

Robert Fisk Presentation  
(Time codes are approximations)

02:00: Fisk: Thank you ladies and gentlemen, and it will also be about the patterns of bad journalism as you'll see. First of all a question: how many of you have read the Baker Iraq report? Hold them up, one two three four five six seven. And how many of you have seen the new James Bond movie? Many more! Yes, and you're absolutely right. There's a wonderful scene in it in which M, the head of M-I-6 played by Judi Dench – the real head of M-I-6 is a woman – comes out of a meeting with parliamentary members in London because James Bond has been caught in a C-C-T-V camera executing an unarmed prisoner. And she comes out and says “well you know in my day spies who did things like this would defect... God how we miss the Cold War!”

And we all do miss the Cold War don't we, I miss it in the Middle East. When I first went there thirty years ago, those people who fought the West or Israel, whether that's the same thing or not is up to you to decide, were all nationalist, socialist, Baathist, Pro-Soviet. You could even find representatives in the occupied West Bank of that nice little rabbit the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. You had the very ruthless Baath party in Iraq and the Baath party in Syria. And in Lebanon there were even the Communist party and the Social Nationalist party and various other bits of Baath parties including the Iraqis. But it was always those that relied upon the Soviet Union at that time that we used to go and report. It was pretty low intensity warfare until the Iran-Iraq war, which of course was one of our major epic productions in the region and of course the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was one of Moscow's more epic productions. But at the time you know... there'd be one story a day.

Today I'm finding myself filing five or six or having to decide from eight reports I'm going to have to write about. Because today all our enemies – the West's enemies and Israel's enemies – are Islamists. In Iraq, quite apart from Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia or Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan or Al-Qaeda in anywhere else... the Islamists are basically behind the insurgency, the military Islamic insurgency. Because most of the members of the Iraqi existence or terrorists or whatever you want to call them are former soldiers in the Iran-Iraq war who fought in the Iraqi army. And their leaders, some of whom I've met, were generals in the Iraqi army. In Afghanistan, we you, the British, the Americans and the Canadians were fighting the Taliban. In the West Bank, Israel fights Hamas – an Islamic Jihad. In Lebanon Israel fights Hezbollah. Socialism is dead in the Middle East except in the decaying dictatorships in which we set up in many cases. The National Democratic Party of Egypt with all of its pro-worker slogans is in fact just a large corrupt organization to maintain President Mubarak in power and perhaps to bring his son Gammal into power so he can imitate the new coward fate in Syria where after Zalastars death it led immediately to a change in Baath party rules to allow for his son Basha to qualify by age for the same job.

We now have K-lists(?) back in the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire now returning under an Islamic guise. And you know, I think very much about this. Because when I was writing my book, and by the way, I'm not going to plug my book at you. Anyone,

anyone who buys a book of one thousand three hundred pages by me is completely out of their mind. So I do not recommend you to buy this book, if you're foolish enough to do so yes I'll sign it reluctantly.

But there is a central chapter, in my book, which has got everything to do with the Middle East, and nothing to do with the Middle East. To kind of paraphrase Sal-Hadin's last quotation in the great movie "Kingdom of Heaven." Who saw "Kingdom of Heaven" by the way? Yeah great film by the way, much better than Muslims claimed it to be before they'd seen it. They claimed it was not going to be a great movie of course. My father was much older than my mother. And he became a soldier at the age of nineteen. He was sent into the trenches of France in 1918 at the very end of the war. He was in the third battle of the song. In his old age, his cantankerous right-wing conservative old age, he used to drive my mother and me insane with anger. He wanted capitol punishment reintroduced he wanted magistrates, policemen, law and order. But when he was much younger, and this I really discovered after he died when I inherited his things, I discovered he broke all of the rules and took a camera into the trenches of the first world war. The First World War, which was partly fought by the way to destroy the Ottoman Empire. To get rid of the last Kalifate on the planet, which they successfully did a couple years later, four years later. And at that time my father took pictures of his comrades, most of them died. I've got pictures of my father in the trench with his bayonet fixed and his steel helmet on. He even took two pictures of no mans land by holding his camera quickly and shooting pictures. And then he'd go down before the snipers opened fire.

And in writing my book in journalism, I always felt the most important thing in the Middle East is to refuse the narrative of history that is laid down for us by our presidents and our prime ministers and our generals and our journalists and by Tom Friedman of course. And my father, who was always in later life such a cantankerous right-wing obedient man... so angry that he made my mother that she and indeed I didn't see him when he was dying. But in the First World War he was also ordered to execute, to carry out an execution party on an Australian soldier, same age nineteen. Who had killed a British military policeman in Paris. And he had killed him, I had actually been to the spot which the military policeman was murdered in the hotel – it still is a hotel. The soldier was nineteen years old, he was executed by someone else, my father refused. He refused to obey an order, which he thought was immoral, he would not shoot his fellow soldier. Very strange for a man who in later life was such an obedient servant of the state. He was a (?????) that was servant to the local government. And I always thought that in a way my father too was refusing the narrative of history by taking a camera to the trenches. He was a bit of a journalist as well. And I was very struck too that when he died I inherited his campaign medal. Which upon the back of it was written, "the great war for civilization." Which I realized immediately that ironically must be the title of my book.

Since then a girl came up to me, a lecture on Broadway a few weeks ago and brought to me a little box and she opened up and said "my father went with the American forces to France in 1917." There was an American flag on one side and on the other side it said "the great war for civilization." The Americans and British used the same idea and

concept for the war being for civilization. And in seventeen months that followed the First World War, my dad's war, we the victors, Britain and France, drew the borders of Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia and most of the Middle East.

