



**April 18, 2008**

**BILL MOYERS:** Welcome to THE JOURNAL.

You knew it was going to be a dismal night this Wednesday when just a few minutes into the debate, ABC interrupted the candidates for a long commercial break -- the first of many. By the time it was over, the audience had had enough.

Makes you think that if Lincoln and Douglas were around, they'd be sandwiched between a Viagra ad and Victoria's secret. In a real debate the candidates would face each other on the stage with no one but a timekeeper to enforce the clock. As it is, these 'debates' are commercially-staged press conferences about as connected to reality as an Elvis Presley sighting.

[THE WASHINGTON POST's Tom Shales called the affair "shoddy" and "despicable."](#) Greg Mitchell of EDITOR AND PUBLISHER said it was "[perhaps the most embarrassing performance by the media in a major presidential debate in years.](#)" And the [historian and writer Eric Alterman said](#): "I don't like to speculate on people's motives. Just why ABC thinks that a presidential 'debate' should entirely ignore health care, environmental issues, science policy, our over-stretched and under-resourced military, an epidemic of people losing their homes, the bailing out of mega-banks, and our disappearing civil liberties... is a mystery to me.

Sadly, as the fantasy-inducing commercials and journalistic narcissism built through the evening, the most damning indictment of all came from facts on the ground, otherwise known as reality.

Just this week Iraq was struck by a fresh wave of violence. At least 50 people died from a bombing at a funeral - a funeral! Sixty people were killed earlier in the week, and 120 wounded.

It's difficult ... but gruesome news doesn't go away because we look away. So consider these photos taken in Baquba, Ramadi, and Mosul -- victims of car bombs and suicide attacks.

Such scenes are routine for the people in Iraq and the journalists who still cover them. One of those journalists is Leila Fadel - the Baghdad bureau chief for the McClatchy Newspaper Group. She was born in Saudi Arabia of a Lebanese father and a mother from Michigan. The fact that she speaks Arabic may have saved her life when she was covering the war between Hezbollah and Israel.

She's reported on everything from Iran's relationship with Iraq... to the impact of war on families in ethnically torn neighborhoods ...to the constant stress on US troops. And she does it all so well that this week she received a George Polk award for foreign reporting - an honor bestowed for courage under fire.

This is footage Fadel shot last weekend in Sadr City where she was embedded with US troops...quite literally under fire, in a rat-infested building, surviving on military rations. She left Sadr City last Sunday for her flight to New York on Monday, arriving in time for the Polk Awards - and to join me on THE JOURNAL.

**BILL MOYERS:** Leila Fadel, welcome.

**LEILA FADEL:** Thank you so much.

**BILL MOYERS:** Let's go back to some of that video that-- that you took when you were embedded with those troops in Sadr City.

**LEILA FADEL:** These are young guys from Tennessee and Texas, Illinois, Michigan. Young guys who joined the military because many of them didn't have other options and went from a semi-peaceful area north of Taji to a hostile environment in Sadr City, living in abandoned homes, abandoned buildings, where people view them as occupation forces, where people view them as the bad guys. And so they're holed up in these abandoned homes, told that they can't push further into Sadr City. And they have to wait to get shot at to shoot back. And so many of them said that they were playing a game of cat and mouse and they felt like the mice.

**BILL MOYERS:** So do these fellows know who they're shooting at when they're shooting there at in Sadr City?

**LEILA FADEL:** I asked them, "Who are you fighting?" And he said, "Anybody that shoots at us." "I don't know about the politics. All I know is I'm shooting at the people that shoot at me." And there were--

**BILL MOYERS:** Who is this talking to you?

**LEILA FADEL:** This is the platoon leader

**BILL MOYERS:** How old is he?

**LEILA FADEL:** He is 23. He was a chemical officer.

**BILL MOYERS:** He's younger than you.

**LEILA FADEL:** Yes, very young. Very young and expected to play this political game I mean, here they are in Sadr City. But they're not allowed to identify their enemy as this militia which they are fighting and is extremely organized in the way they're fighting. You know, they had a gaunt-- they went under an ambush in the end of March, March 31st, the height of the violence, the Shia violence. They were hit by two IEDs, a striker--

**BILL MOYERS:** An I-- which is a?

**LEILA FADEL:** An IED is a roadside bomb.

**BILL MOYERS:** Right.

**LEILA FADEL:** A striker was destroyed. They had to dismount and run to the other vehicles and have people come in to save them. And when they dismounted, there were men all over the rooftops shooting at them. They had sandbagged the windows. I mean, they were prepared to take on anybody who was trying to take back this area. And these guys said, "You know, in the movies when the bullets are flying and you're hitting around people's feet and you say, 'How do these people live?'" He said, "That's what happened to us and nobody died. It's a miracle."

**BILL MOYERS:** So what was it like for you to be there with him? You were under fire--

**LEILA FADEL:** Yeah. I had been in Sadr City five or six days earlier talking to the victims of air strikes, U.S. air strikes, who had so much anger towards what the U.S. military calls collateral damage. I mean, these people were angry. Angry, angry that their four year olds had shrapnel in their body, that there were soldiers shooting from abandoned buildings in their neighborhoods. They were extremely angry. And then to go into an embed and hang out with--

**BILL MOYERS:** An embed. That's your--

**LEILA FADEL:** An embed.

**BILL MOYERS:** --you're embedded with the troops.

**LEILA FADEL:** Yes, exactly, I mean, at one point I was walking into Sadr City covered, looking at the American--

**BILL MOYERS:** Covered in a?

**LEILA FADEL:** Covered in a scarf so that I wouldn't stand out in the neighborhood. I had to walk in 'cause there was a curfew. I had to take a taxi once I got inside with authorized vehicles. I had to go to the hospitals. And I was nervous. You know, I walked by one square at the entrance of Sadr City in the south. And the Iraqi residents in the area were telling me, "Oh, you gotta run through this area. There are American snipers on that roof."

