently accepted that as a satisfactory answer.

In sum, I too would like to know why the planners did such a stupid thing. But I would think, Matt, that you should be concerned about why, if the attacks were a surprise, the Secret Service left Bush at the school, why the White House tried to change the story a year later (giving us two mutually inconsistent reports), and then why the press has not forced the White House to explain either of these events.

2. Matt Taibbi: If I'm following the implications of your early-chapter questions correctly,

the Secret Service perhaps knew about the attack in advance (this is the implication of your chapter 1 question), while the Air Force needed to be explicitly ordered to stand down on the day of the attack (chapters 3 and 5). However, in later chapters (chapter 21, to be exact) you also mention the fact that the Secret Service was “very concerned, pointing up at the jet in the sky” when the mysterious “white jet” was flying over Washington — the “white jet,” incidentally, being an Air Force jet.

So according to your early chapters, the Secret Service knew that Bush wasn’t going to be attacked, but the Air Force needed to be ordered to stand down; in the later chapter, the apparently-in-on-it Air Force sent a mysterious white jet up in the air over Washington for some unknown reason, while Secret Service agents, in the dark about the jet’s purpose, point up at it with concern. Do you actually have a theory about which services may or may not have been in on this job, or do these kinds of inconsistencies just not bother you?

David Ray Griffin Responds: I’m pleased to see that you believe that a conspiracy theory, like any theory whatsoever, is not credible if it contains inconsistencies. I would think, therefore, that the 25 inconsistencies I have pointed out in the official conspiracy theory would lead you to consider it unworthy of credence. I have, however, seen no sign that you are troubled by these inconsistencies.

In any case, with regard to the apparent inconsistency you’ve pointed out in my own position, it is *merely* apparent. You elsewhere point out that it is a mistake to think of America’s ruling class as monolithic. The same is true of the Air Force and the Secret Service. Only the top members of those organizations would have known about the plans for the attacks.

This difference was illustrated at the Sarasota school. As I reported, when the Secret Service agent who carried the president’s phone saw the second WTC strike on television, he said to the sheriff: “We’re out of here. Can you get everybody ready.” But he was obviously overruled by the lead Secret Service agent, because the presidential party did not leave for another 30 minutes. The Secret Service agents at the White House disturbed by the white jet would have been equally in the dark.

The same division would have been true in the Air Force. Although General Richard Myers and some other top officers knew what was going on, the lower officers in charge of the interceptor pilots had to be ordered to stand down. So there is no inconsistency.

3. Matt Taibbi: If you were running this kind of conspiracy, why in God’s name would you let the Mayor of New York — a man who couldn’t even keep his extramarital affairs a secret from the tabloids, a man whose own children bad-mouth him to the media every chance they get — in on the secret? More to the point, if Rudy Giuliani did indeed, for some completely insane reason, have a part in this conspiracy, and in the absolutely impossible and implausible event that what you’re implying took place and he did have foreknowledge of the towers coming down, on what planet would it make any kind of sense for this key conspirator to go blabbing his big criminal secret to Peter Jennings on *television* on the day of the big wedding? Can you explain why in the world he would ever do that?

There are two possibilities here: one is that Giuliani either misspoke or innocently communicated someone’s fanciful guess about the towers coming down, and the other is that he inadvertently confessed to being part of the largest premeditated murder conspiracy in the history of the free world on live television. Why is the latter possibility more likely?

David Ray Griffin responds: You are referring to the fact that on 9/11, Rudy Giuliani told Peter Jennings of ABC News: “[W]e set up headquarters at 75 Barclay Street, and we were operating out of there when we were told that the World Trade Center was gonna collapse. And it did collapse before we could actually get out of the building.”

Why did Giuliani say this on national television? I don’t know, but it might have something to do with the fact that he’s not generally considered the brightest, most discreet, person in the world.

In any case, I was surprised by your statement that it was “absolutely impossible that . . . he did have foreknowledge of the towers coming down.” Philosophers generally talk about three kinds of impossibilities: logical impossibilities (such as making a round square), metaphysical impossibilities (such as traveling back to the past [where you might kill your grandfather before he had children]), and physical impossibilities (which are ruled out by the laws of physics in our particular universe, such as the law of the conservation of momentum). None of those kinds of impossibility apply here. Giuliani could have known the Twin Towers were going to come down if he knew that explosives had been set and were about to be detonated. Nothing “absolutely impossible” about that.

You argue that it is highly unlikely that Giuliani “inadvertently confessed.” However, a *confession* would be a statement that most people would immediately recognize as such. Giuliani’s statement that he was told the WTC was going to come down has been seen to imply foreknowledge only by those few individuals who know two things: that there would have been no reason to expect the buildings to come down unless they were known to be rigged with explosives, and that it was Giuliani’s own people (in the Office of Emergency Management) who said the buildings were going to come down. So yes, he was careless, but he hardly “blabbed.” He merely said something that was recognized to imply foreknowledge by the few people who knew the relevant facts.

