

# Who Lit All Those Fires?

By SEAN HANNON

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This week President George W. Bush made an absolutely stunning statement: "We've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September the 11th." It was echoed by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, who, when asked about the public's solid belief in Saddam's personal involvement in September 11, said, "I've not seen any indication that would lead me to believe that I could say that."

When I tell people what the President is quoted as saying, their eyes widen and they shake their heads in disbelief. "What? He said that?" they exclaim. Such an intense reaction should come as no surprise, however. For months now the polls have indicated that 70 percent of Americans firmly believe that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the 9/11 attacks. But where did they get this idea? Who fostered such a notion? Who, in countless speeches over many months, spoke of Iraq, Saddam Hussein and the attacks of September 11 in the same breath?

President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld are attempting to back away from their insinuations of Iraqi complicity, and distance themselves from all those fires they lit in the imagination of millions.

Who ARE these men in whom so many have placed their trust? How do they pretend not to have had any part in misdirecting our thirst for vengeance at an easy target? This misconception of who really attacked us did not suddenly appear from nowhere. It was nurtured and insinuated and innuendo-ed into existence by those men who now are saying in effect, "Oh, you believed that? Well, you didn't hear it from us."

This belief in Saddam attacking us on September 11 is rock solid in the minds of many. For several months, I have stood on the corner of a bridge with signs of protest and have heard my neighbors shout "Don't you care what they did to us on 9/11?". When I marched in Washington, I passed by pro-war advocates wearing Saddam masks heckling our plea for peace and ignoring my graphic poster of the burning Twin Towers with the caption "IRAQ WASN'T THERE!". And I have read quotes from American soldiers over in Iraq who have said with great satisfaction, "This one's for 9/11".

I know how I feel about this betrayal of trust. It is easier for me because I never trusted them to begin with. But what of those people I just mentioned, the "true believers"? How do they come to terms with having been manipulated emotionally to such ends? How do they cope with the inescapable reality of our children lost, billions squandered, and thousands of innocents incinerated by Shock and Awe, now that they know from our President's lips that Saddam Hussein and Iraq was not the enemy who attacked us?