And I've spent my entire professional career watching the people from within those borders burn, in Belgrade and Belfast and um Baghdad. Guess we love onomatopoeia we journalists. And Bosnia and Beirut. And I have in fact spent most of, certainly half my life as a journalist watching the direct results of the First World War. Primarily in the land we initially called Palestine, which of course was divided between Israel, and then Jordanian occupied West Bank and then Egyptian occupied Gaza which then became Palestinian or so we believe. And Iraq and Lebanon. I was very struck by the way in which we constantly chop into these societies, chop them up, break them up. Lebanon if you go into the antique shops near my home in Beirut, you can buy a picture of the great railway station in Beirut and it says, Beirut comma Syria.

(0:10:00) Because it was General Ali Guro (sp?) in 1920 first procurator of the French mandate to Lebanon awarded by the league of nations, which was set up by the Versailles treaty in 1919 to give France rule over northern Iraq, which they eventually seceded for an oil deal to Britain. Over Syria which was called Greater Syria now it became Greater Lebanon and Syria. Lebanon was chopped off from Syria even though the majority of its inhabitants wish on public opinion polls which were actually taken by two American professors at the time to remain part of Syria. Lebanon was an artificial creation. And because the French wanted the Christians to predominate, they were just about 51 percent, of course they were about 35 percent today, but is still just a Christian maranate (?). Because the Christians wanted as much territory as they could get, they inherited a land in which they were bound to become a minority, which made them even more subservient towards the French for assistance. And of course the Muslim states looked around for neighbors who would assist – Syria the land from which they had been cut off. And we liked it this way, we liked to chop these countries up.

We under the Balfour declaration of 1917 supported, the British government supported the creation of the Jewish homeland in Palestine. For many Jews remember that meant Palestine. Not just the bit of Palestine in the west that became Israel. You'll meet many Israeli Jews who will tell you that according to history it was all of Palestine they were being offered by the British. We didn't actually offer it, we gave our support to a homeland in, but since we have a mandate for Palestine, you know what that meant. Of course the Arabs who had been told by the British when Lawrence of Arabia was encouraging them to stage a massive uprising against Turkish Ottoman rule during the First World War. One of the purposes of the First World War was to destroy the Ottoman Empire. As I said, the British lied to the Arabs, knowingly or unknowingly, maybe it was just a mistake and said "We'll give you independence, after you help us in the First World War." And they found themselves with a French Government that refused to have a king Feisal (?) in Damascus. In fact the First Arab army to be successful in the First World War was attacked by French troops on the Syrian-Lebanese border. Tanks against Arabs on horseback, this isn't many years before the Polish Cavalry was forced to fight on horseback against the German Panzer Tanks in 1939, in Poland. The Syrian Ministry of Defense at the time was taken by the French, tied to a tree and shot. This is how we honored our agreements. One very interesting moment I discovered while prowling

through the archives for my book was that the very origins of Lebanese nationalism in the center of Beirut still, now mostly rebuilt though there are a few ruins left from the war in what's called Martyrs Square in Plasty Canon (?). And its called Martyrs Square after sixteen Lebanese, or Syrians as they had been called at the time, Christian and Muslim, and some Palestinians as well, were hanged by the Turks because they were demanding that there should be Allied control over a free Lebanon. Where like now the present government wants Western protection over the Lebanese government from the Syrians, who are the inheritors of the Ottoman Empire in that region. History again flop-flop-flopping along, without us of course reading it or certainly not caring about it, even if we read it.

One of the most astonishing things I discovered was that the Lebanese patrons who were hanged by the Turks after being tortured. The evidence against them was contained in letters that had been written by the French ambassador in Beirut. On French consulate to Beirut, prior to the first World War. When the First World War began, the French found themselves as enemies of the Turks. The French consul departed but left their incriminating letters inside the embassy in a hole in a wall which was immediately betrayed by Christian doorman from Bickfire (?) who told Embar Passur (?), the Turkish potentate (?) in Syria where the letters could be found. They were discovered, taken out all the men who wrote those letters were arrested and subsequently hanging in martyr square. What is interesting is that the day after they were hanged, the day after the claim of independence in Lebanon which was for Western control but against French rule, the day after that the Sikes Piko (?) agreement was signed secretly, between Mousour (sp) Passa Piko and Sikes of England, which effectively chopped up the Middle East and ensured that there would not be Lebanese independence, there would be rule by France. And when I discovered what was the name of the French console who left those letters in there that got those nationalists hanged Mousour Piko. Same guy.

(0:15:00) So... of course the French historians explain that this is a most unfortunate mistake, maybe. It seemed to me frankly a little bit more like what happened when the Russian armies were approaching Warsaw in 1944. And urged the Potfree (sp) Poles to rise up against the Nazis and then sat back on the other side of the river and watched them die before they entered. They did not want these nationalists alive. And I don't think the French wanted those brave Lebanese to remain alive because they would have been the first people to tell the Allied powers to get out of Lebanon. So over and over again the same similar... poor old king Feisal he got chopped out of Damascus so Winston Churchill as a consolation prize gave him Iraq. And what happened in Iraq, well we invaded Iraq in 1917, general Angus Mort. And when he arrived in Baghdad he pinned to the wall a proclamation to the people of Iraq well the people of the city of Baghdad which are faintly familiar to us, to you. Prior to our invasion of 1917 British military intelligence in Basra... we came in through Basra, just as we did in 2003, this is 1917. British military intelligence in Basra announced that they had every indication that the Iraqis would welcome us when we arrived in Iraq with flowers and music.