That clarified, let’s look at what you call the other possibility, although your statement actually articulates two possibilities: “that Giuliani either misspoke or innocently communicated someone’s fanciful guess about the towers coming down.” To begin with the first one: What would it mean to say that he “misspoke”? That would be no more plausible than Hillary Clinton’s claim that she merely “misspoke” when she claimed she had come under sniper fire in Bosnia.

What about the other possibility — that Giuliani simply repeated someone’s “fanciful guess”? High-rise steel-frame buildings had never before come down on this planet because of any combination of external damage and fire. Such collapses had occurred for only one reason: their steel columns had been sliced with explosives. Surely someone’s prediction that the WTC was going to collapse, made just a few minutes before the South Tower did and about 30 minutes before the North Tower did, could not plausibly be regarded as simply a “fanciful guess.”

That Giuliani was aware that he should not have said that was made clear by the fact that, when confronted about his statement by a 9/11 activist group in 2007, he tried to deny it, saying: “I didn’t know the towers were going to collapse.” After a member of the group quoted exactly what he had told Jennings, Giuliani claimed that he had meant that “over a long period of time,” meaning from 7 to 10 hours, the towers could collapse, “the way other buildings collapsed.” However, no steel-frame high-rise buildings had ever collapsed after

burning for 10, or even 18, hours. Moreover, Giuliani's statement to Jennings — "we were told that the World Trade Center was gonna collapse. And it did collapse before we could actually get out of the building" — was clearly referring to an imminent collapse, not one that might occur 7 or 10 hours later.

So yes, I believe that the most likely possibility is that Giuliani inadvertently revealed, to those people familiar with the relevant facts, that he and his people knew that the Towers were going to come down. This conclusion becomes even more evident when one is aware of the massive evidence, which I discussed in *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*, that the Twin Towers (along with WTC 7) did indeed come down because they were brought down with explosives.

One final point: You suggest that, if Giuliani did have a part in the conspiracy, it would have been for "some completely insane reason." But there may have been some perfectly rational (if evil) reasons. New York City avoided having to pay billions of dollars to have the asbestos removed from the buildings. Also, Giuliani may have believed that, by appearing to act heroically on 9/11, becoming "America's mayor," he might also be able to become America's president. And if this was a motive, it almost worked: He was regarded as the front-runner when the race for the Republican race began.

4. Matt Taibbi: What is more likely — that an up-till-then poor pilot like Hani Hanjour got lucky and pulled off a highly-skilled maneuver, or that the plane was actually piloted by some *other* suicidal terrorist ordered by some secret bund of Pentagon conspirators to give up his life in order to attack his own? Or maybe you like the third option — that thousands of witnesses who saw a plane hit the Pentagon were wrong, that the people who died on flight 77 didn't actually die then and there but at some other place and time, and it was actually a missile that hit the Pentagon?

Exactly what do you believe is the significance of Hani Hanjour's record of poor piloting? Do you believe someone else was flying the plane? Do you believe it wasn't a plane at all? Why don't you just come out and say what you think? Because we know this much: *somebody* piloted a jet liner into the Pentagon, and that somebody did a pretty good job of it. What does it matter if the ostensible pilot had a poor flying record? Who cares? Because unless you've got hard evidence that something else happened that day, that it wasn't Muslim hijackers but some other fanatical suicidal terrorist (for whoever it was was a fanatical suicidal terrorist) the detail is irrelevant. But you don't even have a theory about that day. Or do you? (Note: I fully expect you to respond by saying, "It's not our job to reveal what happened, it's only our job to raise questions." Which is a very convenient way of saying one of two things: either your evidence doesn't add up to any kind of coherent story, or you don't have the nerve to say in public what you really think the evidence suggests. Please, please disappoint me!).

David Ray Griffin responds: To begin with your final statement: I am puzzled why you would suggest that I, having written six books that suggest — some of them very clearly — that leading members of the Bush administration, including top Pentagon officials, orchestrated the 9/11 attacks for primarily imperialistic motives, might not "have the nerve to say in public" what I think.

Let me, in any case, examine the three possibilities you offer as to what happened at the Pentagon. Having read my chapter on Hanjour, you are presumably aware that aviation sources, immediately after 9/11 — before Hanjour had been identified as the pilot — said

that “the unidentified pilot executed a pivot so tight that it reminded observers of a fighter jet maneuver,” and that another story said, “Investigators are particularly impressed with the pilot who , just before [slamming into the Pentagon], performed a tightly banked 270-degree turn at low altitude with almost military precision.” You are also presumably aware that Hanjour was said to have been a terrible pilot by several instructors, one of whom said, “he could not fly at all,” and that another instructor, in the summer of 2001, refused to go up with Hanjour a second time.

