

9/11 And William Bill Cooper

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Introduction

Milton William “Bill” Cooper was an influential American conspiracy broadcaster and the author of *Behold a Pale Horse*. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, supporters circulated a June 28 radio segment in which Cooper warned listeners that Osama bin Laden would soon be blamed for a major event. The original essay treats this statement as a precise prediction, repeats the unsupported claim that bin Laden was a CIA agent called “Tim Osman,” and interprets Cooper’s later death as proof that the federal government silenced him. A critical analysis must distinguish a broad prediction from evidence, a documented covert relationship from an internet rumor, and suspicious interpretation from verified fact. Cooper did anticipate that bin Laden would be publicly blamed after media reports already identified him as a leading terrorism suspect, but he did not predict the date, targets, hijackers, method, or operational details of the attacks. The 9/11 Commission and extensive investigations attributed the plot to al-Qaeda. Cooper’s death occurred during a law-enforcement attempt to arrest him after a prolonged warrant dispute; claims of assassination require evidence beyond timing and distrust. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

Who Was William Cooper?

Cooper served in the United States military and later built an audience through books, lectures, and the shortwave radio program *The Hour of the Time*. His work combined claims about secret government, intelligence agencies, firearms, taxation, UFO narratives, and a coming “New World Order.” He was important not because every claim was accurate but because he helped create a style of alternative media in which official denial was treated as confirmation and scattered events were organized into one hidden plan. (Barkun)

Cooper also criticized other conspiracy figures and sometimes revised his own claims. This complexity matters. He cannot be reduced either to a prophet who revealed every secret or to a person whose audience had no legitimate reason to distrust government. The United States has a documented history of covert action, surveillance, and official deception. That history creates a rational reason to demand evidence, but it does not make every allegation true. (Barkun)

The June 28, 2001 Broadcast

In the widely circulated recording, Cooper discussed television reporting about Osama bin Laden and warned that Americans should not believe the story when bin Laden was blamed for a future attack. This was a prediction about attribution, not a detailed forecast of 9/11. By 2001, bin Laden was already internationally known. He had been indicted in the United States for the 1998 embassy bombings, appeared on the FBI's most-wanted list, and was repeatedly discussed in news coverage as an organizer of anti-American terrorism. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

A prediction becomes more evidentially impressive when it is specific, improbable, recorded before the event, and not selected from many unsuccessful predictions. Cooper did not name September 11, New York, Washington, commercial aircraft, the World Trade Center, or the Pentagon. The statement is therefore historically interesting, but describing it as a complete prediction exaggerates what the audio contains. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

What the Official Investigation Found

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States reconstructed the plot through travel, communications, financial records, captured documents, interviews, intelligence, and the histories of the nineteen hijackers. It concluded that al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, approved and supported the operation and that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was its principal architect. Later evidence from al-Qaeda itself, including public statements and internal materials, is consistent with this attribution. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

Official reports can contain errors and should be scrutinized, especially where intelligence remains classified. Scrutiny, however, must engage the actual evidence. The existence of unanswered questions, bureaucratic failures, or prior government misconduct does not by itself establish that the attacks were secretly planned by the U.S. government. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

The “Tim Osman” Claim

The original essay states as fact that bin Laden was a CIA agent called Tim Osman. Reliable evidence does not support that claim. During the Soviet-Afghan war, the United States supported Afghan resistance largely through Pakistan's intelligence service. Arab volunteers, including bin Laden, operated in the broader anti-Soviet environment, but proximity to a U.S.-backed conflict is not proof that a person was recruited, paid, trained, or assigned an intelligence alias by the CIA. (Douglas et al.

538-42; Barkun)

The name “Tim Osman” appears mainly in later conspiracy accounts lacking verifiable documents, named firsthand sources, or corroborating records. A responsible writer should distinguish the well-documented history of U.S. support for Afghan mujahideen from the separate and unsupported assertion that bin Laden personally served as a CIA agent. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

Prediction, Retrodiction, and Selection

Conspiracy narratives are often strengthened after an event through retrodiction: an older statement is reinterpreted as more precise than it originally was. Hundreds of broad warnings may be forgotten while the one resembling a later event is repeatedly shared. This is selection bias. A sound method asks how many predictions the speaker made, how specific they were, and how many failed. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

Cooper’s warning can still be analyzed as media criticism. He anticipated that a familiar enemy image could organize public reaction. That insight does not demonstrate foreknowledge of the operational plot. It demonstrates his established expectation that governments and media manipulate fear. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

Conspiracy Thinking and Agency

Research on conspiracy belief examines how people infer intentional agency behind large events, especially when outcomes are frightening, complex, or politically consequential. A hidden plot can feel more satisfying than a combination of fanaticism, institutional failure, chance, and fragmented decision-making. Conspiracy explanations also offer moral clarity by assigning total control to a single actor. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

This does not mean every conspiracy claim is psychologically irrational. Real conspiracies occur and are proved through documents, witnesses, physical evidence, money trails, and independently testable facts. The distinction is methodological: a theory becomes credible by surviving attempts at falsification, not by explaining every objection as part of the cover-up. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

