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I would like to apologise for a Ahmed El-Sheikh not being here tonight – I hope not too many people are disappointed to see me instead! But it's great to be here in a place for which I have high regard, and I thank Charlie for creating this marvellous project that we can all learn a lot from – me included - and definitely this is one reason that I am so happy to be here tonight.

Let's start from the end. I was recently in France and Paris and I had the opportunity to be taken to a project, like many other projects now, waiting to be launched: the new channel in France called France 24 it will be out in both French and English with a few hours in Arabic. They gave me their brochure and on page one there was an 'Ambitions' section under which they said "we aspire to offer the world a serious challenge to CNN, BBC World Service and Al- Jazeera, and that epitomises a lot. I couldn't have envisioned a French media outlet holding a Arabic media outlet in such high regards to the point that their ambition is to offer serious competition to them. Like Charlie mentioned, I had the opportunity to work for the BBC world service – like some people in the crowd. For all of us, few would challenge the BBC World [Arabic service] project was a dream that came true. At the time I was in Glasgow attempting to do my PhD with no intention to work as a journalist, and when the BBC announced they were launching this service I thought maybe this was the organisation that I would like to belong to, and I was lucky to be accepted and at the time to do the Bosnia war. The BBC collected some fine Arabic examples from the four corners of the world, very professionally, and we were all proud of that experience. Unfortunately it wasn't to last. Even though towards the end I thought that the BBC had every reason to keep the channel going but it was not to be. But the Qataris made use of these very well trained journalists that were suddenly unemployed, and that was the beginning of Al Jazeera.

From day one Al Jazeera became very controversial. Phase number 1 was an utter shock, for both governments and the people. People couldn't believe it, governments were literally shocked, and immediately it was political. Many governments withdrew ambassadors from Doha, and many sent their ministers of information to Doha to wizen the Emir up – telling him that what he was doing was mad. For those of us not familiar with the set-up of the media scene in that part of the world, when it comes to electronic media especially (perhaps with the exception of Lebanon) there hasn't been a single electronic media outlet that's not under state control, directly or indirectly – in most cases directly. Due to the fact that unfortunately half if not more than half of Arabs just cannot read

or write, we can understand why Arab governments would be very interested. Even though shyly they give a little bit of room for print to move, but not electronic media. So comes a channel – a rogue channel – like Al Jazeera – and breaks this norm, and defies every single taboo. They mentioned anything, including how a husband makes love to his wife, in graphic details – but fortunately the political pressure didn't work, and one has to give credit to the Qatari government in this regard.

So we move in to phase number 2 which was the closing down of our offices around the world, the arrest of journalists, the smear campaigns especially in Egyptian and Saudi newspapers. Salah, who was the editor at the time, used to report this on the channel – so apparently this didn't work.

So we move in to phase number 3, and phase number 3 was... right, ok, thanks to technology we cannot jam – I mean Hitler tried this just before and during World War II, but now technically could it be done? Yes, but it would be hugely expensive, so much so that even the Saudi government can't afford it. So, what do we do? Arab governments try to find a way. Until- and I consider myself lucky to be part of this generation of Arab journalists – the critical point arrived. They started basically to get the message. That it's different now. We can't go on pretending that we are still in the middle ages. We have to do something about it. So, if we can't beat them, how about not quite joining them but offering something that looks like it... and we began to see whole channels being launched. The introduction of Al Jazeera look-a-like programmes. Some people might argue that this is not significant and it was just a ploy to try and lure a people from Al-Jazeera. And another thing – the launching on a massive scale of numerous channels in every field – that's another way of combating Al Jazeera basically. But I would agree disagree with the opinion that this was a cheap method of luring people away from Al Jazeera. I think one of the most significant developments in the last 10 years – if Al Jazeera closes down today then Al Arabiyah might close down tomorrow. But they manage to offer a little bit of competition to Al Jazeera – they have great talents and great journalists, and many of them are my friends.