And yet you believe that one of the likely possibilities is that “Hani Hanjour got lucky and pulled off a highly-skilled maneuver.” Let’s see what some men with more expertise say. Former Navy and Pan-American Airlines pilot Ted Muga said: “I just can’t imagine an amateur even being able to come close to performing a maneuver of that nature.” Former fighter and airline pilot Russ Wittenberg called it “totally impossible.” Former 757 pilot Ralph Omholt said: “The idea that an *unskilled* pilot could have flown this trajectory is simply too ridiculous to consider.”

The other possibility you endorse is that “some *other* [Muslim] suicidal terrorist” flew Flight 77 into the Pentagon. The government has told us that there were five members of al-Qaeda on the plane. If Hanjour was not the pilot, it had to be one of the other four. Do you have a theory as to which one was up to the task? Muga, Wittenberg, and Omholt all doubt that anyone, including themselves, could have flown the reported trajectory in a 757. They are certain that no amateur could have done it, and any of the other men would have been amateurs with regard to 757s or any other “big birds” (as pilots call them).

What of the other possibility you offer — “that thousands of witnesses who saw a plane hit the Pentagon were wrong.” I wonder where you got that number. Even *Popular Mechanics*, which I had always considered the gold standard for reckless statements in support of the official theory, claims only that “hundreds of witnesses saw a Boeing 757 hit the building.” The most extensive list of alleged witnesses of which I am aware contains only 152 people, and only some of them claim to have seen an airliner hit the Pentagon. A study of these, moreover, found that only 31 of them provided “explicit, realistic and detailed claims,” that 24 of these 31 alleged witnesses “worked for either the Federal Government or the mainstream media,” and that 21 of these testimonies contained “substantial errors or contradictions.” Witness testimony, therefore, cannot establish the claim that Flight 77 or any airliner struck the Pentagon.

This is especially the case when we add the testimony of witnesses from inside the Pentagon. Captain Dennis Gilroy, the acting commander of the Fort Myer fire department, “wondered why he saw no aircraft parts.” Captain John Durrer thought, “Well where’s the airplane, you know, where’s the parts to it? You would think there’d be something.” Army officer April Gallop, who escaped from the building after being injured, said: “I don’t recall at any time seeing any plane debris. I walked through that place to try to get out before everything collapsed on us . [S]urely we should have seen something?” ABC’s John McWethy reported: “I got in very close . I could not, however, see any plane wreckage.”

You say: “[W]e know this much: *somebody* piloted a jet liner into the Pentagon.” I’m puzzled as to how you think you know this. The word “knowledge” means “justified true belief,” so you cannot know something unless (1) it is true and (2) your belief that it is true is based on sufficient evidence. You ask what “hard evidence” I have for the view that the official story is not true. I provided a lot of this in Chapter 3 of *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*. Assuming that you place the same demands on the official conspiracy theory as you do on the alternative

theory, what hard evidence is there for the claim that Flight 77 hit the Pentagon?

The authorities could have provided such evidence by showing reporters the various airplane parts that have unique serial numbers, including the flight data recorder, but they did not. They could have shown some of the 85 videos from cameras trained on the Pentagon, which the Justice Department admits having, but they have refused. One of the pieces of evidence offered by Rumsfeld in the first week was that the nose of Flight 77 was sticking out of the hole made in the Pentagon's C ring. But this claim, being ridiculous (the fragile nose could not have survived the impact with the reinforced outer wall), has been quietly dropped. In light of all this, plus the reported absence of airliner debris, I'm puzzled as to what hard evidence you believe exists. If you cite the DNA evidence, the truth is that we have no evidence that the bodies of the passengers actually came from the Pentagon (as I explain in *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*). Even if an airliner had hit the Pentagon, moreover, it might have been controlled remotely. So you do not know that someone piloted a plane into the Pentagon.

As to what really happened, I do not know. I am quite certain, however, that the official story, according to which Hani Hanjour (or some other al-Qaeda hijacker) piloted Flight 77 into the Pentagon, is false. There is no credible evidence to support it and a lot of evidence against it. One part of this evidence is the fact that Wedge 1 would have been, for several reasons, the least likely spot for Muslim terrorists to have struck. Another part of this evidence is the fact that the primary targeted area was the first floor of the Pentagon (92 of the 125 victims were on that floor), which would have been impossible for a 757 to have hit — especially without even scraping the Pentagon lawn (photographs showed that it was undamaged). I do not, therefore, merely “raise questions.” I state that the official story is a lie.