(5 seconds missing due to capturing error) who of course were in the Ottoman army fighting us they wanted to be taken prisoner instead, they said because they knew they would be well treated. And they were also very concerned to make sure because most of them were Shiites as they are today that the holy cities of Koufa and Najaf and

Keblah were to be protected by the British. What happened? We took them all prisoner, we sent them to prison camps in India where they were abused. Faintly familiar. Anyway, general Mord reaches Baghdad within a few days he dies of Cholera because he drank milk without boiling it, typical Brit in the Middle East, however, before he died he published this proclamation to the people of the Mahafazat of Baghdad. Private Charles Dickens, wonderful name to have, of the Cheshire regiment, the regiment my dad used to be in when he was in Ireland before he was sent to France saw it on the wall, thought it might be historic and peeled it slowly off, its in English and Arabic and he puts it in his haversack where it got damp in his perspiration over two hot summers in Baghdad and eventually took it back to Britain. Before he died he gave it to his daughter. Who sold it to me for \$2000 just before our invasion of Iraq in 2003 and it hung beside my desk as I wrote this ridiculous 1300 pages which you must not waste your time reading. And it hung beside my desk and it said “to the people of the government of Baghdad we come here,” this is the British army in 1917 “ we come here not as conquerors but as liberators to free you from generations of tyranny. (undecipherable) thank you very much.

We were always, Napoleon did the same thing if there is any French people here. He went on a French expedition to Egypt and promised the people of Cairo freedom from the Pashes who were hanging if they exercised free speech. Familiar? Anyway even more familiar three years after the British occupied Iraq there was an insurgency. The Iraqis didn't want us after all those ungrateful Iraqis wanted us to leave. They didn't want our sacrifices. I know exactly where the first incident took place. Captain Townsend of the British army was murdered by insurgents at a village near Abu Gharib. Faintly familiar name for being very famous for our interrogation techniques. Anyway then Captain Townsend was killed in a neighboring village. I know this village very well because when the first American soldier was killed by a roadside bomb in August of 2003 I raced to the scene being a good reporter to see what I could learn. His blood was still on the ground, some of the soldiers were still there, one of them was crying, his mate, one of his friends, comrades. A large group of Iraqis, some of whom I suspect set off the bomb. That is usually the case, the bomber waits to see what happens afterwards. And I was talking to these Iraqis and one guy stepped forward “im well interested, where are you from Mr. doctor sir?” I said I'm from England. “Ah!” he said “Yes my grandfather killed Captain Townsend just there!” So the spot where Townsend was killed in 1920 was only meters away from the spot where the first American soldier was killed by Iraq roadside bomb in 2003, and I bet you didn't read that in the New York Times.

What did the British do? By way of retaliation in 1920, they laid siege to a city named Fallujah, and they reduced it to ruins with artillery fire. A well-known Sunni city, which was well known for its Islamic teachings. The city of minorets it was called. Then we laid siege to a holy city named Najaf. Faintly familiar to you. We demanded the surrender of a Shiite cleric called Baddah. Not Sadr, Baddah. We got Baddah, you did not get Sadr. Not yet anyway. But you see there are certain parallels there. Even better or even worse British intelligence, and I've seen the telegram, British intelligence in Baghdad, in 1920 sent a telegram to the war office in London, which would be the Ministry of Defense today saying that terrorists were crossing the Iraqi border from, no the other one, Syria (undecipherable). And then the occupation was very unpopular in Britain, we wanted our soldiers to come home it was the end of World War I two years earlier. It was mission accomplished, they should be coming home now, not dying in the

sands of these ungrateful Iraqis. And what happened? Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister stood up in the House of Commons, you can read this in the Times parliamentary reports of London 1920. They say, if British troops leave Iraq today there will be.... Yes chaos, chaos and civil war, you've read the Times reports of 1920.

(0:20:00) You see, fingerprint parallels, the past and the present. Amazing. But we either didn't read it and if we read it we didn't care. And gradually, even Lawrence of Arabia as he was moving darkly towards his own suicide and loneliness, he began to write letters to the observer saying this is hopeless. We will, it's the same pattern, they attack us, we move in with overwhelming force, we use firepower, and the royal air force was using bombs on villages. We destroy hundreds and hundreds of innocent people. Then there is another attack and so we carry on, which is exactly what is happening now. Then the British found that they could no longer use the roads. Because the roads were being mined, just as the Americans can't do so and now have to fly by Chinook or by Apache helicopter and perhaps get shot down. British aircraft have to fly very high from the Habaneer airbase to avoid gunfire from the ground, there weren't any missiles in those days. And then we decide to use the Royal Air force more, bomb villages, bomb villages, bomb villages. Of course we only killed terrorists according to the press reports, but when you actually went to the village we were killing lots of civilians as well. The parallels are extraordinary. Winston Churchill said "why can't we use gas?" We were using plenty of interrogation techniques at the time. I don't think we were quite as careful as the CIA. I mean about wounds afterwards. In any event, in the end we got all kinds of agreements and we had to get out we had to still control of the oil at least for the time. But very parallel situations exist today.