And there were rumors that women and children were being killed. The U.S. military said that was not happening. Then I'm embedded with these guys. And they're in an abandoned house-- that they've never seen before. They're going through photo albums and trying to entertain themselves with air soft guns whenever they're not getting shot at. They were calling the little store that was this man's living, whoever lived there-- the Wal-Mart so that they could go in and get Lysol to try to clean the toilets that were no running water and no, you know, completely stopped up.

And I asked them what would you do if this guy comes home? What are you gonna do? And he said, "Oh, they won't come home." The platoon leader told me, "Oh, he won't come home. It's very dangerous." So a few hours later the man walks up to the door. And he says, "Excuse me, but, you know, I wanna move back into my house." They said, "No, not until it's safe here."

He said, "Well, can I have the books for my daughter so she can study?" And so they wouldn't let him in his house. And the translator, who they called Joe, a nickname and-- Joe, went around and got some books and handed it to him through a crack in the door of his own house. And he said, "Well, watch my cigarettes. I'm broke. I need to be able to sell those." And so it was telling. And I asked these men, you know, what would you do if there was a foreign army in your house?

**BILL MOYERS:** You asked the Americans?

**LEILA FADEL:** I asked the American soldiers. And one soldier told me he would blow up half the house to get back into it. And another said he would be a sniper on a rooftop and start taking people out. And I said, "Well, isn't that what this group is doing?" And one soldier told me-- he was from Athens, Tennessee, I think. And he said, "But we're trying to do something good for them."

**BILL MOYERS:** Are they frustrated?

**LEILA FADEL:** Very frustrated. I think they're very frustrated. I think they don't necessarily understand what they're fighting for anymore, what the exact cause is. I mean, right now they're in Sadr City, really caught in a political conflict between two Shia groups.

**BILL MOYERS:** What exactly is Sadr City?

**LEILA FADEL:** Sadr City is a district of Baghdad. It's a very poor Shia slum in northeast Baghdad. It was once known as Saddam City when Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq. Sewage runs through the streets. Extremely crowded and urban and poor. Sadr City is said to have 2.5 million people in this crowded area. And it is the stronghold of Moqtada al Sadr and his militia, the Mahdi Army.

**BILL MOYERS:** Why is it so hostile to these American troops?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, the Mahdi Army was founded in the early days of the war as a

resistance movement against the United States and their occupation.

Moqtada Sadr, at the time that I first arrived in Iraq in 2005, was a loved figure by both Sunnis and Shias at that time. He was seen as the only legitimate national resistance leader. He didn't leave Iraq when Saddam Hussein was in power. It's not like the rest of the government who fled to Syria or Iran or London and then came back to rule once everything was okay and Saddam Hussein was gone. But after 2005 the sectarian killings began, especially in 2006 following the bombing of a Shia shrine in Samarra, following intense bombings for two and a half years of Shia targets by Sunni insurgent groups.

**LEILA FADEL:** And in the early days of the war, the first two and a half years, the Shias were the American friends, the exiles who came back and took government positions. And the Sunnis were the resistance. They didn't wanna lose their power. And factories were disbanded. The Iraqi Army was disbanded. And they didn't have jobs. They didn't have anything to do. And so they became insurgents, what they call insurgents, and they saw themselves as resistance to a foreign army. And a lot of the attacks in the first two and a half years were on Shia-Iraqi targets. And so the Mahdi Army in late 2005 and especially in 2006 began to take revenge against Sunnis, all Sunnis.

**BILL MOYERS:** How do you know who the players are? You, as a reporter?

**LEILA FADEL:** Yeah. Well, you know who are the important people that you need to know and talk to and-- but it's so hard to tell when you're getting everybody has an agenda. And everything they tell you is going to go towards their cause, you know? The fact that the Maliki government is saying, "We're gonna disarm militias," I mean, that's a very empty thing to say because the Supreme Council has a militia which now is pretty much the national police.

The Kurdish parties have a militia, the Peshmerga. The head of the KDP, the Kurdish Democratic Party I think it stands for-- has a personal militia that was deployed when Turkey bombed the mountains of Kurdistan because of what they consider a terrorist organization, the PKK. A personal militia that has no--

**BILL MOYERS:** So every political faction has a militia.

**LEILA FADEL:** Has a militia.

**BILL MOYERS:** Like the Democrats have a militia here. The Republicans would have a militia here.

**LEILA FADEL:** That's right.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Secret Service would have a militia so when Maliki says he's gonna disband the militia, who's he talking to?

**LEILA FADEL:** Right, exactly. And that's what the Sadrists are saying. The Sadrists are saying, "Okay, fine, you're gonna disband our militia. What about the other militias? What about the illegal--" I mean, they often tell me that they are being detained illegally, that there are extra-judicial killings of their people. Now, the Mahdi Army is not an innocent group. They are--

**BILL MOYERS:** --anybody innocent?

**LEILA FADEL:** No. Nobody's innocent. And that's the difficult thing about this story is that, you know, right now the Mahdi Army is saying, "We're the victim of an offensive that is politically motivated" But they also have victimized so many people. I interviewed a commander in the Mahdi Army who was the most cold-blooded person I'd ever met.

I mean, I went to a neighborhood called Salaam, it means peace. And when I first went to Iraq I used to go there and do stories. I did a story there about just the beginnings of marriages falling apart because of the political situation and the Sunni and a Shia wife and

a Sunni husband fighting over-- there used to be a show called Terrorism in the Grip of Justice. And they would put Sunni men on television.