5. Matt Taibbi: In chapter 21, you write about the “white jet,” which you say may have been circling Washington when flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. “The claim that Pentagon officials were unaware of the approaching aircraft, which spiraled downward for three minutes before crashing,” you write, “becomes implausible, making even more insistent the question of why the Pentagon was not evacuated.”

Now, if I follow you correctly, your implication here is that officials in the Pentagon launched a jet into the airspace over Washington prior to the crash, and therefore knew that flight 77 was going to hit the Pentagon, and yet *intentionally* refused to evacuate their own personnel from the Pentagon building, ultimately incurring the deaths of over 100 of their own people. Do you have a theory about why they would engage in this seemingly pointless murderous/suicidal behavior? Or do you just implicitly believe that our government is capable of any and all nefarious behavior, not matter how insensible?

Because think about it: if the Pentagon was in on this job, why did they wait until the very last second to send that “white jet” into the air? Really, why would you wait until the last second, unless the whole situation was an unforeseen emergency, a surprise? And if they were really reacting to a surprise development, are you really ready to demand that congress investigate their failure to evacuate the world's largest office building within three crazed minutes? Remember, we have the luxury of knowing that the plane ultimately crashed into the Pentagon. But that couldn't have been at all clear to those on the ground until the very last moments. So exactly what is there to be indignant about here? Are you upset that they failed to save the lives of those people who died at the Pentagon? Or are you implying that you believe they knew the ultimate destination of the attack all along and

failed to act on purpose? Which is it? There is a very wide gap between those two propositions, but you leave your readers the option of choosing either. Why?

David Ray Griffin Responds: To fill in a few details for readers unfamiliar with the issue: The “white jet” in question was an E-4B, the Air Force’s most sophisticated command and communications aircraft (often called a “flying Pentagon”). I did not say merely that “it may have been circling Washington” when the Pentagon was attacked; I presented evidence that this was indeed the case. The failure to evacuate cost 125 lives. The fact that the recent revelation of the E-4B’s presence is embarrassing to the Pentagon is shown by the fact that, incredibly, its officials have denied that the plane over the White House was a military plane, even though there can be no doubt about this.

In your wording of the question, you say that the implication of my position is that the presence of this white jet meant that Pentagon officials “knew that flight 77 was going to hit the Pentagon.” As my response to your third question shows, I do not believe that. My point is instead that, *if* the official story were true, they would have known this — or at least that *some* airliner was approaching.

You say that an attack by the Pentagon on itself would have been “seemingly pointless murderous/suicidal behavior.” In the first place, it certainly was not suicidal on the part of Rumsfeld and the top brass: Wedge 1, which was struck, was about as far as possible from their offices as possible (which is one of the reasons it would have been an unlikely target for Muslim terrorists angry about US foreign policy). None of the casualties, moreover, were connected to the US Air Force; all the victims were either in, or worked for, the Army or the Navy. Air Force officials did not kill any of “their own personnel.”

Although the attack certainly was “murderous,” I doubt very strongly that it was “pointless.” I myself don’t offer theories about what the point was, but this does not mean that a plausible theory cannot be provided. One suggested answer puts together two facts: first, the day before 9/11, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld stated at a press conference that the Pentagon was missing \$2.3 trillion dollars; second, one of the most damaged areas was the Army’s financial management/audit area. This combination of facts has led one 9/11 researcher, citing evidence that the “attack” began with explosives going off inside that area, to ask: “Were the auditors who could ‘follow the money,’ and the computers whose data could help them do it, intentionally targeted?”

You also ask: “if the Pentagon was in on this job, why did they wait until the very last second to send that ‘white jet’ into the air?” We don’t know when the plane went up (we know only the time of the first reported *sighting*). The Pentagon clearly won’t tell us, since it won’t even acknowledge that the plane belonged to it. So we have no way of inferring that the military officials were reacting to a surprise event.

In any case, yes, even if Pentagon officials had had only three minutes notice, I would want Congress to ask why the evacuation alarms were not set off. There is no evidence that these were “three crazed minutes,” and evacuations had been regularly rehearsed. What you call the “world’s largest office building,” moreover, had only five stories, so it would have been nothing like trying to evacuate the 110-story Twin Towers. In three minutes, therefore, a good percentage of the Pentagon employees could have gotten out of the building — surely all 92 of those people who were killed on the first floor.

Accordingly, whether the victims were deliberately targeted by Rumsfeld and other

Pentagon (especially Air Force) officials, or they were merely allowed to die because of a failure to set off the alarms, we should be outraged (not merely “indignant”).

6. Matt Taibbi: Do you really think that people like Ted Olsen and Lisa Beamer are lying about receiving phone calls from their spouses in those last moments? Do you think someone would lose their spouse in a terrorist attack, and then moments later clear-headedly act a part in some devious conspiracy for the benefit of the press and the public? What exactly are you implying here? I mean, Jesus Christ — they guy’s wife *died*! Why would he lie about getting that call? Did someone call him and say, “Hey, Ted — tough break about your wife. Can you do us a favor and pretend you got a call from her, pinning the attack on hijackers with box cutters?” Exactly how do you think that worked? Can you speculate, please, on what the instructions to Olsen with regard to his phony phone call might have sounded like?

