

IRAQ: Missing links

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Trying to keep facts straight in the debate over the liberation of Iraq is difficult, mostly because some opponents have little regard for facts.

The only relevant fact is that they want George W. Bush out of office. Publicly, however, a reason they often cite for opposing the war is that "Bush has admitted there is no connection between al-Qaida and Iraq."

What the administration has said is that there is no overwhelming proof Iraq was involved directly in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Big difference.

In fact, al-Qaida tracks are all over the sands of Iraq.

Many of the connections can be found on the Tech Central Station Web site. Written by Richard Minitier, a reporter and author of the best-seller *Losing bin Laden: How Bill Clinton's failures unleashed global terror*, the list mentions:

-- Abdul Rahman Yasin, the only one of the 1993 World Trade Center bombers still at large, fled to Iraq. Recently found documents show he was given a house and a monthly salary.

-- Osama bin Laden has been seen in meetings with Iraqi officials in Sudan, Afghanistan, Khartoum and, on at least eight occasions, Iraq.

-- An Iraqi defector told the Sunday Times of London he saw bin Laden's fighters at training camps in Iraq in 1997.

Secretary of State Colin Powell also cited several links in unrefuted testimony to the United Nations in February 2003.

There were at least two reasons for the cozy relationship: money and weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein had both. Minitier said the Iraqis had the largest poison gas operation in the Third World before the first Gulf War. Flush with cash stolen literally from the mouths of Iraqi people through the oil-for-food program, Saddam had plenty of wherewithal to develop and stockpile arms.

Details of the connection won't be seen on the evening news programs. But they are there, for those interested in facts.

However, even if Saddam managed to hide or destroy his weapons, even if he did not direct the Sept. 11 attacks and even if Bush is defeated in November, the liberation of Afghanistan and Iraq are part of a just cause.