Would put them on television visibly beaten. You would see, like, black eyes. And they would admit to everything. Like, "Oh, I bombed this. And I blew this up. And I blew this up." And they would fight over that, you know? The Shia wife would say, "Why are you killing Shias? And why are you killing people in the house of God, in mosques?" And the Sunni husband would say, "First of all, I'm not doing it. And why are they beating up these people and making them confess to things we don't know would happen?"

I went back in the summer of 2007. And I was very saddened. I had to sneak into the neighborhood with somebody who I knew in the neighborhood who brought me in. And we went to house after house after house to hear of the killings by the Mahdi Army. They had purged most Sunnis out of the neighborhood.

They had killed Shia women, Shia men who didn't agree with them. It was like Lord of the Flies. I mean, six really young guys, 17, 18, 19, 20, who were ruling with weapons. And if you didn't-- if you gave them a wrong look, they would shoot you. And we found one of the stories that we did was that I interviewed a woman about was-- her neighbor was shot in the back coming home from the bakery. And her son, he was seven, came out of the house and saw her bloody body on the ground.

And he went to her and he started hugging her. And nobody in the neighborhood would help him because they were scared that if they did then they would be seen as saying this was the wrong thing for the Mahdi Army to do. So this woman who I interviewed came home and saw him and took him. She was a Sunni woman across the street. And you could still see the blood on the pavement.

And she brought him in. And she said, "Let me clean you off. Let me put you in new clothes." And he said, "No. You'll see what I'm gonna do when I grow up. I need to stay with the blood of my mother." And you see that cycle of revenge that's plaguing Iraq. And I interviewed that man and he had no remorse. I mean, he talked about this woman who he said he killed. He talked about his brother who was killed in the Sunni neighborhood of Ahdamia and how the Sunnis need to be purged from Baghdad in order to keep it safe. And so that is the feeling of this constant revenge, constant violence.

**BILL MOYERS:** has the surge worked? We do read that the levels of violence are down. The President says the surge is working. General Petraeus said the surge is working, although he said it's very fragile. Is the surge working?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, I don't think anybody can disagree that violence did drop in the last six months of 2007, that it did go back to levels of about 2005, that you could feel a change, that the bodies left in the street every day that are signs of sectarian assassinations did drop. But it's very reversible. And it's very-- a part of it also can be explained in other ways. I mean, when you have a capital, Baghdad, it's divided by sect.

And you've walled off certain neighborhoods to protect them. You know, the Sunnis sort of ghettos of Baghdad now that are walled off completely. No cars go in. And they have these U.S.-backed militias, U.S.-sponsored militias that are protecting the neighborhood. So now they can't--they're being protected from the outside world. And the outside world is being protected from them.

And so it's completely all these little fiefdoms, no central real power on any of them. And I think it's all extremely reversible. What happens to these 91,000 men who are on the U.S. payroll if they don't get absorbed into the government? What happens, as Basra and Sadr City have shown, if the militia decide, "I'm not standing down anymore. I'm not gonna get arrested," and in their eyes, "humiliated by the Iraqi government that's trying to take away my power"? What happens when-- people don't continue to be paid by the United States and maybe don't get absorbed into the Iraqi government? All these factors.

**BILL MOYERS:** That is so confusing. I mean, we read a lot about the thousand Iraqi soldiers who quit the fight in Basra, laid down their arms. And this week there were stories of more defectors in Sadr City. Are these people cowed? Are they afraid? What's

happening?

**LEILA FADEL:** I think it's a combination of things. I think there are people who don't feel that they should be fighting the Mahdi Army, who don't feel that they should be killing their Shia brothers because most of the Iraqi security forces are Shia. And I think there is also threats. I mean, we had reports of the Mahdi Army going house to house in Sadr City and if they were Iraqi security forces, they would say, "We know where you live. We know where your family is. And if you fight us, we'll find you." And so I think it's a combination of the fear that their families will be killed and that they're being killed as well as a moral objection by some of them.

**BILL MOYERS:** Moral objection?

**LEILA FADEL:** I think so, yes.

**BILL MOYERS:** To?

**LEILA FADEL:** To fighting who the people they consider their brothers.

**BILL MOYERS:** You broke the story that it was an appeal to an Iranian source. You broke the story that the Iranians actually intervened to stop the fighting in Basra, right?

**LEILA FADEL:** That's right. Yeah, that's right.

**BILL MOYERS:** So there's real evidence on the ground that Iran is influential in Iraq.

**LEILA FADEL:** Yes. I mean, I don't think anybody questions that Iran is influential in Iraq. I don't know that all of Iran's influence in Iraq is bad influence. Iran has chips on every table, you know? They're betting on everybody. You'll talk to Iraqi officials who say that the Iranians are willing to give money to anybody. You have Sunni leaders going to meet with Iranian officials in Iran. The man who is the Iraqi affairs man is the head of the Qods force in Iraq in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, who the United States says is a terrorist.

He is the man that deals with Iraqi affairs. He is the man that deals with Iraqi officials. He is the man that was involved when an Iraqi delegation went to Iran in March to stop the fighting in Basra and apparently was the one that was helping get Moqtada Sadr to say stand down. Now maybe it's a bad thing that the Iranians have so much influence, but what do we expect when we put a Shia government into power? These men took refuge and had funding in Iran.

**BILL MOYERS:** Let's listen to what President Bush said recently about Iran's influence in Iraq.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** The regime in Tehran also has a choice to make. It can live in peace with its neighbor, enjoy strong economic and cultural and religious ties. Or it can continue to arm and train and fund illegal militant groups, which are terrorizing the Iraqi people and turning them against Iran. If Iran makes the right choice, American will encourage a peaceful relationship between Iran and Iraq. Iran makes the wrong choice, America will act to protect our interests, and our troops and our Iraqi partners.