David Ray Griffin responds: I don’t want to be unkind, Matt, but these two questions make me wonder how well informed you are about 9/11. The name of the US Solicitor General was Ted Olson (not Olsen). More important, Lisa Beamer never claimed to receive a call from her husband, Todd Beamer. According to the official account, he called another woman named Lisa — an Airfone employee named Lisa Jefferson — and talked to her for the final 13 minutes of his life. He allegedly did this rather than accepting her offer to put him through to his wife, even though he reportedly assumed he was going to die. If you had asked whether I believe that *this* call occurred, I would have said no. Jefferson’s report of this call was very important, however, because it was the source of Bush’s “Let’s Roll” slogan for the so-called war on terror.

With regard to Ted Olson, your argument is based on the assumption that his wife, Barbara Olson, really died, and that he truly loved her. Both of those things may well be true. But I certainly do not *know* that they are, and I suspect that you do not, either.

What we do know is that, although Ted claimed that he received two calls from his wife (during which she told him that Flight 77 had been hijacked by men with knives and box-cutters), the FBI has said otherwise. In a report on phone calls from the four airliners presented in 2006 at the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui (the so-called 20th hijacker), the FBI indicated that no such calls from Barbara Olson occurred. It did say that she attempted a call to the Justice Department. But the call, it said, was “unconnected” so that it lasted “0 seconds.” This was the main point of Chapter 8 (“Did Ted Olson Receive Phone Calls from His Wife?”) of *9/11 Contradictions*, the book under discussion here.

In any case, if you accept the FBI’s report, then there are two options: Either Ted Olson lied or else he, like many other people that day, was fooled by fake calls based on voice morphing technology. Either way, the belief that Barbara Olson called her husband from Flight 77 was based on deception. (This point, incidentally, is relevant to the question of whether Flight 77 could have struck the Pentagon, because this alleged call was the only evidence that it was still aloft after it disappeared from the FAA radar shortly before 9:00 AM.)

You may, incidentally, doubt the feasibility of voice morphing, in spite of my earlier reference to William Arkin’s 1999 article (in which he reported that he heard the voices of Colin Powell and another general perfectly rendered). So let’s look at the alleged cell phone calls from United Flight 93. According to news reports at the time, of the 37 reported phone calls from this plane, over a dozen were made on cell phones. A leading British paper, for

example, said: “The phone calls began, 23 from airphones, others by mobile.” Four of those mobile or cell phone calls were reportedly made by Tom Burnett to his wife, Deena Burnett. She knew he had called from his cell phone — she reported to journalists, in a book, and on national TV — because her Caller ID showed his cell phone number.

When the FBI presented its phone report to the Moussaoui trial, however, it said that of the 37 calls made from this flight, only two of them — both of which occurred at 9:58, after the plane had descended to 5,000 feet — were made from cell phones. (Members of the 9/11 truth movement had argued that successful cell phone calls from high-altitude airliners would have been impossible in 2001 [prior to the invention and installation of pico-cell technology].) All of Tom Burnett’s calls were said to have been made on passenger-seat phones. Assuming that you accept the FBI’s report, Matt, do you have a theory as to why Deena Burnett reported recognizing the number from her husband’s cell phone? Believing that we surely cannot accuse her of either lying or misremembering, I myself have suggested a theory — that the calls were faked by means of a device, at least one of which can be purchased on the Internet, that allows callers to fake other people’s phone numbers as well as their voices.

If Deena Burnett was tricked, then it’s possible that Ted Olson was, too. My own hunch, however, is that he simply invented the story. For one thing, he was very much an insider in the Bush-Cheney administration, being the attorney who successfully argued before the Supreme Court that the Florida recount in 2000 should be stopped (thereby making Bush president) and that Cheney did not have to reveal the participants at his secret energy-policy meeting in 2001. Also, if the calls really came to the Department of Justice, Olson could have provided evidence of this fact when the veracity of his story was challenged, but he never did.

7. Matt Taibbi: In chapter 19, you quote the Commission about Hanjour’s piloting: *The instructor thought Hanjour may have had training from a military pilot because he used a terrain recognition system for navigation.* To which you comment: “How could this instructor have had such a radically different view of Hanjour’s abilities than all the others, right up through August of 2001?”