I remember about two years ago noticing in newspaper letters columns usually in the Midwest, sometimes in California, letters that would pop up along the lines of, we can't transport our democracy to other places. The Iraqis are not ready for it. Um the Iraqis don't seem to be grateful for all that we are trying to do for them, for them. And then last November it spilled over, I noticed, remarkably on the very same day, into both the New York Times and USA Today. I'm going to read you a few quotations. First from the New York Times, then from USA Today, to see the parallel with how with the British reaction to Iraq back in the 1920s. And also how we're preparing you to avoid thinking that we have been humiliated. David Brooks in the New York Times, this is November 2006. He's been reading some history books. A bit late, but he's read some. He's read Elle Kitora's (sp?) essay on the kingdom of Iraq, a retrospect. "The British tried to encourage responsible Iraqi self-government to no avail." He discovered! Amazing! A bit late. Then he says, "Today Iraq is in much worse shape. The most perceptive reports," he's not in Baghdad of course, he's in... New York. "The most perceptive reports describe not so much a civil war as a complete social disintegration. This latest dissent was initiated by American blunders" All these writers always say, we make terrible mistakes, we say, even Mr. Blair who will tell you that "I am absolutely completely convinced I was right! I had to do what I did." Being convinced you're right is not enough of course, its being right that matters. And being absolutely and completely convinced is no good, but even he says mistakes were made. Passive tense, not by the British marquee but your lots (?) You see. "But this latest dissent was initiated by American blunders. But is exacerbated by the same old Iraqi demons, greed, bloodlust

and a mind boggling unwillingness to compromise for the common good. Even in the face of self immolation.”

(23:00) So why do we have to rescue these people in the first place? It gets worse, or better “Iraq is teetering on the edge of futility.” What on earth does that mean? “It will be time soon to effectively end Iraq.” Whoof! Or end Britain maybe if we pull out of the coalition, who knows. “It will be time to radically defuse our authority down to the only communities that are viable. The clan, the tribe, the sect.” Chop them up chop them up chop them up! You see. Now we go to even worse. Ralph Peters, former American military officer writing in USA Today. Which I trust you do not read. I have to read these on airplanes flying to people like Mohammed to talk to you. I try not to get them in business class Mohammed. Anyway. Like our friend David, Ralph was pro-invasion originally. He remembers that we might call up a few previous articles to find a certain logicity. “So I was convinced at the time that the Middle East was so politically socially morally and intellectually stagnant that we had to intervene.” That’s pure kippling, believe me. I can produce about forty books in old books in my library of the British Empire which gives precisely the same reason why we intervened. In India and Africa and various other places like Cyprus and indeed Palestine and the whole Middle East. Of the same path. Then he goes on, “I still believe our removal of Hussein was a noble act. We would have otherwise faced generations of terrorists, terrorists (stumble) and tumult.” What have we got now ladies and gentlemen? “Iraq is failing, the country’s Prime Minister has thrown in his lot with our mortal enemy.” He means al’Sadr. “The police are less accountable than they were under Saddam.” He’s got that right anyway. “In reality, the confessional ethic lines are ruling. Iraq exists on the maps but in reality it’s gone. Only a military coup,” here we go! “Which might come in the next few years, could hold the artificial country together.

(00:25:00) Daniel Pikes in August of 2003, even when the first American soldier been killed just by a roadside bomb, announced that what Iraq wanted, please do not laugh ladies and gentlemen, was a democratically minded strongman. Think about that for a moment. On we go with Ralph here, “Yet for all our errors we did give the Iraqis a unique chance to build a rule of law democracy, they preferred to indulge in old hatreds, confessional violence, ethnic bigotry and a culture of corruption.” You see they weren’t worthy of our sacrifice. We wanted to offer them the fruits of our society when we arrived with our humvees and our Bradley fighting armored vehicles and our Abrams M-1 tanks and our Apache Helicopters and our AJ 114C Missiles. We had lots of good things to give them you see. As indeed, the Americans now say they had lots of good deeds, things to do for the Lebanese government and its people, not the Shiites because they are against the government. Much of the appropriations given at the Paris reconomic summit to assist Lebanon economically is to be put into military hardware for the Lebanese army, to be used against who? Not surely the Israelis. So who would the hardware be used against? The Shiites and Hezbollah perhaps? Already we’ve got a situation now in Lebanon. Iran backs Hezbollah, America backs the Israelis inside Lebanon. So you’ve got the last summer’s war as a war between America and Iran. Fought by their proxies in Israel and the Hezbollah. 1,300 Lebanese had to die for it. But we come back here. “Iraq”, this is Ralph, “was the worlds last chance to board the train to modernity.” I mean just who do you think invented the numerals, the Arabic numerals. Long division, what? The Arab world. “To give the region a future not just a bitter past”,

this is purely Bushite, “that the violence staining Baghdad streets with gore.” You really mustn’t laugh. You will, (mumbling and stumbling). “The violence staining Baghdad streets with gore isn’t only a symptom of the Iraqi but of the Iraqi governments incompetence.” Rather like the Bush incompetence. “But of the comprehensive inability of the Arab world to progress in any sphere of organized human endeavor.” No wonder they needed us. No wonder Angus Moore went there in 1917. Poor guys, they really need us. But they don’t want us you see. “If they continue to rebel in fratricidal slaughter we must leave.” But don’t worry there’s a good bit. “We’ll still be the greatest power on earth. Indispensable to other regional states” Such as the Persian Gulf states and Saudi Arabia. We’re frightening them now, (whispers) Shiites Shiites Shiites. They are terrified of Iran’s growing might. “If the Arab world in Iran embark on an orgy of bloodshed, the harsh truth is that we may be the beneficiaries.” Of course, we’re selling weapons aren’t we. Indeed we are selling them weapons. Why do you think in the height of last summer’s war in Lebanon the biggest arms store in the Middle East opened in Dubai. No we’re not doing it for arms, and we’re certainly not doing it for oil. Let me ask you a question. Did we go to Iran for oil? If the national product and export of Iraq was principally asparagus or carrots or potatoes, do you think the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne would be Mossah (sp?). Do you think the American marines would be in Ambar province? We know they would not, would they? Yes it was for oil, but it was for something else. Some months ago I was investigating the murder of a poor Red Cross driver. Highway 8 which is the throat cutting highway/road south of Baghdad. He was discovered because his blood was pouring out the bottom of his Red Cross car onto the road. And I was talking to an Iraqi family whom I think had seen the gunman. And as I was chatting to him the whole ground began to shake like a tommet on a tear, an earthquake. And up the road came the biggest military convoy I have ever seen in my life, much bigger than anything I saw, Soviet convoys in Afghanistan, 89 in um 79 and 80. The same old lot, humvees, tanks, Bradley Fighting Armored Vehicles, Apaches overhead. Hundred and hundred and hundreds and hundreds with thousands of trucks with tens of thousands of lined troops, rifles poking from the side like porcupine quills heading off into the wilderness of occupation. And it was a roodamall (?) they were changing brigades and divisions. It was actually, though I didn’t know it at the time the largest movement of armored units and men since World War II. And I sat there in the muck by the road. (making car noises!) With this family just watching this. They were mesmerized by it you know. And I sat there on the roadside watching this and I thought well 2000 years ago a little bit more to the west, Syria and Lebanon, I would have been sitting on the roadside watching the trample of Roman legions, because I think, I think that... superpowers have a visceral need to project military strength. We can go to Baghdad so we will go to Baghdad. We can topple the regime of Saddam of course we can and well show you and our armies will drive across the lands of Samaria, where civilization supposedly began. Later we’ll become interested in offering the people democracy, especially when the Shiites say as they did, “Oh if we don’t get an election well join with the Sunni insurgency,” which is why we suddenly became keen on democracy.