**BILL MOYERS:** What's your reaction hearing the President talk that way?

**LEILA FADEL:** First of all, just in the practical sense, the American Army's tired. They're on third and fourth rotations in Iraq. Can they really go after Iran at this point? And secondly, what are we going to do if we go into Iran, the United States? They say that the Iranian government is bringing weapons into Iraq and funding and training the Shia militias. I don't know if the Iranian government is doing that.

I know that they say that the rockets hitting the Green Zone are 107-millimeter rockets that are made in Iran. I know they say the deadliest weapon used against U.S. troops are the EFPs, and those are deadly. But do you really go and invade the neighboring country of

the unstable nation that you're already in?

**BILL MOYERS:** But do you, as a reporter, find evidence of mischief on the part of Iran?

**LEILA FADEL:** Oh, definitely. I don't think Iran is not mischievous. I don't think the United States is not mischievous in Iraq. I think Iran has a vested interest in having a weak Iraq next to them because they did have an eight-years war with Iraq. They did have a hostile environment between the two nations. And I think it's in their interest to have some control over that neighbor. And that's what they have. I mean, they have groups, the parties that are in power are the parties that were created in their area, are the parties that thrived and fought Saddam from Iran. And so when the best friend in the government of the United States, which I explain the Islamist Supreme Council of Iraq, when Hakim is coming to the White House and speaking to President Bush but also going to Iran and speaking to Ahmadinejad and is very, very much influenced by Iran, it's really unclear what we're complaining about. I mean, we should have expected that this government would be Iran friendly.

**BILL MOYERS:** Here's Senator Joe Lieberman speaking on this when General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker were in town recently.

**SENATOR LIEBERMAN:** Let me ask you first, are the Iranians still training and equipping Iraqi extremists who are going back into Iraq and killing American soldiers?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** That is correct, Senator.

**SENATOR LIEBERMAN:** Is it fair to say that the Iranian-backed special groups in Iraq are responsible for the murder of hundreds of American soldiers and thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** It certainly is. I do believe that is correct. Again some of that also is militia elements who have then subsequently been trained by these individuals.

**BILL MOYERS:** What about that?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, I don't, you know, the U.S. military says that they have people in detention that say they were trained and supplied in Iran and apparently have killed U.S. soldiers. I don't know. That's what they say. I don't know that it's true. They have-- and they also, you know, they're calling these Iranian-backed special groups. The entire Iraqi government is Iranian backed. You know, all these-- they say that if the United States pulls out, Iran says they can fill the security vacuum in Iraq. That's what Iran says. And Iran says, on their side of the story when they've never admitted to being involved in these things publicly. And when you ask them about it, they say, "Well, actually the problem is the United States. They want unrest in Iraq so they'll never leave."

**BILL MOYERS:** So, on the one hand, Iraq is working behind the scenes to broker a cease fire in Sadr City. And yet we're, again, making Iran out to be the one behind the violence. I mean, there's a paradox there, right?

**LEILA FADEL:** Right. Right. I don't think Iran is nothing's black and white. I don't think Iran is the white knight or the evil villain either. I think that Iran is playing a political game in Iraq.

**BILL MOYERS:** Was the battle in Basra a defining moment in the war, as Washington has been saying it is?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, Washington has been talking about Basra as the defining moment for the Maliki government taking on the Shia militias. But a lot of people think Maliki made a big mistake. The U.S. was backing away from that battle. They were saying, "We weren't informed, and we had to get military power in last minute." The United States also, I think, is very afraid-- the U.S. military in Iraq, very afraid that what happened in Basra is gonna bring back this, what I described as a sleeping bear, up again. Because part of the success of what they call the success of the surge, one of the major factors was the freeze that

Moqtada Sadr put on his militia. And now that's unraveling.

Washington's suddenly been talking lately about special groups, a term that we've never heard before. But suddenly almost every official and anonymous high-level source in Washington is talking about this special group, that special group. Who are they talking about, as you see it?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, yeah. I'd like to know that, too. They have started-- they've coined this term "special groups." And what they say is special groups are Iranian-backed Shia militias. Iran's a Shia nation. Iran is very, very influential in Iraq. There's no question. They're a very powerful neighbor and it's in their interest to be influential in their neighbor who was once hostile.

But anytime you see any attacks by militias, the American military will say it's the Iranian-backed special groups. It's not Moqtada Sadr, who is the leader of this militia that's being fought right now. I mean, they can talk about Sadr City for the generals can talk about Sadr City for an hour and never mention Moqtada Sadr or the Mahdi Army because they're saying it's Iranian-backed special groups. But it-

**BILL MOYERS:** So they say Iran is behind everybody, right?

**LEILA FADEL:** Right.

**BILL MOYERS:** In effect, that's the line now.

**LEILA FADEL:** Right, right.

**BILL MOYERS:** Is al-Qaeda still a factor?

**LEILA FADEL:** Yes. I mean, I think the last two days showed that.

**BILL MOYERS:** What do you mean?

**LEILA FADEL:** The last two days 120 people died.

**BILL MOYERS:** You think that's from al-Qaeda?

**LEILA FADEL:** Yes, I do.

**BILL MOYERS:** Is al-Qaeda in Iraq indigenous to the country? Or do you have evidence, as a journalist, that al-Qaeda gets its orders from Osama bin Laden and that network?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, you know, al-Qaeda was not a force to be reckoned with before 2003.

**BILL MOYERS:** Yeah, we learned that.

**LEILA FADEL:** It was not. Okay, yes, exactly. And so al-Qaeda was a very foreign idea. I think the rank and file al-Qaeda is Iraqi. But the leadership is foreign. And it's a foreign idea, and it's a foreign group. And I think it's easier for Iraqis to reject. Now, when it comes to groups like the Mahdi Army or the Islamic Army, which was a Sunni insurgent group that very much are now part of these awakening groups, those groups are much more difficult to reject. These are people's neighbors and fathers and brothers. So al-Qaeda in Iraq had more of a foreign leadership and is more acceptable to reject.

