

Fisk: 00:12:46;18 ...I have to deal in the realms of the possible. I mean yes in a perfect world we'd impeach half the British Cabinet and half the American Administration but it's not going to happen. Let me finish answering the question if I may...look, one of the problems here, I'm not going to cheerlead about what you should do about the war or not and maybe you want to pursue it and continue it. It your country and your decision and not the Brits. We tried to do it several hundred years ago and you kicked us out. (laughs) But what I would say is this, what I observe as a journalist is that those people who have grave doubts or are appalled morally and ethically about what is going on in the Middle East, not just for the Palestinians, not just for the Iraqis, and not just Lebanon, but all of the Middle East, is that over and over again is that the opposition, especially the academic intellectual opposition, talks to each other, talks to itself and it doesn't talk to ordinary people. I remember at George Mason during a seminar there were hundreds of professors, some of them who had been \_\_\_\_\_ in the noses so you can imagine the \_\_\_\_\_ element I was in an that's fine, that's fine. They said, "How can we get our letters to the New York Times?" and I said, "Don't waste your time on that contraption." I said then you've got to go out and talk to railroad crews on the Amtrak train, truck drivers, and bellhops in hotels, people who pat you down for security at JFK. These are the people who join the army for an education and get sent to Iraq. And the reply for this woman academic was, "Well they have so little information." Well why don't you go out and talk to them! You know with my lectures, and I can't do anything, well I had an entire aircrew that came to a lecture in Montreal the other day, in uniform by the way. I've had the bellhops at the Essexville House Hotel come and see me in Columbia. I've brought in bellhops and hotel workers in Los Angeles to Southern California. I've gotten security people in Chicago to come to one of my lectures in Chicago. They were patting me down and I said, "By the way, tonight, 8 p.m. you might be interested if you're interested in terror." These are the people you should talk to and I'm afraid in this country there's a great barrier and a gulf created by the university people between them and the rest. I'm sorry to be so cruel and offensive but that's the case. It exists in Britain but it's not so bad over here. I'm sorry I don't believe that...when you talk about impeachment, you switch off most of the population. There's no point they know it is unrealistic. The realistic thing is having a serious dialogue, a conversation with people who go to Iraq or people who are tempted to go. Yes?

Audience member: 00:15:15;20

Fisk: 00:16:35;13 This is like talking about impeachment it's not going to happen! It's totally unrealistic! What we've got to deal with is real things. Bin Laden will never talk to Hamena and Hamena won't be seen dead talking with Bin Laden. I think that Bin Laden has integrity in he Arab world and I'll tell you why he's popular, and he is very popular, and it's because he says things about the Middle East in which the so-called democratic leaders like Mubara (?) and \_\_\_\_\_ will not say. He has to say it from a cave, what a humiliation. That's why Bin Laden is listened to and admired by many Arabs, just a minute. But I say again, we've got to stop, Bin Laden is not going to talk with Hamena and he's not going to talk to him either, this is total fantasy. This is almost as fantastical as what Bush believes in the Middle East. And that's \_\_\_\_\_ fantasy.

Audience member: 00:17:20;00

Fisk: 00:17:25;11 Well, I can't give a reaction to something that is not going to happen. The sky may be pink but I don't know how I'm going to do it. I'm sorry I'm trying to be realistic. I live in a world where I see real corpses killed by bombs usually made here. That's the world I live in. Talking about impeachment and talking about who will never talk to each other and talk to each other, this is toy town. I'm sorry, I'm not personally blaming you for it, I have these fantasies too from time to time but the point of the fact is if there was real "Muslim-Arab unity", we'd be all of the problems. But we like the divided, we enjoy this division. You know Time Magazine cover which talked about Shi'ites and Sunnis and why do they hate each other said that one of the ways to spot who they were was to read their car registration numbers. Okay, you see the context in Iraq if you come from Hanbar providence registration then you're probably a Sunni and it's got a matching registration but what a way to deal with that subject people, which is the way we treat them. We don't care about these people. This is why we always give a name and identity to our soldiers who are killed, and we should honor their sacrifice, so we know who their wives are, how many children they've got, what they were based, how old they are, what units they're in. Iraq has remained anonymous, always, and that is how we want them. You, right in the back, I've got my reading glasses on, it is definitely a lady, yes?