(0:30:00) And why we’ve now got an Iraqi Shiite government frankly, by the way most of the parties in government were created inside Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. “Oh the Iranians are interfering.” The Iranians are in the government in Baghdad! We don’t have to worry about interference. All this nonsense about oh they’re giving weapons to

the Iraqis. Iraq is weapons every foot from each border to the border. Every Iraqi knows how to use bombs. They had a war, which we promoted, against Iran they don't need Iranian weapons. But you see here was an instance where we could see with our own eyes this expansion of power. Superpowers believe if they don't expand they will be regarded as weak and will be the beginning of retreat, that's why it happens.

I remember just about over a year ago when the Spanish were pulling out following the change of government in Spain which followed the bombs on the trains in Madrid. I went down to talk to some, the last Spanish soldiers to leave. Of course I was expecting "Oh we prefer to stay here and fight." No they didn't say that at all. They said we can't wait to get home. We shouldn't have been here in the first place. Off the record of course. But what was interesting is that they met, the Spanish also guarding a small American civil affairs unit in Koufa. Koufa is a Shiite holy city next to Najaff and Kaborah. And there was a CIA guy, quite a bright guy walks up and introduces himself, I'm from the agency you know. He was (mumbling) clothes with a pistol and um um a holster and a belt. And he says to me, "You know 30 40 50 armed men at night on every road around here." I said I'm not surprised, its insurgency. You've lost. Its over. And he said, "What could have we of done?" And I told him a joke. Which I don't think is a joke anymore. I think it was serious. But I told it as a joke. I said, "You know when the Romans conquered other countries, the first thing they did was crucified every insurgent they found." I'm not recommending that. But I said the second thing they did is make every man woman and child of that country a citizen of Rome. They belonged to Rome. Not just belonged to, they had a right to belong to Rome. To the greatest empire on earth. And I said to this guy, "Why didn't you arrive here and give all 25 million Iraqis U.S. passports?" Not an idea which commended itself to him. Nor would I imagine would have done so to the White House. But in retrospect, it wasn't a bad idea. The Iraqis wouldn't have flooded into JFK and taken over America. They would have wanted to live in their country proud to know that they were members of this great empire, the Americans. They would have set up some businesses here, they would have no problems over the oil fields, and they would be selling the oil as fast as you could burn it up. Not that that would be very good for the ecology, but that's not the point I'm making. The fact of the matter is we did not care about them. We didn't want to offer them what we have. We wanted to sell them democracy on the cheap. With anarchy and chaos and the hell disaster to use Winston Churchill's expression about Palestine in 1947.

I think that Arabs would actually like some of our democracy. I think the Lebanese have already shown it. Though we betrayed it in the war last year by refusing a cease-fire until we had given the Israelis a chance to win, which they didn't have a chance to do and thus killed hundreds of Lebanese. I think the Arabs would like some of our democracy. And they'd like some packets of human rights off our Western supermarket shelves. But I think they also want another kind of freedom. Freedom from us. This we will not give them. Not an offer. That ladies and gentlemen is why we are fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. Fighting the insurgents in Iraq. And why we are backing Israel against the Hezbollah and why we are backing Israel against Hamas and Islamic Jihad. We cannot have, we will not have, and we do not want justice in the Middle East. We only want our democracy.

Look what happened to the Palestinians. Lets go to Palestine. Bush said after Arafat was dead, "Phew now we can have peace." Actually many Palestinians thought

that Arafat would bring them peace. They thought Ariel Sharon was the man who'd bring them war. That when Sharon died we were told now there would be war, an amazing system of logic. But anyway. Bush said what Palestine needs is democracy. And they were given democratic election. And those pesky Palestinians voted for the wrong people, you see. That wasn't part of the plan. They were supposed to vote for the nice Palestinian authority. Not for the terrorists. I noticed the auto citizens responded by saying we'll have to hold over them the threat of new elections. Now democracy is now a threat to people if they back the wrong people. Incredible, actually amazing. You need to watch the logic of this as it slowly drains away into the sand and gets just covered up. You know, this is the problem. Um the Palestinian people did not I believe want an Islamic Republic, which is the latest sort of you know... USA Today New York Daily Post version. They wanted, they were objecting to, this was a symbolic vote against the corruption of the Palestinian authority. The people who we had generously brought in to do a deal with the Israelis and eventually become the policemen of Gaza and the West Bank. Arafat failed in his role as policeman, which is why he ended up in the misery of his headquarters in Remowa (?) and died of sickness. He wasn't murdered by the way, he died of illness and ill treatment. Um and you see I remember thinking, I remember the time when I first realized what was wrong with the Palestinian authority.