You do realize that the Commission’s statement is not implying that the instructor was making a qualitative assessment of Hanjour’s piloting skills, don’t you? He was merely saying that Hanjour’s ability to use a certain device implied a certain kind of experience/training. Similarly, the notion that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed described Hanjour as the “most experienced” pilot is also not a qualitative assessment of Hanjour’s abilities. Todd Collins is “more experienced” than Ben Roethlisberger, too. Objectively speaking, even without taking into consideration Hanjour’s skill level, he was the “most experienced.” Do you really not grasp this distinction?

David Ray Griffin responds: Given the fact that early reports described the aircraft that hit the Pentagon as having been flown with “military precision,” the claim that one (apparently unidentifiable) instructor believed that Hanjour may have been trained by a military pilot was not insignificant. Also, my statement was based not simply on the sentence from *The 9/11 Commission Report* that you quoted but also the previous one, which claimed that Hanjour had “successfully conducted a challenging certification flight supervised by [this] instructor.” With regard to whether “more experienced” implies a qualitative assessment, one of the main factors in judging whether pilots are qualified to take tests for various certificates and ratings is the number of hours they have logged in the

air.

I am puzzled, moreover, by your assertion that, “[o]bjectively speaking, [Hanjour] was the ‘most experienced.’” I am aware of no objective basis for that assertion. Furthermore, investigative reporter Daniel Hopsicker interviewed Amanda Keller, a woman with whom Mohamed Atta (i.e., the man going by that name) had lived for a few months while he was attending flight school in Venice, Florida. She reported that Atta was already an experienced pilot when he entered the country and that he was allowed to fly other students, as if he were an instructor. Of all the alleged pilots, furthermore, Hanjour seemed to be the only one who failed to complete a single course of training.

I wonder, finally, why you included this point. If you had successfully argued that even the two apparently favorable statements about Hanjour in *The 9/11 Commission Report* do not really suggest that he might have been a fairly decent pilot after all, how would this help your defense of the official account?

8. Matt Taibbi: In chapter 10, you write about the apparent discrepancy between the military’s position that its jets were 71 miles away from Manhattan at the time of the flight 175 crash, and the time those jets *should* have been there. “For example,” you write:

the F-15s were reportedly airborne at 8:52 and one of the pilots, Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Duffy, was quoted as saying that he ‘was in full-blower all the way.’ That would probably mean that the fighters were going about 1300 mph and hence about 22 miles a minute. At that speed, they would have covered the 180 miles from Otis to Manhattan in ten minutes (allowing two minutes to get up to speed and to slow down). Rather than being 71 miles away at 9:03 a.m., therefore, they should have already been there for a minute.

Now, what’s more likely — that a suburban Californian professor of Theology has his scrawled-on-a-napkin fighter-jet timeline math wrong, or that some dark conspiracy of White House confederates issued an unprecedented stand-down order in the missing minutes, an order that, despite being a *de facto* admission of responsibility for the greatest crime against American citizens ever committed by an American government, would subsequently be faithfully kept secret by all the ordinary rank-and-file military personnel who, up till that moment, had been kept in the dark? Can you explain to me why the latter scenario is more likely?

David Ray Griffin responds: Mathematics is the same for people of every occupation in every part of the world. The calculations are either right or wrong, no matter who does them. So rather than suggesting that my calculation might be wrong, why don’t you pull out a napkin and see if you get a different result?

I based my calculation, incidentally, on a conservative estimate of the speed of the fighters. As I pointed out in a note: “Although the F-15 can fly at 1800 mph, this is only at very high altitudes, where the air is thin. For my calculation, I assumed that the fighters would have been traveling about half way between sea level, at which they can fly 915 mph, and 36,000 feet, at which they can fly 1650 mph.” In the meantime, however, I have talked to pilots who say that the F-15s would have more likely gone up “to altitude.” If they went full speed at 36,000 feet, they would have been going 1650 mph, hence 29 miles per minute, allowing them to cover the 180 miles in slightly over 6 minutes. Even if we generously allow a total of 5 minutes for ascent and descent, they would have arrived in Manhattan with at least two

minutes to spare.

If your napkin gives the same result, I wonder if you have a theory as to why, according to the military, the F-15s were still 71 miles away. Your question, incidentally, is dealing with a position that the military defended only from September 2001 until the 9/11 Commission put out its report in July 2004. As I explained in the next section of Chapter 10, the Commission's new story claimed that the FAA, instead of notifying the military about Flight 175's difficulties at 8:43, failed to notify it until the airliner was hitting the South Tower at 9:03. This new story absolves the military of all possible blame for its failure to intercept Flight 175. Why did the 9/11 Commission change the story? I believe it did so precisely because it saw that the 9/11 truth movement had the math right — that if the military had been notified about Flight 175's hijacking at 8:43, the F-15s could have easily intercepted it. (The Commission explicitly admitted this with regard to Flight 77, as I point out below.)