And it's never been about whether or not Arabs can make good journalists. 'Can Arabs actually write? Can they actually work a camera and link it to a cable and beam a signal out of somewhere'... it was that bad, and thankfully that stereotype – which is to be honest a bit racist – is now better. It has always been about opportunity – young Arab journalists expressing themselves – and I know many who used to work for state media outlets, but they join Al Jazeera (or Dubai, Al-Arabiya, Abu Dhabi etc) - only then do they begin to find a way. In the full professional sense of the word. And that's why I considered that moment when Arab governments decided it was time to acknowledge that our people are... and the thing that made it in my opinion is that Al Jazeera took the strategic decision from the beginning, from the peoples' view, not from the government's view

– this was nothing short of a revolution. How much would it cost anyone to get a couple of guests in a studio and chat together? With the exception of opening the telephones live? It was historical.

From a purely professional point of view, this is not good TV – but that's only due to our own reality. We have to be frank with ourselves – in the beginning we needed to scream and we weren't allowed to criticise anything even whisperingly, let alone screamingly on Al Jazeera to millions of people around the world. And that was something very very significant. And I have to admit, it affected the quality of some of the programmes, and still is, but you know it takes time to get people to accept the concept of 'speak your mind', democracy – and this is why I can't understand people in America who say 'we would like to democratise' – I mean 'hello, how would you even begin to democratise people before they know how to read and write? how could you get hold of a driving license before you can read the signs or where to go?' That's another thing that I claim Al Jazeera has managed to introduce and is offering: education.

I come from Egypt and we like this joke in Egypt. There's a Muslim guy and he works in the traffic department, and he lives next door to a Christian, a copt, who he doesn't like and wants to give a parking ticket to. One night this Christian is riding his motorbike, and the Muslim stops him and says 'give me your license', and tries to find something wrong with his driving, but can't find anything. He says 'show me your mirrors, wheels' etc – but still can't find anything. So he says 'aren't you afraid of riding your bike all by yourself late at night?'. The Christian says 'no, I'm not by myself, I have the father the son and the holy spirit'. 'And you have three people on one bike?' says the Muslim. 'OK, come with me...' Which is basically education. I for one never understood Christianity, and it was never part of our curriculum. Even though Egyptians are easy going and tenacious, welcoming etc. but you hardly hear about Muslims marrying Christians etc. – so I tend to point to education most of all – this is what Al Jazeera is offering. What is politics? What is human rights? The thing that I am really proud of is the opportunity to present programmes which are investigative in nature – sort of like panorama look-a-like. And if I'm in a remote area in Yemen, sheikhs who don't read or write will approach me just to shake my hands. The argument by the governments has been that these people won't understand quality programmes, but this is such an arrogant attitude.

Which incidentally has also been used many times by the US administration itself in an attempt to intimidate Al Jazeera in to a certain line of editing a certain story or another, especially at critical times. I think we are familiar with the pressures put on Al Jazeera during the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, the war itself, Afghanistan – a spokesman for the White House once said 'ah those tapes that Al Jazeera are putting on air, they might include code sent by bin Laden to his people around the world, and I said ' Bin Laden doesn't need Al Jazeera to get in touch with his people –

he has the internet- but the point is that they know that it's not right, but the argument is the thing that matters... the attempt to take people for granted... we don't trust people so we're going to decide what they can or cannot see. When I used to teach mass communications and TV, I always encouraged students not to comment on what they saw, but what they did not see – try to spot what is missing. That tells you a lot about the makers of the programme and their editorial policy.

So we are now 10 years old, a very frightening age, because I remember the early years of Al Jazeera had a different taste to them. We could afford to make mistakes then, but now we can't. In certain areas Al Jazeera has matured, but in other areas people are getting tired – physically, mentally, psychologically. The challenge has been enormous and still is. I judge Al Jazeera not by what we see on it, but by what I think Al Jazeera has forced others to have on their screens – that's the biggest achievement that Al Jazeera has introduced to that part of the world. I always make the analogy between death and freedom, because Al Jazeera has opened a door – it's something, and it's making things happen – not only when it comes to the media scene but also politically, socially, educationally. In a sense you can compare freedom to death in as much as you cannot go through the experience of death and go back from it and visit it again. The same with freedom: the door cannot be closed again. But a lot a lot is still waiting to be done.