(0:35:00) When I got wrung up I was in Jerusalem with my colleague who is based in Israel. And we heard that the Palestinians were objecting to there was an Israeli tank who had fired a shell through a Palestinian authority office. This was before the elections. Near Remowa (?) and Bob sets off in his little VW through all of the Israeli checkpoints and eventually reaches his house and shortly enough there's a bloody great bomb threat. The Israeli tank did fire a shell into it. Everyone was taking pictures, look those armies this is what they did you see? Bob goes into the house and starts prowling around (creaking noise) opening the door, and goes to the bathroom where all the taps are gold plated. For me that was the symbol of corrupt authority. This was money that was supposed to be used on road improvements, pre natal clinics in Gaza, etc etc. The Palestinian authority were corrupt and known to be corrupt, Arafat was a most corrupt man so they voted for Hamas. And now in revenge were going to say to them we don't accept your election, we don't accept the results, we insist that you have another election or get rid of Hamas. Because after all the PA were our people. Abbas was meant to be working for us. Abbas who by the way wrote a six hundred-page volume on the Oslo agreement and did not use once the word occupation. Kind of important in this context. And so what are you supposed to do now. They then have a unity government. Patched together by the Saudi's, we don't want that either. Maybe we do a little bit, not very much. The Hamas has got to abide by all of the Oslo agreements. Even though Israel has on each occasion failed to abide by the withdrawal agreements of Oslo. There's a whole page in my book listing each date when Netanyahu said he wouldn't abide by the full agreement of Oslo so we had the Y River agreement, which split withdrawals into three separate peaces, the first of which was not honored until five weeks later. The second and third which were not honored, etc. But its Hamas now that has to abide by the whole Oslo agreement.

Don't be romantic about Hamas or Hezbollah or Islamic Jihad or any of these opponents of the west or Israel. They are not romantic people and I do not want to live under Hamas or Islamic Jihad or Hezbollah nor would you. But the fact of the matter is

we are preaching lies to these people. We do not want democracy in the Middle East. We want to put our dictators in power there and keep them in power and say it's a democracy. Look at Mubarak Laura Bush said its on its way to democracy. Today they are voted in a vote that will definitely pass to enshrine emergency law in normal legislation and effectively cut the Muslim brotherhood who are a powerful representative of a large Egyptian minority out of parliament. And this continues, we prop up King Abdullah in Jordan and his unconstitutional monarchy. We prop up King Abdurrah of Saudi Arabia, we prop up all of these people. We're even propping up Gadafi now, described by Reagan as the mad dog of the Middle East a decade or so ago and now he's our hero. Tony Blair absolutely completely believes he was right to go see Gadafi. I wrote a piece about what I call the Libyan whoops factor. That every time you go and see Gadafi you regret it afterwards. So a couple of weeks after Blair did his oh Jack Straw, who was in our fine secretary said oh what a fine statesman. And two weeks later the Saudis uncovered a Gadafi plot to kill King Abdullah. Quite a statesman. That was sort of erased from the Downing St. narrative of course.

And this is the whole problem, we accept these narratives, we journalists, and your journalists particularly go along with them. You know you only have to watch a presidential press conference at the White House on the Middle East particularly to see the osmotic parasitic relationship that exists between American journalists and power. "Mr. President Mr. President!" "Yes Bob?" "Yes Mohammed?"

This is how it goes, this is the relationship. Because here to challenge power particularly over the Middle East is regarded as unpatriotic. Especially in war and thus potentially subversive. I suspect there is a ghost of McCarthy somewhere there. And it's a great danger because also added to this are the pressures on journalists not to anger the Israelis because the pro Israeli supporters will step forward immediately and label anyone with a slander and libel of anti-Semitism if they criticize the state of Israel. It's a fact. In Britain we just shrug this off now. In America unfortunately your newspapers do not. Frightened of it. It's a libel and a slander to call a decent and honorable person an anti-Semite for political reasons. This is the kind of person that will make anti-Semitism a spectacle. There are real anti Semites out there, I'm against them and we're all against them. But this should not be used as a political weapon to defend Israel against its behavior in the occupied territories. But then we come to the word occupied, this in itself has become disputed because since Colin Powell when he was Secretary of State told U.S. Diplomats in the region to use the word disputed territories rather than occupied territories, most of your newspapers have gone along with this. They are now disputed territories. And similarly colonies or colon, colonies the French actually use the word colonies for Jews and Jews only on Arab land are called settlements or neighborhoods, like East Lansing. Outposts you see, the wall I mean its very big, its about 40- vie been there its like bang bang it's a real wall believe me. It's referred to as the Israeli security barrier. Just as their occupied zone in Lebanon used to be called security zone in maps. And sometimes it's even called a fence. I don't suppose many of you put a 40 foot concrete fence at the bottom of your garden.