The question everyone's asking is what will victory look like in Iraq? It was the big topic when General Petraeus testified recently.

**LEILA FADEL:** There something one of my staff members always says.



**BILL MOYERS:** Iraqi?

**LEILA FADEL:** Iraqi staff member. He's from Fallujah. And he says that every time there's one step forward, it feels like they're making one step back to square one. A lot of what's being done today is fixing years of mistakes that we've made. And so what is victory? Is victory dealing with a terrorist organization that didn't really exist in Iraq before we invaded? Is victory dealing with an Iranian influence on the government that we invaded to put in power?

It's a very confusing thing. I would ask the generals, they describe something called irreversible momentum, a point where you get to where that's it. It's no longer reversible and fragile. It's real success. When that is, I don't know. What is an acceptable level of violence? They talk about acceptable level of violence. I don't know.

And so to define victory I don't even know what that is. Is victory that people are everybody's returning and there's electricity and water? Well, that's not happening. I mean, there are some people returning, yes. But you don't have four million people coming back home from internally and abroad. There's thousands of people.

**BILL MOYERS:** Four million refugees.

**LEILA FADEL:** Four million between--

**BILL MOYERS:** Displaced within the country and--

**LEILA FADEL:** And outside.

**BILL MOYERS:** --and outside the country.

**LEILA FADEL:** Four million.

**BILL MOYERS:** Are there any positive signs to a reporter?

**LEILA FADEL:** You know, I have to say that the last six months of 2007, there were positive signs. You could move around a bit more. I've been able to move around a bit more, you know? And I can't deny that that's happening. The issue is, is you don't know what's lasting and what's real and what's going to backfire in ten days. And, you know, this Basra situation, it was the symbol or the quantification of how quickly things can change.

And suddenly, you know, a year, a year ago, it was the Sunni neighborhoods I couldn't go to. They were the most difficult. And I was very fearful to go into these neighborhoods. Now it's different. It's the Sunni neighborhoods where I feel comfortable going into because they have the whole U.S. military around there anyways and they're being paid by them.

And so going in as an American isn't that dangerous anymore. Although I don't announce it, of course, and I still go with a scarf and try to blend. But going to the Shia neighborhoods are more difficult now and more frightening because they're the ones in the limelight and they're the ones fighting right now with both the Iraqi security forces and the U.S. military. So-

**BILL MOYERS:** Talk a little bit about how you do your job you have a staff of how many Iraqis working for you there?

**LEILA FADEL:** Well, I have five Iraqi translator-slash-reporter-slash-- fixers, like fixing appointments and things like that, who work with me in the bureau. They have grown into really wonderful reporters in their own right, two women and three men. I also have a staff of five drivers because we travel in two cars at all times for protection. And then we have stringers around the country who will feed us-- information from the provinces that we're not in, whether it be in the southern, northern western provinces. So that we can give a full picture to our to our readers--

**BILL MOYERS:** How do you keep the sectarian rivalries out of your own newsroom?

**LEILA FADEL:** Yeah. Well, you know, first of all, I have just amazing people in our bureau, very human, very wonderful. But it is hard to keep that hate out of the bureau. I mean, their lives are not being lived separately from what's happening in Iraq. So, you know, when I hired-- when I arrived there, many of the people that I had worked with over the year and a half, about two years before I became bureau chief were leaving. They were fleeing the country. And so I had to hire so many people and re-staff the bureau. And the first question I had to ask, and it's a shameful question in Iraq, was, "Are you Sunni or Shia?" Because I need to know so that I don't take them to a neighborhood where they'll be killed for being Shia or Sunni. I can't-- put their life at risk that way. And so-- and also they're gonna have a different perspective-- if I only have Shia on staff or only have Sunni on staff, I'll have one perspective of this war.

**BILL MOYERS:** What's the distinction between a Sunni and a Shia, from-- in-- in the practical working world?

**LEILA FADEL:** In the practical world. Well, basically it was a dispute on who was the leader of Islam following the Prophet Mohammad's death.

**BILL MOYERS:** Hundreds of years ago.

**LEILA FADEL:** Hundreds of years ago. Basically the Shias believe that the proper, the rightful leader of Islam following Mohammad's death was his son-in-law and his cousin, Ali. And the Sunnis believe that the four califa following Mohammad were the rightful leaders of Islam. And the split came after the after Ali's death. And so the Shia and Sunni, I mean, this is just a religious disagreement or a, really, I guess it's a bureaucratic disagreement from hundreds of years ago. But-

**BILL MOYERS:** It's hard to believe that people still fight and die over this, right?

**LEILA FADEL:** I mean, there isn't especially in Iraq, there isn't a huge, huge difference. I mean, there most of the tribes in Iraq are intermarried. It's not unheard of for Shias and Sunnis to be married and have children. And, of course, the religious line in Islam comes from the father. So if the father is Sunni or Shia then the children will likely be Sunni or Shia.

But now because of the practical problems of being married to a Sunni or a Shia, it has stopped. So when I say "practical problems," I interviewed a family who-- the daughter-- their daughter-- married a Sunni man-- after very, very-- after a lot of resistance from her father. And-- she finally agreed 'cause he was a good man. And-- and so they got married. And a few months after they got married, they got run out of their neighborhood as Sunnis in a Shia neighborhood and went to Amara, which was Sunni, completely Sunni neighborhood.

And so suddenly they could barely see their daughter. The Shia family could not go the Amara to visit them. And the Sunni husband couldn't come to their neighborhood to visit his in-laws. So they would come to a neutral point. The brothers would come pick up the sister. And the husband would go home. She would go visit her family. And then they would come back to the neutral point and go home.