I am pleased, in any case, that you agree that if 9/11 was an inside job, it was “the greatest crime against American citizens ever committed by an American government.” Given this view, I am puzzled why you seem less interested in the enormous body of evidence suggesting that it was indeed an inside job than in trying to pick away at a few pieces of this evidence.

Surely you cannot believe the Bush-Cheney administration incapable of such a crime. Surely you know, for example, that an order from the White House condemned thousands of Ground Zero workers to miserable lives and early deaths. As I reported in the introduction to *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*, the EPA was going to issue a warning that the air was unsafe to breathe (asbestos levels of four times the safe level had already been reported). The White House, however, ordered the EPA to declare that the air did not contain “excessive levels of asbestos” and was otherwise “safe to breathe.” Over 50,000 of the workers have respiratory problems, over 350 have died, 600 more have cancer, and there are predictions that the deaths will far exceed those that occurred on 9/11 itself. Likewise, more Americans have already died in the Iraq war, which was based on lies, than on 9/11. No *a priori* argument can be given, therefore, that the administration would have been too moral to orchestrate 9/11.

8. Matt Taibbi: In the course of this entire book, did you pick up the phone once? Or is the whole thing based upon research of internet sources? I notice, for instance, that you seem not to have called Congressional Air Charters. Even your guess about the F-15 jet flying 1300 mph appears to be something you pulled from an internet source. I'm looking at your bibliography and I don't see a single original interview. Do I have that wrong?

David Ray Griffin responds: My work from the beginning has been devoted to summarizing and synthesizing the findings of those members of the 9/11 truth movement who have done original research of various types. In *The New Pearl Harbor*, for example, I took pains to point out that each point I made was derived from at least one of the major sources I used.

That said, I often found it necessary in my later books to contact various individuals. This was not true while I was working on *9/11 Contradictions*, since it merely documents contradictions within the official story. With regard to Congressional Air Charters, about which you asked, I saw no point in trying to contact it, because a journalist, as I reported in note 23 of the Hani Hanjour chapter, had already tried and learned nothing. However, two experienced researchers did carry out extensive (but fruitless) searches on my behalf to find

the “Eddie Shalev” cited by the Commission as support for its claim that an instructor at Congressional Air Charters had supervised Hanjour’s “challenging certification flight.”

Some of my previous books, however, did provide occasions for contacting people. While working on *The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions*, I had a lengthy telephone interview with Laura Brown of the FAA about a memo she had sent to the 9/11 Commission, clarifying the time at which the FAA had first contacted the military on the morning of 9/11. (I refer to it, in fact, in note 19 of Chapter 10 of *9/11 Contradictions*.) Although I did “pick up the phone” in that case, I generally prefer to communicate by email. If you look at the notes for Chapter 9 (dealing with Flight 11), you will see references to several email letters from Colin Scoggins, an air traffic controller at the FAA’s Boston Center who was cited in *The 9/11 Commission Report*. I exchanged dozens of email letters with him while I was working on Chapter 1 of *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*. At the same time, I was also corresponding extensively with Robin Hordon, who had previously worked at that same center. I have also consulted extensively with scientists and pilots while working on the flights, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center.

I’m afraid that this was a pretty boring answer, but I didn’t want to dodge your question — although I was puzzled about the reason for it. Since I am not applying for a prize for original research, is not the only important thing the accuracy of my information, rather than the methods I employed to get it?

10. Matt Taibbi: Just out of curiosity — when you hear hoof beats, which animal comes to your mind first? Horses or zebras? Because throughout this book, you hear hoof beats and conclude that this or that juking of the timeline a few minutes in this or that direction is evidence of something extraordinarily sinister — a something for which, of course, no concrete evidence exists. I look at the same evidence and I see the completely predictable behavior of a bunch of incompetent politicians rewriting history in order to cover their asses for their failure to protect the country on a day of crisis. Can you give me any reason why any of the discrepancies you’re describing *shouldn’t* be laid at the feet of pure political self-interest? Why is a cover-up of garden-variety incompetence less likely than a cover-up of criminal involvement?

And please don’t say that a cover-up of mere incompetence is just as worth investigating as a cover-up of criminal involvement. The entire direction of your investigatory enterprise implies something far more sinister than base-level incompetence. And if you’re going to make that implication, you need something a lot hotter than minor timeline discrepancies to make it stick. If you accuse someone of murder, you need real evidence, and you don’t appear to have any at all. In other words, where are your zebra stripes?

David Ray Griffin responds: You suggest that all of the timeline discrepancies I have documented are “minor.” Let’s look at some of them.

As I mentioned earlier, the military had originally said that the FAA notified it about Flight 175 at 8:43, which was 20 minutes before the flight would strike the South Tower. But the 9/11 Commission claimed that this notification did not happen until 9:03, when the building was being struck. This 20-minute difference cannot be described as minor: It makes all the difference with regard to whether the military could have intercepted the flight.