(0:40:00) That the Berlin fence which we all remember very well, oddly enough the East German regime actually used to call it the German Democratic Republic security barrier, they used the New York Times same exact words the New York Times now uses

about the Israeli wall. You can see the problem here, we are desemanticising a most tragic conflict. How are we doing it? Very simply. I'm against all violence for any reason, ever! But if a Palestinian chucks a stone because there is a wall 40 feet high on his land. Or people are taking the bottemeers (?) garden away to build a settlement, all because his land is occupied by a foreign army, you might not understand why he chucks the stone. But if he's chucking a stone because of a dispute or something you can solve it over a cup of tea or a wall over a fence at the bottom of a garden, a neighborhood something like just beyond the next building on the campus here. A man who throws a stone over this is obviously generically violent. He is not capable of negotiation. He has no leader we can talk to for peace. And that's well build some more settler roads through his land and take a bit more. Gentlemen we are guilty we journalists of this. We do the same in Iraq with the dead. I don't think we care about Iraq, I don't think we care about any of the people in the Middle-East. I'm afraid that includes the Israelis too. And we should care about them. You know I remember after the invasion of 2003 a very brave writer camera crew making it down to Basra. The British army had announced that Basra had fallen to British troops. They got into Basra and it was still under command of the Iraqi army. But British shells were falling on the city and the hospitals were filled with screaming civilians who would be wounded many with amputation wounds. And they came back with terrible film. I did not manage to get to Basra, I tried hard. But I went to watch the running of that film through to London. They were satelliting it straight to London, London would have to edit and put it out. But of course this is not the kind of film that London wants. The writers office in London was very upset. They started showing pictures of a kid with bones sticking out of his sleeves from his hand. And the voice came down, very English voice, came down over the satellite link, I don't know why you are sending us this you know its in the morning here, people cant watch this sort of stuff at breakfast time. Well no I suppose not but he says no look this is what its like this is Basra this is British shells. This is Reuters which is owned by the United Kingdom by the way sending this stuff. Then the voice said, you know I don't think you understand, we're not into the pornography of war here. You see the problem isn't there, then the best one of all was after more tape had been sent these guys said just roll it let them see in the studio at least you know. The guy said, you know I don't think you understand, our duty is to respect the dead. You see the problem here don't you? We respect these people when we've blown them to bits, but when they were still alive we didn't respect them enough not to blow them to bits. There's a serious moral flaw in all of this. Because we present you because we do our own (big French word) we self censor our own material for you. We present you with blood as war as a bloodless sandpit. That way you find it more easy to percept more or even to support the war. We are conniving this, we are lethal in doing this. By our desemanticisation of the conflict in Palestine, by our inability, refusal to show you what war is like.

If you've seen what I've seen in wars you would never ever dream of supporting a war again. Now of course I could say 1940 when Hitler was going to invade England what would you do, I'd probably fight, id hope I would. There's the illogicality of what I just said to you. But I've seen dogs tearing to pieces the bodies of women and children caught in American and British air strikes in rogue parts of Basra and North of Kuwait in 1991. Ripping off bits of peoples heads and faces in making over the desert for arms to eat, it was lunchtime it was the desert rat, the desert dogs coming to feed. Um it very

much strikes me you know today not a single leader or indeed cabinet member of any western government has ever had any experience in war. I grew up with Winston Churchill's last Prime Minister ship and need being the First World War as well as the second. William Michael, first secretary of state from Northern Ireland worked in Belfast, had been in the crossing of the Rhine in 1944-45. Um Colin Powell was in Vietnam but he's gone from the government, the last man's left. Hollywood and television, is where our leaders learn about the Middle East and war. Much easier to send your soldiers away when that is your knowledge of war. Oddly enough the nearest I see on the screen to what I witness, though its nothing like as bad, is in feature films, Kingdom of Heaven, Private Ryan. That's a bit more like it. But you are only allowed to see the imaginative recreation of war. Be it in the Middle East or anywhere else. And again, here we play lethally with you. It's much easier if you go "oh that was just a movie, its ok."

(00:45:00) And the truth that the wars in Iraq and in Lebanon and Israel and Palestine have surely taught us is that there is a changing strategy to the nature of war in the world today. You know after the Second World War we got into the habit of having foreign adventures, which was pretty free of charge. We paid for them our soldiers died but no North Korean ever came and blew himself up on the London Tube. No Vietcong ever blew himself up in New York or Washington did they? We fought the British aoka in Cyprus Mao mao in Kenya Iragon in Palestine, Flossi in Yemen, Malaysia. Most of these leaders ended up having tea with Queen Elizabeth. But the point is, and the Americans ended up talking to the Vietnamese in Paris and the British and Americans ended up talking to North Koreans in Pan Wan Chan. But the fact is that is no longer the case. Today in Gloster Shier or Kentucky or anywhere else in the western world we are no longer safe from our foreign adventures. The will come back to us. We cannot avoid the fact, call it multiculturalism, and call it the new world in which we live. We have now got to take into account all of our societies not just the white worn dicks (hard to understand) who want to go to war and capture bits of the Middle East. And we still haven't realized that.

Now we talk about Iran, the narrative of history, the mad rulers want a bomb in Iran to bomb Israel. The people who actually control Iranian nuclear weapons not Ahmadinejad, a cracked lunatic he wants to have an anti holocaust conference. Anyone who wants to have an anti holocaust conference is ridiculous. But the real history of the nuclear crisis in Iran began under the Shah, our friend the Shah, the emperor, the king of Iran. Who was our policeman of the Gulf. He asked for nuclear facilities when he was on the throne we said yes. Your country and mine and the Europeans we crawled on each others shoulders to sell him nuclear facilities. The facility at Brushev was built by the German company Siemens. Then he came to New York on a television interview and he actually said I would like to have a nuclear weapon. And after all the Soviet Union has got one and America has got one and after that no comment from the interviewer he was warmly received by President Carter at the White House. You see, when Hominy came into Tehran with the Islamic revolution I was there I saw Hominy and he said this, he said nuclear facilities are the work of the devil and I am going to close them down and he did. It was only in 1985 at the height of the Iran-Iraq war after Saddam had been encouraged by us to invade Iran and use chemical weapons from which the components came from the United States and Germany. That the Iranians said look if he's using gas then the next thing he's going to use is a nuclear weapon we opened the nuclear facilities. That's how

Iran came to have continued scientific progress in its nuclear facilities. That is the background to the story that we begin with a man who is wanting nuclear power. We encouraged the Iranians and the Shah to have nuclear facilities and we didn't respond to Homini when he said and actually acted upon the instruction to close down nuclear facilities.