**BILL MOYERS:** How old are you?

**LEILA FADEL:** I'm 26.

**BILL MOYERS:** And you've been in Iraq how long?

**LEILA FADEL:** I became bureau chief at 25. And I started at 24. So I turned both 25 and 26 in Iraq.

**BILL MOYERS:** So you have a lot in common with these soldiers and with the Iraqis. I

mean, so many of them are young.

**LEILA FADEL:** Yeah. I mean, I think covering the story-- you have to be an empathetic person. You have to be able to put yourself in so many different people's shoes. And I try to do that with whoever I'm with at the time.

**BILL MOYERS:** Are you afraid? Do you think something could happen?

**LEILA FADEL:** No, not really. I mean, you can't think like that. You can't-- I mean, think every time you return to Iraq you-- in the beginning, first week, you might be a little more scared than you were when you left the last week. But by the middle of the rotation you're telling your staff, "We have to go here, and we have to go there." And they're telling you, "Are you crazy? You're a foreigner. What are you thinking?"

But you can't be afraid all the time. There are cases where you're afraid. I remember in 2005 when our hotel got attacked and we had a double truck bombing. And it was the end of 2005. And I couldn't sleep for a week because it had happened in the morning. And I'd been asleep when glass started coming in. So I was afraid to close my eyes because if I would open them, maybe it would be shaking-- maybe our hotel would be shaking again and the bombing would happen again.

But that goes away. And you have to work. And life goes on and just like Iraqis, they've-- I was telling somebody the other day, life adapts to the situation. You can't move around at night 'cause it's too dangerous then you have your wedding at 1:00 p.m. instead of a night/evening party. Oh, you can't celebrate New Year's at midnight 'cause you can't get home at midnight? Your New Year's party finishes at 8:00.

You can't get to a certain neighborhood because it's Shia and you're Sunni? You open grocery stores in your gardens. I mean, you just adapt. And some of that is changing for the better. And some is not.

**BILL MOYERS:** Your colleagues at the bureau do a blog every day, right? They're allowed to write what they're seeing and thinking?

**LEILA FADEL:** That's right. They do a blog. It's called Inside Iraq. And it's one of my favorite parts of what we do because it's so telling. It's things that we can't capture in a story, in an article that's gonna go into a newspaper. It's life. It's the checkpoints that take them three hours to get to work in the morning. It's the curfews that stop their life. It's that fear of a sniper on campus when your daughter's at the dentist.

It's the sudden human invasion. We had a blogger in one of my staffers, who's just amazing, a single mother, so brave, who lost her son in this war, caught in a crossfire. She's so strong, so strong. And she wrote a blog and it was called "Square Windows." And it was about the U.S. military, U.S. soldiers coming down the street. And she looked through the square windows of the Humvee, and she realized they were the age of her son who was killed.

And she wondered if any other time those boys would have been friends, if at any other time they would have had the same interests. And it made me so sad because it just tells the human toll, when you're not looking at the policy and when you're not looking at whether the U.S. military's doing the right thing or whether the Iraqis are-- it's just basic human.

**BILL MOYERS:** Leila Fadel, thank you very much for being with us on THE JOURNAL. And thank you for agreeing to go online, [PBS.org, and answer questions from our viewers.](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04182008/transcript3.html?print)

**BILL MOYERS:** When the Pope arrived this week he brought a two-edged message for Americans. He praised us as a country where strong religious belief thrives in a pluralistic society, but he also warned against "the subtle influence of secularism." This had some people scratching their heads, because a secular democracy - in which no religion is favored and all are tolerated - may be America's greatest contribution to political science. Furthermore, religion and politics are now paraded so prominently in what's called "the

public square" that it can sometimes seem our long-standing constitutional prohibition against a religious test for office is threatened with de-facto nullification. Consider one of the highest rated news shows on cable television this week:

**BROWN:** Tonight, we bring you something different in this already extraordinary campaign year. We are calling it the Compassion Forum...

**BILL MOYERS:** The compassion forum on CNN was touted as an opportunity for the candidates to "discuss how their faith and moral convictions" might guide them as president of the United States.

**BROWN:** You said in an interview last year that you have actually felt the presence of the Holy Spirit on many occasions. Share some of those occasions with us.

**MEACHAM:** Do you believe God wants you to be president?

**BROWN:** If one of your daughters asked you, "Daddy, did God really create the world in six days?" What would you say?

**MEACHAM:** Senator, do you believe that God rewards or punishes people or nations in real time?

**BILL MOYERS:** If you don't think those questions at least imply a religious test for office, try to imagine what would have happened if one of those candidates had answered, "Well, I find the concept of the supernatural rather shaky and the evidence for it insubstantial. To be honest, I'm agnostic. So let's talk instead about how we're going to find the money to rebuild our infrastructure."

That candidate would be burned at the metaphorical equivalent of the heretic's stake. So I have a suggestion for the next compassion forum. Turn the tables, and insist that the candidates get to quiz the moderators on how well they have read Martha Nussbaum's new book: LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE: IN DEFENSE OF AMERICA'S TRADITION OF RELIGIOUS EQUALITY.

When Martha Nussbaum thinks out loud, people listen. This professor at the University of Chicago is one of our leading philosophers. In her latest book, she argues from history, and the Constitution that we shouldn't try to define our country by one set of religious beliefs any more than we should try to curtail the influence of religion in public life in a way that is unbalanced and unfair. She joins me now.

Welcome to THE JOURNAL.

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Thank you very much Bill.

**BILL MOYERS:** Your book is written in defense of America's tradition of religious equality. What's the most important thing we can do now to defend that tradition?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** I think that what we should do is to be very, very delicate as George Washington said regarding the consciences of other people and recognize that people who don't want a lot of religious observance in public life are not our enemies, are not mocking us or denigrating us. But, they are worried about something that's a real issue. Namely, how can we be a nation of equals?