Audience member: 00:18:37;24 You gave a very powerful and humorous speech but as I was listening to you I got the feeling that like, perhaps President Bush, you were portraying the world in a very black and white way, whereas Bush would feel very superior towards people in the Middle East and I think that his vision is wonderful and beautiful. You seem to be portraying the West, as rural Britain and the U.S. as kind of at fault for all of the Middle East's problems and there's almost patronizing to them because they have no agency or whatsoever on the side of justice, and by the way, I am against, and I've always been against the war in Iraq and I certainly don't equate criticism of certain Israeli policies with anti-Semitism. If you look at some of the things that you just said was actually Bin Laden was more sympathetic than the other leaders

Fisk: 00:19:27;01 I didn't say that. I didn't say he was more sympathetic.

Audience member: 00:19:29;01 Well, Bin Laden has to speak from a cave while a lot of these authoritarian...

Fisk: 00:19:32;26 Yeah, that's a humiliation to the Arabs. That's a misquotation. I'm sorry.

Audience member: 00:19:35;27 You put down a boss by saying he doesn't mention occupation, he mentions occupation all the time in his speeches.

Fisk: 00:19:42;23 Yes now he does, now he does and he didn't originally and that's the problem.

Audience member: 00:19:45;09 Originally he wrote a book denying the Holocaust, okay, and other things you said just in this sense, I think that you told a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ inaccurate truths here, but they were partial and selective truths. Just like Bush does.

Fisk: 00:19:58;10 Okay, let me start over. Let me, let me, let me respond to you. Let me respond to you. Let me respond to you if I may? I've given other talks as I've traveled around the world too much traveling, at which I've dwelled at great length of the floors and ceilings of

the Arab world and their dictatorships, of their patriarchal societies which lead us to massive abusive women and indeed the continuance in the power of the dictators is very limited in intelligence and understanding. I've questioned the Holy \_\_\_\_\_ why Islam didn't have a Renaissance, why Islam cannot be questioned, answer; the enemy is at the gates. But I'm sorry, we went through a terrible period of people being burned alive in Europe to get through the process of working out how the model of the world could work. I don't think the Arabs have gone through that process so very historic, very historically resources. I mean there were certain times where they did progress and they tried to be like us. The Ottoman Empire in Constantinople, the \_\_\_\_\_ were learning to paint and play the piano. They brought the very finest, very state of the art railway system to Lebanon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so the steam train could go over the mountains, even the \_\_\_\_\_ was impressed when he visited Lebanon. I should tell you one story, when the Christians went so far and blocked the line and went to the Kaiser and said, "We've been oppressed as Christians," and he said, "So become Muslims." (laughs) We knew how to deal with the Middle East in those days, especially if we were German, right? And in Egypt, the greatest man-made project of it's time, the Suez Canal admittedly built by the French, was put there by the lesser and was put there under the Ottomans. And what do we do? We destroyed them in the First World War. We called them the "Sick Man of Europe." But yes, I'm entirely in agreement with you, I'm not trying to present a Bush-ite reason of right and wrong, left and whether it's white and black, not at all, absolutely not. And I think that, I'm sure that Bin Laden was involved in 9-11 by the way. I don't think it was the Bush Administration. The Bush Administration has stood up everything it's done, it couldn't possibly bring off 9-11. But Bin Laden, the last time he talked to me actually talked to me about turning America into a shadow of itself, and he certainly did that to Manhattan. But I told you earlier don't be remanding about \_\_\_\_\_, and Islamic Jihads, and \_\_\_\_\_, don't be. And if I had another hour, which I don't and thank goodness I don't and thanks to you I don't, I mean we could go into these points. I'm not a simplistic person about the Middle East, I've lived there 30 years and I live in the Muslim world. Umm, lady here.