Questions and Answers

1) How is it that the government of Qatar different (by hosting Al Jazeera) compared to the Saudis and Egyptians, considering they don't have a different political set-up?

It's a good and valid question that we are sometimes asked – why don't you criticise the Qatari government? But you ask the Qataris themselves and they would say to you 'what happens in Qatar'? As a journalist I don't really care who pays for a certain media outlet so long as they allow me to do my job and I would go on the record as saying even if it was Israel backing Al Jazeera, giving me the chance to do all the work I have done, I would have still done it.

2) I heard that the English Al Jazeera station will be broadcasting different programmes. Why don't you just have subtitles on the Arab Al Jazeera station?

I can't speak for colleagues from Al Jazeera International. Actually in the beginning, when we started 'Top Secret, I had this conversation with my ex-boss. He said 'I would love to, but 50% of our viewers wouldn't be able to read it'.

I understand your question is a different one, and I'd like to link it to something else. So long as your editorial lines are the same, and you go about your job professionally, ie. you do your homework, you report on things and you present facts in a fair impartial balanced way, that's OK. But still, in the very making of the programme, there will be a lot of elements that prompt you to

present the same facts differently to different people around the world. It's not only a matter of difference in language – the prospective audience for Al Jazeera International are going to be very different from Arab Al Jazeera. The audience experience freedom – all these years of oppression in our part of the world – the level of sophistication is different. So many factors, it's a huge challenge. When I write my script for instance I am not sure, am I writing for a Bedouin in a tent in Saudia Arabia or Yemen, or am I writing to that Syrian who migrated and is teaching now at Harvard? Because he's also part of my target audience. It's a huge challenge not only for Al Jazeera but for all of satellite TV in general. Literally subtitling a channel doesn't really solve this – and that's why we thought of launching Al Jazeera English. Al Jazeera International is not going to be fundamentally different from Al Jazeera Arabic by the way – I can assure you about that. And I do believe that there is room out there for a black sheep, so to speak, and it's going to present a different perspective of the same thing. Are you telling me that the same event is covered the same way by Fox and the BBC? Everybody might be right but they present things differently because they have very different sets of target audiences.

3) How will Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera International be funded, considering their current advertising difficulties?

Advertising has been a major problem for Al Jazeera from Day 1. One of the methods that they used to try and combat Al Jazeera – especially the Saudis – is to almost monopolise the advertising markets in the Middle East, and they intimidated advertisers. But at the same, to start with, there isn't a single 24 hour news channel that subsidises itself. News is not the kind of business to make money – you lose money for sure, no matter how good you are. Mr Murdoch makes money not through his news channel but through sports and sex channels – the only two kinds of TV that you can make money from are sports and pornography. News, no. That's his kind of prestige kind of channel, that gets him to be influential within the community that he would like to be part of, so that's a different story. But for us – luckily Qatar have money, and they want to present something that they can be part of. Luckily, Al Jazeera has become very important to the government of Qatar, and there's nothing wrong with that. Some people might even argue that it's more important than the foreign ministry of Qatar – because it makes things happen, it's influential. But you know what, it's not my problem as a programme maker.

4) When you broadcast tapes from Al Qaeda, aren't you perpetuating the war on terror by giving them the oxygen of publicity?

