

[PRINT WINDOW](#) [CLOSE WINDOW](#)

NEW YORK DISPATCH

Schmear Campaign

How I made peace with an Arab neighbor.

BY ALAN BROMLEY

Wednesday, January 19, 2005 12:01 a.m.

NEW YORK--Across the street from my office on West 26th Street is a deli owned by an Arab fellow named Muhammed. He has a TV that hangs from the ceiling and is always tuned to CNN. One day the network was showing footage of tsunami devastation, and I remarked, "It looks worse than a nuclear attack."

"That's what I think it was," he responded. "This wasn't an earthquake, it was an underwater nuclear bomb!"

Shocked that he took my metaphor and flipped a natural disaster into a political bomb, I asked, "Who set it off? Why would they do that? And who do you blame for the 9/11 massacre?" I pushed, as I awaited my toasted bagel with cream cheese.

"The Zionists! The Americans!" he shouted. Other patrons moved away, putting their orders "on hold."

"The Jews stayed away from the towers on 9/11," he continued.

I was boiling. "The Jews stayed away because it was right before our holiest holidays, when the most observant Jews go to synagogue every morning a week or so in advance of Yom Kippur," I replied. "So let me ask you: are you more proud of your ignorance or your bias?"



I escalated the argument: "And when will you accept your own failings for aiding and not confronting terrorism, instead of pushing for some sort of freedom within your

homelands? When will you accept that fact that your people, with a somewhat glorious history of achievement, haven't moved forward for hundreds of years, after your losing efforts to conquer Europe? Yet you're here on 26th Street, making a decent living in the United States for your family, making a profit on my bagel, which you're entitled to."

"Don't tell me what I'm entitled to!" he yelled.

"There are 1.25 billion Muslims in the world, and you basically control the energy supply of the world," I shouted. "There are about 13 million Jews still living, so when are you going to stop blaming the Jews for your problems and take control of your own destiny without looking for scapegoats?"

By now, the other customers had fled, and my bagel with cream cheese was ready--for Muhammed to throw at me! He missed by a good two feet.



I went back the next day seeking common ground. After all, if I can't make peace with my deli man, how can the Palestinians and Israelis move forward? I called him aside, and put my right hand out. We shook hands, and both apologized.

Muhammed, I learned, is from Jordan (where he was a geologist) and is married to an Irishwoman. He has lived in New York for 21 years and has owned the deli for 10 years. He's invested in New York, in America. This is no radical bent on destroying that which he's built or what others have built.

"Look," he said, "I got emotional. I don't believe the Jews or America set off an underwater bomb, but Chirac might have. The French have no desert to try their weapons on, and I don't trust them."

Common ground indeed! If Muhammed and I can become friends, maybe there's hope for the Middle East.

Mr. Bromley lives, writes and eats in New York City.

Copyright © 2007 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[PRINT WINDOW](#) [CLOSE WINDOW](#)