Audience member: 00:22:13;24

Fisk: 00:22:29;04 I think that we, here, we are building re-suspensions. The Saudis know the Iranians and the Iranians know the Saudis and half the people of \_\_\_\_\_ are of Iranian decent. The Saudis understand that they treat very brutally their own sheer population and I understand that there's a danger of war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. I've never seen Iran do anything to suggest that it was aggressive or highly aggressive at Saudi Arabia. Once Donald Rumsfeld or the new secretary or Condoleezza Rice talks about the frictions and the dangers, up it comes in the New York Times, U.S. Officials Believe... Saudis Believe...Iranians Believe...Iranian Danger...and then we come back to the \_\_\_\_\_ facilities again. It's like stirring the same old food pot. The Algerians have an expression of heating up old stones to drink and here we go again. I went through this in 1988 at the very end of the Iran-Iraq War, we were holding arms fairs in Abu-Dhabi and I went to a, British arms salesmen were there with the whole video, digital video thing on the wall and the Iranians come out and bomb Riyadh. You actually see them come out and bomb Riyadh. We aren't told it's Riyadh but if you follow the contours of the map then, but the Iranians never threatened to challenge or bomb Riyadh. It's fiction. And the Arabs are suppose to sit there and shiver in their golden masks and ask them all F.A.T.s,

which were very happy to supply them with them. I think that these conflicts are artificially generated. I'm not saying that they wouldn't exist otherwise.

Audience member: 00:23:53;19

Fisk: 00:24:02;17 They will continue to talk.

Audience member: 00:24:04;21

Fisk: 00:24:06;25 I think you're right but I don't think the Bush Administration cares what the Saudis say. They just want to make it fit into place for the time being. You know this is going back to your point about the Arab world, I mean the Saudis are worried that the Iranians want to take revenge for the Saudis helping Saddam, as they were main financial backers of Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War, that's what they're worried about. (There is a sentence here I can understand what he's saying...it's too low and quick) They're worried that Iran is going to say ha ha ha, now we'll teach you for backing Saddam, you see? Because they can't get Saddam anymore, we've already got ride of him before he had a chance to tell us about this relationship with the United States. But no, if you want to go back to your point, in the Iran-Iraq War and in all of these inter-Muslim Wars, not once have I heard the \_\_\_\_\_ condemning as an outrage against Islam that all of these Muslims are killing each other. Mind you I don't remember a lot of Bishops standing up in self-condemnatory mode at the time of \_\_\_\_\_ when Jews were murdering Muslims, we didn't blame ourselves for that. However, I just make that additional point on floors in Islamic sentry. So, sure.

Audience member: 00:25:07;29 Can you comment on the status of Hezbollah, just in terms of popularity in Lebanon and after the Israeli invasion...

Fisk: 00:25:17;08 It wasn't an invasion, it was a war. It was a little, they sent about five thousand troops over but not the 30 thousand but the bombing of it, yup, yup, yup. Okay.

Audience member: 00:25:28;09

Fisk: 00:25:32;06 Okay, look, I'm assuming that people know the story of Lebanon otherwise we could be here for another half-hour. Lebanon exists in one's imagination I expect rather than in reality only it exists. But, immediately after the war I was at a dinner in Beirut with Christian Mennonites (?), Sunnis, Shiites, businessmen, big businessmen and they all say my goodness, that's wonderful, stop the Israelis, Hezbollah stood firm, whatever happened to Lebanon they better be proud their Lebanese citizens, blah, blah, blah. Then the price tag started coming in of course in millions and millions and millions of dollars and it wound up to be 41 billion dollars. How a country with five million people can clock up a national debt of 41 billion dollars is still astonishing to me. (Another sentence that's too quite and quick to understand) But at that point something strange happened that's rather, all of these huge posters 30 feet high were on the airport road of Nasrallah and how the culture personality overtook him. Why? I don't know. (Yet another sentence I'm not sure of) And in time I could go buy Nasrallah key rings for my car. What had happened? I also say that when you get a cultured personality, or when you open a press office, your organization's become corrupt. And there's a new press office for Hezbollah