**BILL MOYERS:** Paradoxically, religious conviction is often the best defense of religious equality, right?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** I think so. I mean, I think, you know, if you look into the religions, they have this deep idea of human dignity and the source of dignity being conscience. This capacity for searching for the meaning of life. And that leads us directly to the idea of respect. Because if conscience is this deep and valuable source of searching for meaning, then we all have it whether we're agreeing or disagreeing. And we all ought to respect it

and respect it equally in one another.

**BILL MOYERS:** Your ancestors came over on the Mayflower, right?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** That's right. Well, my mother's ancestors. And, you know, they spent a lot of their time putting together all the evidence that they belonged in this prestigious Mayflower Society. And, of course, other people didn't. And so, years later, the Pilgrims' search for religious freedom and equality had become elite American search fortunate social superiority.

The first thing they did was to take the land of the Native Americans, and they did it on religious grounds. They said Christian people have a right to these lands.

And so, the hero of my book, Roger Williams, thought that was what he called a solemn public lie. And he then set out to get to know the Native Americans and befriend them, stick up for their property claims. And this, I think, was I think at the core of his idea of religious equality. Because he learned that you can find decency, friendship and, in some ways, much better behavior than he saw in the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay, where people really had a religion that he didn't think was true. He never thought that religion was true. He actually didn't like it at all. But he thought they were morally good.

And so, then he reasoned, well, we can live together on the basis of a moral understanding with people whose religion we think to be false. We don't need to like it. But we respect their liberty of conscience, and we respect their freedom with which they go their own way.

**BILL MOYERS:** Roger Williams is one of my heroes. Because he believed in that my faith calls soul freedom, or the liberty of conscience, as you would put it.

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Yeah. And what I love are his metaphors for the way that freedom is taken away. I mean, there are two metaphors. One is the imprisonment of the soul. And the other, even deeper, is the rape of the soul. And he keeps saying it's soul rape when people try to get people to believe something that they don't really believe. So the only way we can avoid doing that kind of violence to conscience is to give it lots of space to unfold itself. Not just persecuting people, but really bending over backwards to be sensitive to their religious needs.

**BILL MOYERS:** A lot of persecution and suffering in this country on the part of Catholics, Jews, Native Americans, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Assembly of God. How do you square those?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Actually, in the 18th century, we were making pretty good progress in understanding that people have to live on conditions of equality. And Madison was a very creative thinker about how any kind of religious establishment, no matter how benign, was a statement that said some people are more equal than others. So he didn't want that.

But then, you know, in the 19th century, all of these new immigrants came, all the Roman Catholics from southern Europe, and then, these new, indigenous groups like the Mormons, who seemed quite scary. People get scared. They get scared economically. And then they take it out on-

**BILL MOYERS:** They fear the competition for work, for jobs, for-

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** They fear the competition for jobs. And then, they just think, oh, well, these people are to blame. And this happens all the time, of course, in some of our panics today about immigration. But I think what happened in the 19th century was they identified the threat with religious difference. And then they said Catholics are incompatible with democracy. They're herd-like, they're submissive, they can't really live with us as democratic citizens.

And so, you know, that went on a long time.

**BILL MOYERS:** So why this book right now?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Well, because, you know, what I saw was that there were, on one hand, people who were- who want more and more to insert their faith, and in particular, Christian faith, into public life, and have more displays of the ten commandments and so on, in public places, more and more statements of faith in public life. On the other side are people who simply say we should keep to the separation of church and state. And I thought that language of separation is not all that helpful.

And so, what I want to say to those people is that if we use the language of fair play and equality, rather than just the language of separation of church and state, we can understand why we don't want certain kinds of manifestations of Christianity in public life.

It's not because we don't think your religion is important or deep. It's because we want to be fair to other people who have different religions. So we keep religion out of the public square to the extent that we do for reasons of fairness, not because we hate religion or think it unimportant.

**BILL MOYERS:** You seem to be saying let's retire that metaphor of the wall of separation between church and state.

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** You know, it wasn't really part of our constitutional framing. None of the framers actually used that phrase at all. They used the language of liberty and equal rights with conscience. And separation, I think, doesn't guide our thought that well. Because actually, if you think about it, no one believes in absolute separation of church from state.

For example, The University of Virginia said that student activity fees could be used to fund every student group, the Young Democrats, the Lesbian and Gay Students Group, the gardening club, the choir. But the one thing they couldn't use the money to fund was the Young Christians. Now, there really is an issue of fairness. I mean, why should it be just because you're a religious group, that you don't get what everyone else gets to pursue their own conscientious commitment?

So, the court, I think, rightly said, well, that's just not correct. That's a constitutional violation. So there's a case where fairness requires that the religion should get what everyone else gets. Otherwise, we're preferring non-religion over religion.

**BILL MOYERS:** But doesn't it seem to you that the Christian right does want to see its conservative religious values be the defining ones of this country?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Oh, I think they clearly do. But my hope is that there's a large number of them who really haven't thought through the issue of fairness. And-- they also may just be afraid that we can't live together at peace if there's not some central defining religious ideology.

And so, I think looking at this history is actually quite helpful. Because the Puritans in Massachusetts had that same thought. They really thought there couldn't be peace if we didn't have a religious orthodoxy. And, you know, what our whole history has shown is that that's not true, that people can get along together and respect one another, even though they have differences about religion, because they can recognize a common moral ground to stand on. They can recognize values like honesty, social justice, and so on.

**BILL MOYERS:** But you'll find many conservative Christians especially, saying that, you know, without a belief in a supreme being, a person, an atheist, can't be a moral agent. They just believe that it's impossible unless you have an absolute source of morality, that you can't reason your way to a moral society.

