

**Barrie Zwicker's response to, and comments upon,
the paper "Cumulative Arguments and Smoking Guns"**

Barrie Zwicker

I'm personally indebted to the author of "Cumulative Arguments and Smoking Guns" for exposing a weakness in argumentation in Chapter 2 of my book *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-Up of 9/11*. My recognition of the author's superior reasoning in this particular will become evident.

The paper exhibits two impressive strengths, in my opinion. The first is simply that the author brings philosophy to bear on a highly important topic within current affairs: whether the official narrative of 9/11 is false, true, or somewhere in-between. The last time I studied philosophy in university was 1967-68. My philosophy professor droned on with no application of his philosophizing (until I challenged him) to the Vietnam War, a highly relevant ongoing current affair of the time. The other strength of the paper is the general rigor of the author's philosophical and logical reasoning.

The point of the paper is to examine the nature of arguments put forward both in defense of, and critical of, the official story of 9/11. The author's main example of erroneous reasoning on the part of critics of the official story is an assertion I make in *Towers of Deception*.

On pages 43-44 I assert that those who defend the official story of 9/11 employ deductive reasoning. In deductive reasoning, I correctly state, "each step in the argument depends upon the truth of the previous step." An appropriate metaphor is with a chain. If one link fails, the chain is broken.

I further claim that critics of the official story employ a cumulative argument. That is, they bring forward many pieces of evidence, some or even one of which will undermine or contradict the official story, and which pieces of evidence are not dependent on each other. An appropriate metaphor, as David Ray Griffin has written, is a cable. Even with many or several strands, or all but one strand broken, a cable can still be "unbroken" in the sense of being able to still carry its load.

In *Towers* I provide 26 "exhibits," each of which undermines or contradicts the official story. I state: "Only one exhibit needs to be proven true (beyond a reasonable doubt) for the Inside Job Theory to be strengthened, or even proved (the 'smoking gun'). If more than one holds up, the case for an Inside Job becomes even more substantive. If a clear majority hold, up, the argument for Inside Job becomes nearly invincible."

While the author agrees this is correct as far as it goes, he or she correctly notes that arguments on both sides finally depend more on the "propositional content," of their "exhibits" -- in other words on the *evidence* -- than they do on the "structural nature" of the propositional contents.

To home in more closely, the key flaw the author identifies in *Towers* is my assertion that defenders of the official story employ *only* deductive argument. That, I agree, is unduly sweeping. Some defenders of the official story do say: “Osama clearly was behind it, and so his al Qaeda operatives were recruited and trained to do it, and they then hijacked the planes, and then crashed them into the towers,” and so on. But other defenders of the official story do not suggest a chain. They just throw up a bunch of assertions. In that case they’re arguing cumulatively, suggesting a cable.

Given that is so, my claim in the book that “the official 9/11 story can fail with one proven falsehood” is also false, at least in light of my erroneous claim that defenders of the official story are *all* arguing deductively. Fortunately, elsewhere in my book I do not adhere to my own claim, but rather acknowledge the variety of (to me) irrational, flawed and even absurd claims made by defenders of the official story. I also agree with the author of the paper that both sides employ both cumulative and deductive arguments.

Going beyond my recognition of this valuable criticism by the author of the paper, I would add that he or she usefully notes the significance of evidence, especially that termed *prima facie* evidence, regarding arguments over which narratives about 9/11 hold the most water, or should. I would like to see this point more stressed in the paper, but on the other hand the author sets out a restricted arena within which to work, and I do not fault that.

Another related reality *vis a vis* arguments over 9/11 goes well beyond this paper. That is the reality that most such arguments are very light on rationality but very heavy on: pre-suppositions; emotions such as anger, fear and frustration; competing worldviews; (usually unacknowledged) self interest, and other non-rational factors so significant in human affairs.

Finally, I think it will be useful to criticize the basis, or framework, the author provides at the outset for his or her whole exercise, namely that “we can distinguish between the following three propositions pertaining to the events of September 11, 2001.” This last criticism of mine is more of a cavil than a substantial criticism. In the context of the paper, the author’s other arguments are unaffected, or almost entirely unaffected, by the arbitrary nature of the author’s opening three propositions.

It seems to me there are three problems with the suggestion there are only three propositions concerning the nature of arguments over 9/11. One is that there are more than three. The second problem is that in other contexts this matters a good deal. The third problem is the three the author selects. They are:

- (O) In all significant respects, the official narrative is true.
- (S) Many significant elements of the official narrative are not true.
- (R) US government officials were complicit in the events of 9/11.

It can be said that (O) and (S) are apples, relating to “true” or “not true” *vis a vis* the official story, but (R) is an orange, relating to “knew” or “did not know” on the part of the US government.

A more logically sound trio of propositions out of the starting gate would be, in my opinion:

- (T) In all significant aspects, the official narrative is true.
- (M) Many significant elements of the official narrative are not true.
- (F) In all significant aspects, the official narrative is false.

Further, the author’s proposition (R) (government complicity), can be divided into at least two propositions:

- (L) The US government let 9/11 happen (known as LIHOP, short for “let it happen on purpose”) and
- (M) The US government made 9/11 happen (known as MIHOP, short for “made it happen on purpose”)

Both (L) and (M) – mainstays of debate regarding 9/11 -- relate back to the author’s (S), (significant elements not true) but are unaccounted for in the paper.

The essential illogicality of the author’s chosen propositions is shown by the fact that while it’s true the author’s (R) (government complicity) could not be the case in (O) (official narrative all true) it could be at least partially the case in (S) (many significant elements of the official story untrue).

In a larger debate, or in real-life encounters that take place over coffee or on the streets over what’s valid and what’s not, *vis a vis* the events of 9/11, the author’s three propositions will not prove robust.