I'll tell you my own reading of the situation, because I took the decision within my own programme to broadcast that kind of stuff. You know, every single source would like to use you, and the mechanism works exactly the same whether it's a head of state or a prostitute. They both would like

to use you, or a terrorist organisation for this matter. It's down to you, as a journalist, your judgments on a certain situation. And I was lucky, Al Qaeda invited me for some kind of exclusive, I didn't know what exactly, and I ended up interviewing the two main 9/11 masterminds. But, I was not there to argue with them, to debate certain things. I had my edits room back in London, and I knew that I could always be on top of it, which I claim I was. I came back with information, with facts, that even the CIA did not have. I can argue the same about governments – why are we holding governments in like a sacred place, that anything governments say can just be broadcasted? For me, I'm a surgeon. I am sorry for the analogy... but, you know, I've been asked this before in an attempt to intimidate me as a journalists, when I was asked by the US media about how I would describe those terrorists when I was there... and I said 'well, they were nice... they were nice to me... and I knew they were going to be nice to me, because they hoped I would say nice things about them'. I did not say nice things about them, but I was fair in how I treated the story – fair in terms of judging the meat of the story itself, um, so as much as I don't really allow myself to be intimidated as journalist, also I don't do it with governments. Charlie and I were talking about what I think is the most threatening war that is being waged against journalists... it's not war zones, it's not bullets flying any more – it's spin doctoring and intimidation. And I know that huge budgets have been allocated in every major department in the states and here in this country for just that. And it's become so difficult for a journalist to do his job. Even if you google something about a topic, look at the amount of stuff you have to sift through to get to the bottom of it. Sourcing – it's become so challenging to you as a journalist to really present this. And in my opinion this is nothing less than a war. It is a war.

5) Al Jazeera's broadcasting of beheading has been an issue. There is also an issue between different sets of ideas about politics – and people might say that all our Western media has embedded ideas about freedom of speech, freedom of expression and so on, which is taken for granted. In Islamic countries these are not necessarily just taken for granted. What are you trying to do about educating your audiences in 'the ways of west'?

I'd like to state categorically that Al Jazeera has never broadcast beheadings, full stop – and that is one of the many misconceptions in the west. Go and try and log in to a website that is one of the state department's, because they invented a unit there called 'counter- misinformation unit' ... we've never broadcast any of this stuff. But I can remind everyone that on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, Condoleeza Rice called the editors of the main media outlets to intimidate them using the same kind of 'ah, it's our boys now in the field, don't you dare – it's our boys in the field'. And of course it's a very strong method of intimidation. And the same was done by Alastair Campbell –

not only talking to them over the phone, but inviting them to Downing Street and telling them the exact message again.

Now, when I talked about education, you don't educate people overnight – it takes years and years. But there is a difference between now and 10 years ago – and my parameter would be how much Arab governments are pissed off. And the more they are, the more I think we are doing a good job. And you know, they don't really truly represent at least a big proportion of their own people. And this is why we have Bin Laden by the way – there is a frightening gap between governments and their own people, so people just don't feel that they are truly represented. It's as simple as this. You'll hardly come across anyone who agrees with what Bin Laden did on 9/11, but equally you'll hardly come across anyone who would refute Bin Laden's message when he talks about US foreign policy, the unconditional support for Israel – America doesn't only give the green light, now it orders Israel and pushes Israel, and Israelis themselves are paying for it; as with recent events in Lebanon, you know, we know, it wasn't exactly Israel's idea to do it at that point of time. So when Bin Laden and his people talk about this they know they are hitting on a sensitive chord with the people. It takes time to educate your masses. You can't do everything – people expect Al Jazeera to educate the whole world – but I think so far the picture is better now, and it's empowering people because information and facts and that sort of journalism can only empower people. And when you empower people who are not meant to be empowered, that's what really pisses the government. And if a government feels that it is pissed off, then there must be something wrong with it.

6) Is it possible, or is it in Al Jazeera's policy, to break through to Americans and break through the reputation that the US government has created for Al Jazeera?

