

# Smith, J. W. Why? The Deeper History Behind the September 11th Terrorist Attacks on America.

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Smith, J. W. *Why? The Deeper History Behind the September 11th Terrorist Attacks on America*. Sun City, AZ: Institute for Economic Democracy, 2003.

The author of this book, J. W. Smith, attempts to analyze the root causes of the 11 September terrorist attacks. His analysis is structured along four dimensions: historical-cultural, media, political, and economic. The main analytical focus is on the economic dimension. Specifically, Smith focuses on international economy and what he calls the control over resource-rich lands and the “wealth-producing-process.” (p. 3) The central argument in the book is that the 11 September terrorist attacks were consequences of the inherent unfairness of the international economic and trade system, a “plunder-by-trade” system as Smith calls it. According to the book, the roots of that unfairness partially arises from lack of the application of Adam Smith’s free trade and alternatively applying Frederich List’s principles for the protection of tender industries and markets in developed countries, but not in developing ones. The by-product is an unfair international trade system which is supported by the United States’ administration(s). Smith notes that “the 9/11 terrorists attacked America’s most visible symbol of world trade, the World Trade Center and the most visible system of the military might which enforces the unequal rules of the world trade, the Pentagon.” (p. 4)

The book is very prescriptive in nature. It repeatedly makes the claim that it has “the” solution for the problem of terrorism. “The” solution was a list of very broad policy recommendations from the ilk of “terrorism will disappear if all have equal rights within the wealth-producing-process” or “democratic-cooperative-capitalism” will lead to “peace security and prosperity for all.” (p. 7) I should note that both the “wealth-producing-process” and the “democratic-cooperative-capitalism” were not clearly defined. In conclusion, Smith provides five primary “guidelines” for a “world at peace” and the disappearance of terrorism. The most important are a Cancun-like negotiation alliance of developing nations, elimination of subtle monopolization of land, technology, and finance capital, and addressing population issues and sustainable development. (p. 161)

The four dimensions of Smith’s analysis are not equally strong. The weakest is the historical-cultural one. This dimension was based on what Smith called a “1,300 years battle between Christians and Muslims” over resource-rich lands. Here, Smith is borrowing from Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations hypothesis. Smith is placing that hypothesis in a historical framework rather than a post-Cold War one like Huntington. Both Huntington’s hypothesis and that dimension of Smith’s analysis are flawed. The 1,300 years that Smith mentioned contained almost as many Muslim-Christian alliances against their religious brethren as Muslim-Christian wars. Examples include, but are not limited to, the Abbasid-French alliance against the Muslim Umayyad dynasty in Spain (Harun al-Rashid and Charlemagne correspondences in 802), Christian Arabs fighting

against the crusaders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the French-Ottoman strategic alliance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Russian-Safavid coordination against the Ottomans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the German-Ottoman alliance in World War I. Smith attempted to add a religious dimension to the battles over resources, but such an attempt was bolstered only by selective historical evidence.

In the political dimension of Smith's analysis, he discusses the interventions of the US administration in several countries. These include the overthrow of democratically elected governments like that of Mossadeq in Iran (1953) and Allende in Chile (1973), as well as the intervention in Afghanistan that gave rise allegedly, to the *al-Qaeda* network. In this dimension, Smith is more concerned with international politics and US foreign policies as opposed to state-level politics. In a political analysis of the causes of 11 September, the state-level is too important to be marginalized. Many of the individuals and groups that joined *al-Qaeda*, including the 11 September terrorists, were products of internal crises like political repression, social injustices and identity crisis within their respective countries. It is not a coincidence that 15 of the 11 September hijackers came from Saudi Arabia, a country suffering from a complete lack of democratic institutions, systematic violations of human rights, an acute identity crisis, and an educational system based on an exclusionary interpretation of Islam, and a religious ideology that demonizes the "other" (Wahabism). None of these internal factors were emphasized in the book.

In conclusion, Smith's analysis explains the "deeper history" behind 11 September only partially. The critique of the international economic and trade system was valid and based on firm ground. This unfair system and the trade policies associated with it added to the impoverishment of several predominantly Muslim countries. The American-led intervention in the first Gulf War, if placed in Smith's framework as a struggle for controlling natural (oil) resources, ignited a militant reaction among Islamist radicals whose violence was, otherwise, contained within their state(s) boundaries. However, the dominant causes of 11 September cannot be reduced to the unfairness of trade policies. Why did 17 of the 11 September terrorists come from the Gulf region (Saudi Arabia and the UAE) and not from Latin America, a continent that suffers from the unfair trade policies more than the Gulf region? An analysis focusing on the initiation of democratization processes in Latin America and the lack of these processes in the Gulf could provide a good answer to such a question, as well as several deeper causes behind the mayhem of 11 September.

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