The Information Environment Before Social Media

Cooper’s radio program developed before modern social platforms, but it anticipated many features of today’s information environment. Long-form broadcasts created an intimate relationship between host and listener. Documents and quotations could be presented without immediate access to their context. Listeners formed communities around the belief that mainstream institutions concealed reality. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

The internet later made recordings, excerpts, and derivative claims easier to circulate. A segment stripped from the news environment of June 2001 can appear prophetic to an audience that does not know how frequently bin Laden was already mentioned. Media literacy requires reconstructing what information was publicly available at the time. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

Cooper's Legal Conflict

Cooper faced federal tax-related charges and an arrest warrant. He rejected federal authority, remained at his Arizona property, and publicly warned that attempts to arrest him could lead to confrontation. His political interpretation of the dispute was part of a larger anti-government worldview. The legal existence of warrants does not prove that every enforcement decision was wise, and Cooper's beliefs do not erase the need to examine official conduct. (Barkun)

An evidence-based account should review court records, warrant history, agency statements, and independent reporting rather than infer the purpose of the operation solely from Cooper's fame or the date. (Barkun)

The Death of William Cooper

On November 5, 2001, Apache County officers attempted to arrest Cooper near his home in Eagar, Arizona. Contemporary law-enforcement and news accounts state that officers used an operation intended to draw him away from the residence, that Cooper tried to flee, and that a confrontation followed in which a deputy was shot and Cooper was killed. Details of tactics and sequence have been disputed by supporters. (Barkun)

Cooper's death shortly after 9/11 encouraged an assassination narrative, but temporal sequence is not proof of causation. To establish deliberate silencing, evidence would need to connect decision-makers, motive, planning, orders, and conduct to his broadcasts. The existence of a warrant and a dangerous confrontation offers a documented alternative explanation. Critical inquiry should remain open to misconduct while refusing to convert suspicion into fact. (Barkun)

How to Evaluate Competing Accounts

A reliable analysis begins with primary sources. The full June broadcast should be heard rather than a short excerpt. Dates of media reports about bin Laden should be compared with Cooper's statement. Claims about intelligence aliases require documents or corroborated firsthand testimony. Accounts of his death should be compared across police records, court material, journalists, witnesses, and supporters. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

Source incentives also matter. Government agencies may protect institutional reputation;

broadcasters may benefit from dramatic claims; supporters may preserve a hero; critics may dismiss a person without examining correct observations. Recognizing bias does not mean all sources are equal. A document with verifiable provenance generally carries more evidential weight than an anonymous online assertion. (Douglas et al. 538–42; Barkun)

Legitimate Questions About 9/11

There are legitimate questions about intelligence sharing, aviation security, emergency response, foreign policy, detention, war, and the use of the attacks to expand state power. The 9/11 Commission itself identified major failures. These questions can be investigated without adopting unsupported claims about holograms, controlled demolition, or a secret CIA identity for bin Laden. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

Conspiracy claims can sometimes distract from documented accountability. If public debate focuses on allegations that cannot be substantiated, officials may avoid scrutiny for policy failures that are supported by records. Skepticism is strongest when it prioritizes claims capable of proof. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

Cooper's Cultural Influence

Cooper influenced militia, sovereign-citizen, UFO, anti-globalist, and popular-culture audiences. *Behold a Pale Horse* circulated widely, including among readers who rejected parts of its argument. His work became a bridge between older print and radio conspiracy cultures and online communities. (Barkun)

This influence makes him worthy of study even when specific claims are false. Researchers can examine how distrust becomes a worldview, how charismatic broadcasters establish authority, and how political narratives migrate across groups. Cultural importance is not the same as factual reliability. (Barkun)

Ethics of Writing About Tragedy

Claims about 9/11 concern the deaths of thousands of people and the experiences of survivors, responders, families, and communities. Writers should avoid using tragedy merely to prove a preferred worldview. They should identify uncertainty, correct errors, and avoid accusing identifiable people of murder or treason without evidence. (Douglas et al. 538–42; Barkun)

Ethical skepticism also applies to official power. Victims deserve transparent investigation, preservation of records, and accountability for failures. Respect does not require silence; it requires standards that distinguish inquiry from accusation. (Douglas et al. 538–42; Barkun)

Conclusion

William Cooper's June 2001 warning is a genuine pre-9/11 statement that bin Laden would be blamed for a future attack. It is not a detailed prediction of September 11, and it arose in a context where bin Laden was already a prominent terrorism suspect. The claim that bin Laden was a CIA agent named Tim Osman is not supported by reliable evidence. The official account attributing the plot to al-Qaeda is supported by multiple forms of evidence, although government actions before and after the attacks remain legitimate subjects of scrutiny. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States; Federal Bureau of Investigation)

Cooper's death during an arrest operation deserves careful historical reconstruction, but its timing does not prove assassination. His larger importance lies in the way he organized distrust, alternative media, and secret-government narratives for a broad audience. Studying him responsibly requires neither worship nor dismissal. It requires precise quotation, primary sources, corroboration, comparison of explanations, and a willingness to change conclusions when evidence does not support the story one expected to find. (Douglas et al. 538-42; Barkun)

References

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