I think to a certain extent we have. Don't believe in at least a very big part of the spin doctoring. One of my investigations was to walk in the footsteps of the 19 hijackers in America, which is about the whole of the country basically from Boston to Florida to LA to Minneapolis. I came through the Midwest, I was flying on Thanksgiving eve, and I was down in Phoenix sitting and there was an old lady sitting a few metres away from me... looking at me like... I took initiative, slowly, and said 'Happy Thanksgiving'. And she said 'oh my son, you speak English!'. 'Yes, very much so, and I would have loved to be with my girlfriend now'... 'Ah and you are Al Jazeera?' and we chatted for hours and hours....completely different picture. Most Americans get their impression of Al Jazeera through the administration. When they ask me where I live I say 'London'. They say 'oh, London, which state is that?'. I say fine, there is nothing wrong with not knowing about something, but there is everything wrong about being proud of it.

7) Are there any foreign issues or involvement behind Al Jazeera? Like conspiracy theories?

I can't even count the number of intelligence agencies that I have been linked to! And we have heard a lot about who pays for Al Jazeera... sometimes Saddam Hussein, sometimes Bin Laden, sometimes the Americans. And in the beginning we asked 'what?' and then we said 'OK we are not going to waste our time trying to dignify stuff like that'. We are grown up enough to judge for ourselves, and like I said before, we don't really care. As a journalist, what I care about is being given the opportunity to do what I believe in. And as a viewer what I care about is respecting my mind, is it giving me something useful or not? At least to a certain extent Al Jazeera has been trying to do this. How else would you explain the popularity of Al Jazeera? In Pakistan people said to me they watch us but they don't understand us – there must be something – at least 50 million people can't be wrong about that. I wouldn't waste my time trying to refute conspiracy theorists.

8)What is the strategy for Al Jazeera UK? Are you going to educate and empower us?

I think you guys are much luckier than most of us in terms of the options available to you – there is a huge heritage of certain things that we haven't ourselves been offered for a long time. Please don't quote me on this, I am not part of Al Jazeera International – and let me state this clearly, they are completely independent from Al Jazeera channel (though we share one boss, who is the Director General of the network- in that sense they are our sister channel: we might collaborate on certain stories, share certain facilities, but managerially and editorially certainly they are completely independent from us and vice versa). I don't think it will be a priority to empower the British people, but I think what it will be offering is a different perspective of the same event, ie. as a Westerner, you'll probably have the opportunity to watch what happened yesterday in Gaza, for instance, the infighting between Hamas and Fatah. From a different perspective, from the people who probably know the area slightly better and can really explain the context and not really explain this as civil war that's going to be the end of the world etc... that I think might be something that Al Jazeera will be slightly better than others in.

9) Have Arab governments really been afraid of Al Jazeera? Politically, not much has changed in the last 10 years...

I don't quite agree with you – Arab governments have been forced to change some things about themselves. But it's not just about a media outlet – a media outlet cannot be that kind of force. I think your question is related to the bigger picture, which necessarily brings the US administration in to the question. This is why, by the way, a few months ago I did a programme on the policy of extraordinary rendition – whereby the CIA gives itself the right to kidnap suspects off the streets wherever they happen to be and then to render them to their own respective countries. I called it the triangle of anger, because it involves the US, Arab governments, and Al Qaeda – and Bin Laden stated his position on this quite clearly. By the way, Bin Laden's quarrel has never been with

America, it has always been with his own governments. It's only because America keeps interfering that he decided that this can't go for long. For him it's a zero sum game – not like the IRA (moving from a violent phase to a political existence phase). Bin Laden presents his case, his grievances, and says to you 'this is what I'm not happy about, do something about it otherwise we're not going to be on good terms'. So he's not waiting to sit at a table and discuss terms and conditions. So... your question is more political than media related.

10) Would you agree that 'sticks and stones may break your bones but words can never hurt you' is a good lesson for Al Jazeera to teach to its Muslim audiences (to teach Muslims about free speech, after the cartoon riots etc)?