as well as having a cultured personality. During that war if you remember, Nasrallah would suddenly appear on television and started giving presidential speeches. Admittingly he'd be better than Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ the current president but that's not the point, he's not the president of Lebanon. At that point, the Shiites became to the rest a threat. And that's when secretarianism began to become physically evident. When the big Shiite demonstration came into Beirut I was there. It was a wonderful poster because they were going into this symbol of the wealth of Sunnis and Christians and rebuild central Beirut, \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ as economic policies failed otherwise the Shiites wouldn't be so poor. They came in and one big poster said, "Tut tut tut, Shiites of Beirut(?)" And by the afternoon all of the posters said, "Tut tut tut, Shiites of Beirut(?)" Once they withdrew three of the six Shiite ministers, deputy cabinet ministers from the government, once Nasrallah started talking about a general strike. That was a danger. When that strike happened, I was on \_\_\_\_\_ on the first day, and two days later on was on \_\_\_\_\_ and they had guns in the street, and on the first day I saw seven thousand Sunnis and Shiites chucking rocks and stones at each other. Some came off of the tops of 16-story buildings and seven Lebanese soldiers, whom I was with in the middle of the road and the stones were bouncing off of us. Interestingly enough, three were Shiites, two were Sunnis, one was a Jerus, and one was a Mennonite. Yeah, but still the army held together, thank goodness. But after that Nasrallah in shock because at the university two days later, there was a shooting outside. Hezbollah guys were turning out their weapons without orders. They broke discipline and that worried Nasrallah that things were getting out of hand. That's when he said even if they wipe us all out we will not kill one of them, there will not ever be a civil war in Lebanon. He helps. I must say when I saw government men out on the streets, businessmen coming out with pistols shooting at Shiites I thought it was really bad. At one point at \_\_\_\_\_, you wouldn't see this on your television but the Sunnis were retreating from the Shiites, coming across the central boulevard. All the scenes of violence on those two days were exactly on the same line of the Civil War. It opened up. The Sunnis suddenly draped a six-story picture of Saddam Hussein from their apartment building to do this to the Shiites on the other side of the street. That was secretarianism coming back and I can tell you that a week and a half ago I had dinner with some Sunni friends in Beirut, two of their Shiite neighbors in their apartment building have left, they've left them the keys, they're going on holiday,

\_\_\_\_\_ they've found piles of posters saying this is Muslim land get out. This is to Christian Armenian. Christian Armenian are the survivors of the 1915 genocide by the \_\_\_\_\_. The Lebanese army brought four hundred soldiers into that village to protect the Armenians but they have \_\_\_\_\_. So I think it's a very dangerous situation and I think Nasrallah realizes he pushed too hard. But the problem is that \_\_\_\_\_ is now being boosted to a powerful army that can be seen to confront Hezbollah and they're not going to confront Hezbollah because 60 percent at least, if not 65 percent of the Lebanese army are Shiites. They aren't going to kick in their own front doors and beat up their fathers and snatch weapons from their brothers, they're not going to do that. And if they're ordered to the army will split apart and the Christians will do that and the Shiites will fight the Christian army and we'll be back to the war. But, the Americans still have this crazed belief that the Lebanese army is going to take all weapons from the Hezbollah's and they're not, it's fantasy. That's the situation there. I'm getting tired but I'll keep going, just a minute, you there in the green, yes.

