



# Stop Waiting for 'Cyber-9/11'

Ben Goldsworthy

# Overview

- Why 'cyber-9/11'?
- What might a 'cyber-9/11' look like?
  - 9/11 as an attack on National Infrastructure
  - 9/11 as a statement
  - 9/11 as a rebalancing of power
- Hang on a moment...
- Oh dear.
- Conclusions

# 'Cyber-9/11'

- 'Cyber Pearl Harbour' - US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta (2012)
- 'Cyber 9/11' - US Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano (2013)
- 9/11 changed the world - the years after 2001 are often referred to as the 'post-9/11 era'
- Its influence has been felt in politics, media, etc.
- 'Cyber-9/11' = a cyber-attack that has a comparable impact – after it, we can be said to be living in a 'post "cyber-9/11" era'
- It depends on *why* you consider 9/11 to have had such an impact
- 'Cyber Katrina'? (RAND Corp., 2016)

9/11 had such an impact because:  
it was an attack on (C)NI?

- (C)NI – (Critical) National Infrastructure
- The World Trade Centre was an important part of the Western/capitalist/neoliberal/globalist world's financial infrastructure
- A 'cyber-9/11' in this sense could be an attack on a nation's motorways, National Grid (via smart meters), air traffic, etc.



# 9/11 had such an impact because: it was performed by a non-state actor?

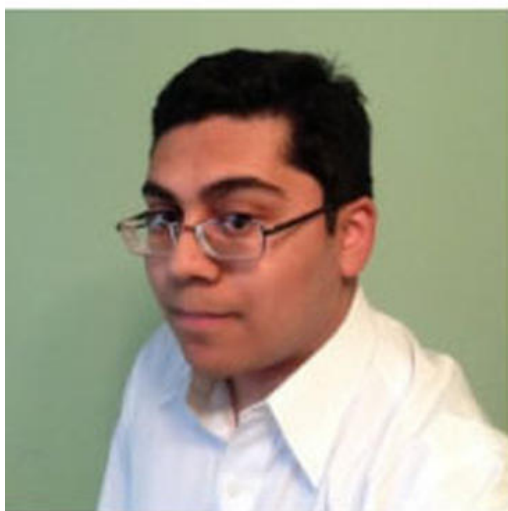
- 'States have a monopoly on violence' - Max Weber
- That is no longer the case
- The enemy was not constrained by the 'rules-based global order' - Al Qaeda do not adhere to the Geneva Convention
  - People tend to think hospitals are or should be protected from attack, for example
    - Unless you're in Syria
- This changed the nature of war, from traditional forms to the perpetual counter-insurgency of the post-9/11 era
- A 'cyber-9/11' in this sense might be a WannaCry-esque attack on hospitals, or an attack by a non-state actor like Anonymous, but more damaging

9/11 had such an impact because:  
it occurred during supposed peacetime?

- The UK is nowadays *de facto* at war with just one thing: whatever the US is at war with
- The US is currently at war only with 'terror' (in Afghanistan, Pakistan, *et al.*) and drugs, to varying degrees of success
- Cyber attacks are difficult to attribute
- China, Russia and North Korea have all been implicated in attacks on the US though, and the US and Israel on attacks on Iran

9/11 had such an impact because:  
it only took 19 men and some box cutters to kill thousands and  
create a new era?

- 9/11 showed that 'David' could hit 'Goliath', hard
- Lately, Daesh truck attacks kill, maim and sow terror for very little capital
- How are lone actors empowered by technology?
- Harnessing the Mirai botnet gives teenagers in their room state-level computing power
- A 'cyber-9/11' in this sense could be something like the taking down of Dyn by Mirai by one man



## Paras Jha

2<sup>nd</sup>

President at ProTraf Solutions, LLC

Greater New York City Area | Computer & Network Security

Current ProTraf Solutions

Education Rutgers University-New Brunswick

✓ Following

295  
followers

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/paras-jha-561ba110a>



# 9/11 had such an impact because: it weaponised civilians?

- Fast, safe air travel is a symbol of the wonders of globalisation and technology
- Suddenly, air travel was being used to blow up buildings in New York City
- The planes were civilian airliners – everyone was now a potential target *and* a weapon
- A 'cyber-9/11' in this sense could be the use of social media platforms to radicalise civilians and influence elections...

# 9/11 had such an impact because: it happened to a flammable Reichstag?

- Shortly after 9/11, the Patriot Act suspended about half of the Constitution – bye-bye *habeus corpus*, hello Guantanamo
- Some of the hallmarks of the 'post-9/11 era' are government surveillance and imprisonment, exploitation of fears over terrorism for the increasing of police powers and the use of the 'terrorist boogeyman' to justify military expeditions and the growth of the military-industrial complex
- Without wanting to go 'full truther', did 9/11 happen under a government that already knew what they wanted and were just waiting for a Reichstag fire to give them the support to do it?

# Have we had a 'cyber-9/11' without realising?

- For example, Russia *may* have influenced a US election, primarily via commercial US platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, in order to elect a destabilising candidate of their own preference
  - The US is not at war with Russia: check.
  - Civilians and civilian tools were weaponised: check.
  - The impact far outstrips the cost to Russia: check.
- Most obviously, this has given weight to those Cold War nostalgics always arguing for military action against Russia
- BUT more cyber-ly, both UK and US governments have expressed desires to increase regulation of this technology (c.f. Lessig's *Code*)
  - e.g. Amber Rudd (may her career rest in peace) arguing against encryption, the FBI attempting to take Apple to court for access to the San Bernadino shooters' iPhones

# Go on...

- Post-9/11 NSA spying has just been re-authorized for another 7 years; the IP Act 2014 and Digital Economy Act 2017 in the UK
- War now happens without war happening (c.f. *Outplayed*, 'hybrid'/'ambiguous'/'non-linear' war)
- Have we just sleepwalked through the next big change in geopolitics? Are we in the post-Ukraine era, or the post-Snowden era, or the post-truth era?

# Why would it matter if we had?

- 'Post-9/11 era' is rarely said in a cheery way
- Responses to 9/11 include widespread gov't surveillance, lengthy and intractable conflicts in the Middle East, creation of groups like the IS
- If we spend our time waiting for a 'cyber-9/11' that goes bang, we risk missing the truly era-creating event and being unable to stop the worst excesses of government in response to it
- 'It has been said critically that there is a tendency in many armies to spend the peace time studying how to fight the last war'  
- Lieutenant Colonel J. L. Schley (1929)
- Are we spending our time studying the last big shock and are going to miss something quieter?

Fin.