Al Jazeera is not about telling people what to think of something or another, we just tell them what happens and it's up to them to make up their minds. We can't be responsible for the outburst of emotions around the Muslim world that happened. We are being accused of inciting this just by reporting it? You want to just kill the messenger? This is an issue that has been repeating itself almost on a daily basis... wars, conflicts, ever since the world was created, have always been entwined with propaganda exercises, always. There is always a war of propaganda, and as a media outlet you will find yourself at the heart of it – and this is why you hear serious allegations about Al Jazeera, particularly in the build up to the Iraq thing. You tell me about Al Jazeera showing the bodies of US marines in the street. When Saddam Hussein's sons were killed – and I can tell you this on the record - we were being pushed to show the graphic pictures of their faces, of dead people – simply because the US administration decided that it's good for the stability of the situation in Iraq, that the Iraqis want fear. They wanted to reassure people that they actually were dead, and they didn't mind hurting our feelings by looking at these gruesome pictures. So it's about your own judgment of a certain piece of news, whether or not it is worth reporting.

When it comes to the Pope thing, it's not a difference of culture; the way the Pope apologised in my opinion was adding insult to injury – not only confirming what he quoted but saying 'you are stupid' for not understanding. We didn't tackle this from a political or theoretical point of view, we just reported it. Are you saying if Al Jazeera wasn't there the Muslim world wouldn't have heard of it and they wouldn't have taken to the streets?

11) On the cartoon story, how different was Al Jazeera's reporting from the Western media?

We did not run the images of the cartoons but we reported what was being said about it, and we opened our phonelines for people to express their minds. And we brought experts and clerics to debate the issues. And we got people from the West to debate the issue as well. Because it is not only a theoretical matter, it is very political... in the context of what is happening now... many people in our part of the world truly believe that there is a campaign against Islam. And comes

something like this and it's not about theology, it's about your own reality as well as about the religion that you believe in – it's about your own very existence as well. Many people thought of the sudden visit that Ariel Sharon made to the Al-Axeh mosque as very provoking and very calculated – let's test the water kind of thing. You can't tell people what to think. You can debate it and get experts from both sides, but you cannot hold a camera and a mic and say 'this is the way to understand it'. I respect my viewers, and I respect that they deserve to get the facts and then they can make their minds up.

12) Why doesn't Al Jazeera criticise the Emir of Qatar? And does Al Jazeera pacify Arab opinion, acting as a window through which Arabs can vent their anger?

Did you want me to make a programme about how the young Emir deposed his father? It's a story that can be done. Well, I am willing – and I have to say that it's not true, so that you don't misreport me – to sacrifice not being able to cover a story or two, which I don't think would really break my back, in exchange for all this freedom which I have enjoyed. I am being very realistic with you. There isn't a single media outlet in the world that is completely free, so let's not waste our time trying to think of cuckooland kind of... and I am satisfied as a journalist with this.

I must say I am slightly hurt that you think this way (re. pacification) – it means that you are assuming from the beginning that you are not smart enough to figure out whether I am trying to fool you in to some sort of political persuasion. I happen to believe the opposite. And I don't believe that by offering people this choice people are using Al Jazeera to get out of their chests then they go back to bed and say 'alright, I've done my bit now, I've done my jihad by tuning in to Al Jazeera'. What do I care whether this is going to be the effect or not? This is a political and socio-cultural matter that takes years and years. Are you saying that our culture is such, by trying to better informed that you are going to be passive later? I don't subscribe to this theory.

13) Does Al Jazeera make the 'clash of civilisations' a more or less likely possibility? How do you make the clash of civilisations less likely?

Probably by – at least on a personal note, I am not representing Al Jazeera here – how about trying to figure out whether or not Mr Rumsfeld is the right man in the right place! I don't regard this, as a journalist, as part of my job – to try and change the course of history. If this is going to happen, if this is meant to happen, I will just report it. I don't know what's happening now in terms of if there is a clash... I don't think so. Noam Chomsky thinks not – there is not a clash, and in a sense it's about interests, and it will change, and his proof is the very special relationship between different successive US administrations and the Saudi regime, for instance (as the land of Bin Laden etc – you can of course debate the issue a lot). Even though I disagree with lots of Chomsky's views, on

this one I tend to agree with him. I think it's primarily about interests in the first place. But, as somebody has decided that these are probably an easy way... and unfortunately, it's working.

