

## A Friend of Mine Bombed a Friend of Mine

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I first met Ali Shabou over the Internet. He is a warm, caring, competent and intelligent person who was on the planning team for one of the great global conferences of the 1990s. Ali and I were coordinating arrangements for Harrisburg Mayor Stephen Reed to participate in the Mayors Conference in Amman, Jordan in 1995. Although Mayor Reed had to cancel out with short notice due to the crisis flooding of Harrisburg during the days preceding the conference, I had the opportunity to meet Ali in person in Istanbul in 1996 at the UN Habitat conference of representatives of all 160 UN member states. I was there to lead several sessions at the NGO Forum attended by 15,000 high-minded people from all over the world.

Ali was a UN Habitat official and so he was deeply involved with the nation state proceedings during the long days of the conference, but a small group of us would meet with him in the late evenings for dinner and discussions. At one point when the United States and delegates from some of the Arab states were having a particularly difficult time reaching consensus on a section of the Action Agenda, which was to be the major outcome of the conference, Ali was called in to mediate. His intervention was successful and the nations of the world were able to agree on important guidelines for ways to work together to secure shelter for all.

Recently Ali was appointed by the UN Habitat Agency to work for the reconstruction of his country, Iraq. Ali went to Baghdad a few months ago to investigate the situation. My colleague who works with Ali at the UN Habitat headquarters in Nairobi told me that when he returned, he gave his report with tears flowing down his face. Ali told them that he never could have imagined the horrific conditions of his homeland and of the massive destruction and suffering of the people he had seen everywhere.

There is a connection between Ali and someone I met recently. Air Force Lt. Col. Matt McKeon was my host during the weeklong National Security Seminar at the US Army War College last June. Flying the radar-evading F-117 "Nighthawk"

Matt was the Eighth Fighter Squadron's commander of the first bombing raid on Ali's homeland with instructions to strike against Saddam Hussein's bunker at the beginning of the so-called "shock and awe" attack on Baghdad.

I sometimes try to imagine how I would introduce my friend Ali to my friend Matt. Would I say, "Ali, meet Matt, who dropped megatons of bombs on your hometown"? How would Ali respond to meeting Matt face to face? How would Matt respond if he could grasp the enormous amount of pain, suffering, despair and worry about his family that Ali has experienced during the past 18 months? Had these men met two years ago, they would have assuredly liked each other.

Martin Luther King once said that we have learned how to fly in the air like birds, and how to swim in the sea like fish, but we have not yet learned to walk together on the earth like brothers and sisters. May we find a way to take down the walls that are dividing us at this sad and sorrowful time. Humanity is one family.



National Security Seminar Number One  
U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, June 7-10, 2004  
The author is second from the left in the front row.