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** I know they think that. But I think they really should look more closely at the ethical reasoning of people who are agnostics and atheists. And I think it's obvious that lots and lots of people in this country are-- are deeply ethical, do have a sense of the ethically obligatory and of the depth and real requirement of ethical norms,

while not connecting that to a divine source. And of course, that's true of some religious people, too, like Buddhists and Taoists, and in many cases, Reform Jews, who may be rather agnostic, or may not have a particular kind of theological conception.

**BILL MOYERS:** When you were growing up Episcopalian, right--

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Right.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Christian notion of a God- singing those hymns- reading the Bible, you clearly had some imprint in your mind of what was behind the word God. Now, you have become Jewish. And in the Jewish scriptures, of course, God is no name. God you're not supposed to fashion an image either linguistic or physical of God. So, when you say the word God now, and it's all through your book. What's in your head?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Well, I am kind of agnostic about what that really means. And I guess what I do think is that there's some moral basis to life that makes us dignified beings, not mere bundles of matter. And that's why we deserve respect for one another. We are not just bundles of atoms being pushed around. But, there's something spiritual about us whether we give that a religious interpretation or not. And so, it's that sense of there being dignity to life that I associate with the word God. I mean, that's probably a pretty radical and agnostic way of interpreting it. But, that's what I think.

**BILL MOYERS:** So, what do you think when you hear politicians, and everyone of them does it today, end a speech with, "God bless America."

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** I wish they didn't feel they had to do that. I mean, we know that Madison wrestled with this and he made Thanksgiving proclamations. But, then, later in life he said he'd wished he hadn't done that. Because he understood that his own equality based principle was in trouble there.

So, when somebody says, "God bless America" we all feel we have to stand up and cheer. But, when we ask ourselves, you know, it's what statement is really being made here? It's the same thing as the Pledge of Allegiance. It's a statement that God is protecting one nation in a favored way. And that marginalizes not only the atheists, agnostics, polytheists, non-theists. But, also people who just don't think of God in that way.

**BILL MOYERS:** How do you think we've dealt with the experiment in religious freedom over the 400 years since your mother's ancestors arrived on the Mayflower?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Well, you know, very unevenly. But, I guess I think on the whole not so badly. I think Americans did learn that you just are not going to be able to live well if you subordinate people on the grounds of their religion. And so, that lesson was learned pretty early partly because we were a nation of weirdoes and immigrants who did strange things or looked--

**BILL MOYERS:** Such as

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Quakers with these hats they wouldn't take off in court. And Mennonites and Quakers who wouldn't fight in the military. There are all these weird practices were understood to be consciously motivated. To be coming from some deep source in a person. So, people just didn't want to say, "You can't do that." And George Washington wrote a letter to the Quakers saying, "I assure you that the conscientious scruples of all men should be treated with the greatest delicacy and tenderness." And what he meant is you're not going to have to serve in the military. And I respect that. And unless there's a public emergency, we're just not going to do that kind of violence to your conscience. So, I think we have understood that lesson. We've certainly violated it lots of times. And I think there's a big danger of violating it again now.

**BILL MOYERS:** What's the biggest threat to it?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** I think these insistent public statements that define the country as a Christian country. I do think the faith based initiatives is one part of that. I'm very upset

that the Supreme Court ruled that citizens don't have standing to challenge the faith based initiatives on constitutional grounds. I think my own colleague Richard Posner who wrote the opinion for the Seventh Circuit did a great job of legally reasoning there showing that there was a way of extending the doctrine of standing to give citizens standing to challenge that law. And it's very I think very upsetting and alarming that the Supreme Court overruled that. So, I do think there's some real big dangers now that we're going to increasingly see these manifestations of sectarian religiosity in American public life.

**BILL MOYERS:** Help me to understand why you are as concerned as you are about faith based initiatives because Al Gore, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama- as far as I can find out- certainly George Bush, John McCain- every prominent American politician has embraced faith based initiatives as now an untouchable in American life. We're not going to turn it around. What's your concern?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Well you know, there are a lot of unfair things that are untouchable in public life unfortunately. But I think, what the trouble is that preference is given to religious groups over secular groups. And the criteria for getting benefits from these groups are often religious in nature. You either have to join up. Or you have to submit to proselytization.

And, unfortunately, what the court has said is because the President is using his discretionary funds and not money for which we're taxed directly for that purpose--

**BILL MOYERS:** Yeah, Congress didn't approve faith based initiatives--

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** No, no--

**BILL MOYERS:** He went ahead by executive order

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** He went ahead by executive order. And, of course, the money comes from us at some level. But, because it's in a discretionary fund, no city has standing to challenge it. Poser pointed out that that means the President, if he uses his discretionary fund, could set up a national church or build a national mosque, whatever he decided to do. And that's the way the law now stands.

**BILL MOYERS:** Do you think that may have been a reason that the framers of the Constitution made no reference to God in the document?

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Oh, sure. I think they thought about that very carefully. And of course, when they immediately said, "No religious test shall be required for office of these United States." That was a decision they did not take lightly. They thought about it quite a lot. And so, sure, I think the fact is that although in the Declaration of Independence, you do have some kind of vaguely deist language, in the Constitution, you don't have that. And it was a very carefully thought out decision.

**BILL MOYERS:** The book is Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality. Martha Nussbaum, thanks for being with me.

**MARTHA NUSSBAUM:** Thank you very much Bill.

**BILL MOYERS:** That's our broadcast. We'll be back at this same time next week when my guest will be the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, in his first television interview since the controversy over his sermons as the pastor of Barack Obama's church.

I'm Bill Moyers.

---

© 2007 Public Affairs Television. All Rights Reserved.

[an error occurred while processing this directive]