So now having gone through the disaster of Afghanistan and the catastrophe of Iraq we're going to have another war. And the irony is here our journalists today are to blame and I'm going far away from the Iraq Lebanon Palestine axis. Today there is one country in southwest Asia which has large numbers of Taliban followers, which has members of al-Qaeda in its borders, which has a bomb. And it's called Pakistan. Its capitol city is in anarchy. And yet it doesn't come onto our front pages. All we are worried about is the Pakistanis helping the allied Taliban with weapons against the British and Americans, that's not the point. Here is a real thundering shaking crisis in the Middle East region. And we ignore it because we want to attack Iran Iran Iran Iran. Frankly if Iran had a bomb it would be safe. We are not going to after all invade North Korea are we. No and we are not going to invade Pakistan are we? Cause it's got a bomb, we certainly wouldn't invade India for all kinds of reasons. So this is the kind of cynicism that we are faced with. Look at Lebanon now. Here is a country which ought to be able to have a democracy. Unfortunately the French built it as a sectarian nation. The problem with sectarian nations is that if they are based on confessionalism they can never be modern. And if you modernize Lebanon and you deconfessionalize, the system where the President has to be a Christian Marinite the Prime Minister has to be a Muslim the Chief of the Head of Parliament has to be a Shi'ite. If you actually deconfessionalise it it wouldn't be Lebanon anymore. But it has a kind of balance. It's necessary to the Arab world to see that they can live together. Unlike what Time says Sunnis and Shi'ites why do they hate each other? They can live together. Yet now with the Iranians pushing the Hezbollah to oppose the government we now read on the Associated Press for example is the American backed government of Fuoid Senora (?) the Sunni draws Marinite government of Lebanon is now American backed another kiss of death for the whole region.

You know sometimes I'm asked in interviews by students at universities give me some hope, and I have none. We are following a path of absolute folly in the Middle East. You know I used to think well at least in Lebanon young people who were sent away to be educated during the civil war you know they came back to Lebanon thinking that there would be something new. Amira Sala a friend of mine an urban planner trained in Boston at Harvard and MIT back working for Solider rebuilding the center of Beirut. She rang me up after the war and said Robert we can never trust foreigners again. And she's right. And we still try to divide them. In Iraq and Lebanon we drew little sectarian maps. Iraq Sunnis and Shi'ites on the bottom of course Sunnis in the middle of the famous triangle or octagon or pentagon or whatever it is. And then Kurds at the top. We have the Lebanese maps, Shi'ites on the bottom, of course. Shi'ites on the right hand side. Then we have the Sunnis inside the draws and the shuf mountains. And Sunnis and Christians in Beirut, Sunnis in Tripoli. We color coded all these different sects reminding them every day every day every day of their differences.

(00:50:00) The British army did the same in Northern Ireland, I've still got some of their maps. Green for Catholic areas of course. Orange for Protestant areas of course. With little color of brown for medium sherry for those of Protestants and Catholics who inconveniently intermarried. That's a brown sherry color over there. We are always chopping up the other the people we face the people who are our problems. I can do very good maps for you if you wish for New York. Wasps, Jewish areas Italians areas, but they won't appear in the New York Times. I can do a very good map of Washington. Black and White areas. But I promise you the Post won't publish it. I can do an even more accurate map of Birmingham in England, Muslims and non Muslims. We say non Muslims because we don't have many Christians left. But Muslim and non-Muslim neighbors of Birmingham. But the Birmingham Post will not print that. I could do Toronto, Misasaga, western suburbs colored green for Muslim but you won't find that in the Toronto globe. Ladies and gentlemen we go on inviting people to have that. We don't give them the justice they demand, we give them our false versions of democracy providing they vote right. This applies in Palestine, this applies in Lebanon and it applies in Iraq. And I don't know how we are going to get out of this. You know my old question of Americans in Iraq. The old equation they must leave they will leave and they can't leave. And they will have to talk to the insurgents. I don't know who the ambassador claims or thinks he is talking to in Iraq or rather in Jordan. But I've met the leaders of the insurgency in Iraq, in Jordan. And all former officers in the Iraqi army for the Iran-Iraq war. One walked into the room and said ah Mr. Robert we meet again. I said we've never met before, he said "yes we have!" You climbed on my tanker in Parin River under fire in the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. And I go back through my files not using the internet and then this is a general with his full name. These are the people we're going to have to negotiate with. The first major resistance brackets terrorism organization sent a statement to the Independent to me in Beirut with the initial first demands for an ordinary American withdrawal. Open talks to the U.S. Ambassador, open talks with the head of the U.S. Army command in Iraq, annulment of all Paul Bremer laws, in other words foreign companies can't take oil of the oil reserves anymore. Disavowal of the Iraqi government that's not going to commit itself to Mr. Bush. And reparations for damage since 2003. Ok they're not going to be accepted but already the insurgents are putting out signs, we will talk. We will talk. And we're still ignoring it. And now we are talking about Iran. Um ladies and gentlemen I won't go into how the manipulation of 9/11 allowed us into this folly. The manipulation of crime as international crimes against humanity were in New York and Washington and Philadelphia. But I think we are the gravest point I've ever known in the Middle East. I've worked every morning with my bag on the coronation of Beirut and I hear the palm trees rustling. I hear the sea on the rocks and I say, "Where is the explosion today?" And thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.