14) Do you not agree that it is necessary as a journalist to invite all opinions and to challenge bigotry? Journalists – especially in the BBC – can do this.

I have worked for the BBC, and beginning with the BBC I can tell you this: the space of freedom that I am enjoying with Al Jazeera now is far bigger than the space of freedom with the BBC. But at the same time I have to say, in the same breathe, that I am most proud that I have worked for the BBC, and now I know what it means 'once the BBC, always the BBC', and I think I will always be a BBC and I owe a lot to them. But I can only remind you of the way our project – the BBC's project – unfortunately collapsed. No doubt that the BBC had every reason to keep the project on air, and it was for political reasons that in the end the Saudis told them to close it down. It hurt me as a journalist who was, and still is, and always has every respect for the BBC – and I knew it was beyond the BBC, that it was meant to be closed down. But by the way, when I used the word 'cuckoo' I was referring to something else – it was in the context of... and Al Jazeera has been criticised for many things, and that was one of them, that we would just offer our people, and there is a conspiracy that America and Israel have decided that Al Jazeera is bad news on the short run but on the long run it will act like keeping people busy by taking part in programmes on Al Jazeera so they will feel they have done their bit and won't bother us.. on the long run we are the masters of democracy and know how to do it in the end... this whole kind of thing I'm not interested in at all.

I don't think it is our right as journalists to tell people what to think. You are biased from the very first moment by deciding to cover this event rather than another event. That would be bigger than me, you are talking about higher levels of editorial policy – why is it that yesterday for instance most of the US networks started with the story that I wrote for the Sunday Times? Why isn't it as big here? Is there some kind of bias in the way each channel presented it? But I still stick by my own reading of the situation, that there is not a single media outlet that is completely free. The BBC perhaps at a certain point of time broke this rule, during the Suez canal crisis – and that is what made the BBC so trusted in our part of the world, because they stood up to the people who were paying their salaries and I hope that this situation can repeat itself. I doubt it because in the end we are human beings and we have to live within a certain context. As a journalist, I weigh things and if I work for BBC or CNN it would be the same. So long as you do it to the best of your knowledge, and you get your facts right, and you present them in a certain way, then fine. I can tell you, off the record, that I haven't seen any media outlet that's been put under such enormous pressure of intimidation as Al Jazeera. I get official emails from different governments discussing what words I use, and you have to answer people, and you have to live with the reality, but it's so complex.

15) Do you think there will be barriers to establishing Al Jazeera International when you are dealing with different places, different cultures?

If you ask me personally, I don't think there was need at all for Al Jazeera international – if you ask me, that's my personal opinion. I think you guys in the west have enough options. I think we still need more and more of Al Jazeera in Arabic, and I think I would have used the money differently. This is only my own personal opinion. It doesn't mean that I don't believe in the project of Al Jazeera International. I think it's still very good for people who can't understand Arabic, who'd like to get a smell of how those people cover their stories to start with, in a different way, and a different perspective of the world. And I do believe at least from a commercial point you can hardly go wrong with a project like this. There is niche out there for a black sheep. And I think they are going to be a kind of... but I don't envy them at all, and they have been put under enormous pressure, even before they launch, and there's been a huge expectation everywhere to the point that I think 'poor guys'. No matter how successful they are going to be, the first night that they launch everybody will say 'so, this is Al Jazeera International?'... no matter how successful they are going to be. Such is the expectation that... and even before the launch editorial pressure... so they will not go out as crusaders of the world. We would have been much better spending the money on Al Jazeera, but I do believe that Al Jazeera will always be the mother ship and the one that is really badly needed in our part of the world.