Audience member: 00:30:09;29

Fisk: 00:30:16;02 I knew Margaret Hussey (?) very well. When I wrote extensively on the cancers that seemed to be forming on many children especially, but on many people across Iran as a result of our use of uranium in the 1991 war, we raised a quarter of a million dollars from our readers for medicines. The United Nations first of all said we weren't going to be allowed to take, when we said we were going to take it, the U.N. gave us permission in 24 hours and then Saddam did not give us permission. I don't have any allusions about Saddam, he was quite happy with our other propaganda value. But eventually we shamed his presidential department into giving us permission and Margaret Hussey was in charge of distributed all of the drugs equally in the Sunni area and Shiite areas. And I went with \_\_\_\_\_, I knew her very, very well. I knew her husband very, very well. I still talk with him and I still go see him in Baghdad where he's waiting for Margaret to come home. He has this little piece of sting he holds up and \_\_\_\_\_ . She was taken by men who were wearing police uniforms. I always got tired after more than a year of listening to reporters, who were largely working from their hotel rooms because it's too...

00:31:17;07 Shots of audience and Fisk

00:35:01;16 Shots of Fisk signing autographs

Interview: 00:37:36;07 I'd like for you to talk about the shortcomings of the American media in covering the Middle East. Could you tell me a little about this?

Fisk: 00:37:41;07 Well, it needs a lot of time because there are an awful lot of shortcomings but basically I think that American journalism is very much, to use Shakespeare's phrase, cabin, cramped, confined by the traditions of old-style journalism where you had 50 percent of your report to one side and 50 percent to the other side. My belief is that's okay if you're reporting a football match or public inquiry into a new turnpike that's going through farmland but when you're dealing with a massive tragedy like the Middle East, a journalist has a duty as well as a right to talk and concentrate on the victims, those who suffer. This is not a football game in the Middle East. When we see an atrocity anywhere in the world, we feel angry. Journalists have the right to be angry too, I believe we do. And if I was covering the slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, I wouldn't give equal time to the slave ship captain. If I was present during the Nazi Extermination Camp, I wouldn't give equal time to the S.S., you talk to the victims. The Pizzeria Palestinian Suicide Bombing in 2001 in Jerusalem I was in fact close and I saw an Israeli women with a chair leg through her and a kid with no eyes. I didn't equal time to the Palestinian \_\_\_\_\_ for the suicide bombing. The \_\_\_\_\_ massacre, up to 1,700 Palestinians were killed by Israelis and I didn't give equal time to the Israeli army. I think on top of this is fear among American journalists that they will, and it's not an ideal fear it's a real one, that the moment they make serious criticism of Israel, they will be accused of being anti-Semitic. Which when used against honest and decent people is an outrage, is slander. I always say that people who use it in that way will make anti-Semitism respectable and it should be made respectable. Its outrageous, it shouldn't be used as a political weapon against those people. It's unfortunate that many journalists, not just American, but principally American are frightened of being given that label, even though they know they're innocent. They \_\_\_\_\_ their reporting on the Middle East. They refer to the Israeli War as an Israeli fence or security barrier. They talk about

occupationalism as in disputed territories rather than occupied territories. They talk about neighborhoods instead of colonies for Jews in the Arab land. And in this way, we desemantize the conflict, which is a terrible tragedy for both people but primarily for the Palestinians because they're the people that are being occupied and they're losing more human beings than the Israelis are. And on top of that it also makes the Palestinians generically valid because if you say, "Well, this is just about a fence or dispute, something you could solve over a cup of tea," then the one who throws a stone becomes a generically valid person and therefore incapable of negotiation. So journalists participate in this and I think this osmotic-prismatic relationship between the power, the President and the journalists huddling up to get some of that power, embedding themselves in the military. It's a very dangerous development and it's not a new development at all. I mean you can see this ever since the Second World War. But today in the Middle East with this incendiary situation, it needs better, better moral standing, better ethical work by journalists than we're seeing.