Turning to the discrepancy about Flight 77: NORAD had said in 2001 that the notification from the FAA had come at 9:24. The 9/11 truth movement asked why, then, was the plane

not intercepted before it struck the Pentagon at 9:38. The 9/11 Commission, agreeing that the 9:24 notification time “made it appear that the military was notified in time to respond,” solved this problem by claiming that the military “never received notice that American 77 was hijacked.” This claim, besides contradicting what NORAD had been saying for almost three years, also contradicted the aforementioned FAA memo sent to the Commission by the FAA — which said that the FAA had actually notified the military *long before* 9:24. The Commission, besides simply ignoring this memo in its final report, also contradicted statements by the FBI and the Secret Service. The discrepancy cannot possibly be called minor.

The same is true of the discrepancy about Flight 93. The 9/11 Commission claimed that the military “first received a call about United 93 at 10:07,” four minutes after it had crashed. But General Larry Arnold, the head of NORAD’s Continental region, had testified that the military had been aware of the flight for over 20 minutes before it crashed. He and many other officials — including Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz — even said that the military was tracking Flight 93 and was in position to shoot it down. Hardly a minor discrepancy, especially given the evidence that the military did shoot the plane down.

Another discrepancy involves the time at which Cheney went down to the bunker under the White House to assume control of events. Many witnesses, including Richard Clarke and Cheney’s photographer, said that it was not long after 9:00. One of these, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, testified that when he got down there at 9:20, Cheney was already there. Mineta then told the Commission about a conversation between Cheney and a young man, which occurred about 10 minutes before the Pentagon was attacked. Although Mineta did not thus interpret it, the conversation is most naturally understood as Cheney’s confirmation of a stand-down order. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, making no mention of Mineta’s testimony, claimed that Cheney did not get down to the bunker until almost 10:00. Definitely not a minor discrepancy.

Still another major discrepancy involves the time at which Cheney issued the shootdown authorization. According to the 9/11 Commission, he did so “between 10:10 and 10:15.” Richard Clarke, however, reported that he received it at about 9:50 — over 10 minutes before Flight 93 went down.

Matt, you want to claim that all of the contradictions in the official story can be regarded as cover-ups of incompetence. However, as I have emphasized in previous books, most fully in *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*, the contradictions are not limited to the internal ones discussed in this book. The official story is also contradicted by much evidence, both documentary and physical, which cannot be explained away by an incompetence theory.

Incompetence cannot explain, for example, why three steel-frame high-rise buildings came down at virtually free-fall speed; why virtually all of the buildings’ concrete was pulverized into tiny dust particles; why clusters of steel columns, weighing thousands of tons, were ejected out horizontally some 500 feet from the towers; why hundreds of tiny bone fragments were found on the roofs of nearby buildings; why some of the buildings’ steel melted, even though the fires could not have gotten within 1,000 degrees F of the requisite temperature; why steel from the buildings had been thinned because of oxidation and sulfidation (which the *New York Times* called “perhaps the deepest mystery uncovered in the investigation”; why explosions were going off in the buildings long after all the jet fuel had burned up; why Giuliani’s people knew in advance that the Twin Towers and WTC 7 were going to collapse; and why 125 people were killed in a part of the Pentagon that could

not have been hit by an airliner, especially one flown by an amateur.

You asked for evidence of murder by forces within our own government. That is some of it.

Let me comment in closing, however, that your concern for evidence seems one-sided. As you know (if you looked at Chapter 18), the Bush administration, after promising to provide proof that Osama bin Laden was behind the attacks, reneged. Tony Blair provided a document but it, he admitted, did “not purport to provide a prosecutable case against Osama Bin Laden in a court of law.” And recently, in spite of whatever proof you may think has been provided by videotapes allegedly showing bin Laden confessing, the FBI does not list 9/11 as one of the attacks for which he is wanted because, a spokesman admitted, “the FBI has no hard evidence connecting Bin Laden to 9/11.” Moreover, all the evidence of hijackers on the planes can be seen to have been fabricated (like the cell phone calls) or planted (like the incriminating evidence in Atta’s luggage and the passports that flew out of the planes and floated to the ground at the WTC site). Where is your concern that bin Laden and 19 Muslims have been charged with murder without any hard evidence? Given your moral concern, I would think you would be especially bothered by the fact that, on the basis of these unsubstantiated charges, hundreds of thousands — by some counts, millions — of people have already been killed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In any case, Matt, I thank you for this opportunity to discuss some issues related to “the greatest crime against American citizens ever committed by an American government.” Let me suggest that you next interview physicist Steven Jones about “the alleged scientific impossibilities” in the official account of the destruction of the World Trade Center. [The exchange continues here](#)

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