Interviewer: 00:40:49;01 Okay, can you talk a little about the difference between journalism in the Middle East and America versus Great Britain?

Fisk: 00:40:56;08 I'm not quite sure what that means.

Interviewer: 00:40:58;27 How the British media, such as the BBC or anything on \_\_\_\_\_ differs on covering the Middle East than the American New York Times, AP, Washington Post?

Fisk: 00:41:09;20 Well, it's the sign of the times that the BBC, which is generally pretty bland and dull, should be so outstandingly good compared to CNN and Fox News. It tells you a lot about American coverage that the BBC's own coverage, which is pretty third rate, should look so wonderful. But at least it has a certain element of fairness about it. It does not adopt the narrative and the policies of the U.S. Administration. Which certainly Fox News does and it's known and that's why it's favored by the Bush Administration. Once (cough) a television channel becomes a voice to the government, it's no longer journalism. It's just a spokesman. Up to a point, the BBC is not a spokesman for the British government. Although there were times in the Iraq invasion of 2003 when it started talking about the Allies, that we had used about the winners of the Second World War, as being the armies which were invading Iraq, the Allies. This was being portrayed of course in our newspapers that Saddam was the Hitler of the Tigris River. But no, I think generally European papers, not just British papers. I'm much less afraid of lobby groups. If we get a letter writing campaign to my newspaper against me or anyone else over Middle East coverage, and all of the letters are coming in the same, they're obviously a campaign. Unlike the New York Times or the Washington Post we don't reply to each one individually and send off e-mails and invite them to send delegations to discuss it, we get all of the letters and we put them in a big bin marked rubbish and that's the end of the problem.

Interviewer: 00:42:35;04 Okay, lastly, can you give some advice to younger journalists who are coming up and want to cover the Middle East on how they should start covering it and what they should do?

Fisk: 00:42:44;25 Challenge authority. Always. Especially when it goes to war. Especially when it uses lies to do it and it's going to kill people. To quote that very fine Israeli journalist

Amira Huss of Harrets Newspaper, "Monitor the centers of power," that's what our job is. If a journalist finds that the editor doesn't want to print what he's writing as a result of this, challenge, then he should find another newspaper and if that means he has to be out of work for a bit or accept a lower paying job, that's what he should do. I'm earning a lot more money myself, I mean I'm not making huge amounts of salary but working for newspapers, which would not give me the freedom to write, which I have, I'd prefer the freedom and less money. If you're going to take the money otherwise and say well I'm just going to change a bit of the report and soften that and leave this out, then you mine-as-well go drive a bus, work in a bank, or run a shopping mall.

Interviewer: 00:43:38;09 Lastly, if you could just talk a little about your book? You love to talk about that hopefully so.

Fisk: 00:43:45;04 Well, my book is not a chronology of Middle East history. It goes backwards and forwards and it's very much my own eyewitness of events. Wars, torture, suffering, the \_\_\_\_\_ War, air raids. I take the reader right up into the Iranian front lines and the shellfire, and the Iraqi front lines, and you see Saddam, you see me shaking hands with Saddam. You see me meet Osama Bin Laden, the reader follows me there. And I tried to take the reader on my shoulder and say, "You won't believe what you're going to see over there, look at that. Look at that aircraft that's bombing there." And I describe the scene of the bombing and what happens to the people underneath. It was a very distressing book to write, very depressing. After page 140, it's a pretty powerful epic of suffering, torture, police states and dictatorship and secret men, betrayal and foreign invasion. When I got to the end of it I was surprised I could make it. I was surprised I had survived the last 30 years. I got in a taxi in Beirut the other day and I was talking to a friend about the book and the driver turned around and said, "Mr. Robert, do you remember me? I used to drive you around Beirut during the war." I said, "My God you're lucky to be alive." And he said, "So are you. You're lucky to be alive." And that's what the book tells me.