ANDREW MARR SHOW
DR MADELEINE ALBRIGHT, FORMER US SECRETARY OF STATE

ANDREW MARR: For several years, Madeleine Albright was the most powerful woman in the world. As Bill Clinton's Secretary of State, she was America's global power-broker. She was at the centre of attempts to find a solution to the Middle East conflict. And became the highest ranking US official to hold talks with the then North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il. When we met, Madeleine Albright told me how her own childhood fostered her fear of totalitarian leaders. And why she decided to write a book about our current times, entitled "Fascism: A Warning".

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT: Well, I was born in 1937 in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and in 1939 Hitler marched in with his forces and took over Czechoslovakia, and I, with my family, my father was a Czechoslovak diplomat, came to London, because he was with the government-in-exile. And I grew up kind of knowing that fascism had taken over the country where I was born. And later, much later in my life - I didn't really know this until 1996 – my Jewish background, and 26 members of my family died in the Holocaust.

AM: So it’s always been with you as a fear. There’s an implication in the title of this book and the way you describe President Trump that you fear America is kind of tiptoeing towards a new form of fascism.
MA: Well, it is literally described as a warning, and some people think that it’s alarmist. It’s supposed to be. And I am concerned about various steps and and.. kinds of things that are happening. Not only in the United States but around the world. I was going to write this book no matter who had gotten elected, because of certain aspects that I’ve seen in our societies, and I did want to warn.
AM: Because, let’s talk very plainly, there is a hint here or a suggestion that you think Trump is a fascist.

MA: No, I do not think he’s a fascist. I do think he is the most undemocratic President in modern American history, and that troubles me. And by the way, it’s not easy, as a former diplomat, too be in a foreign country and criticise one’s own President. But I am concerned.

AM: There is – there is another way of looking at this, which is that you have an idiosyncratic, outspoken, very popular President, a well-tried, long-tested democratic system which is robust and an opposition which simply doesn’t get it.

MA: Fascism is hard to define, by the way. But a fascist leader is somebody who identifies himself with one group, tribal of some kind, in order to really isolate and insulate the people that are disagreed with. Ultimately a fascist leader is somebody who uses violence to achieve what he wants. So I do not think that Trump is a fascist leader, but I think his attitude towards freedom of speech and the role of media and his disregard for institutions, that worries me.

ANDREW MARR: Clearly something very big is happening right around the world, where people are worried about – a lot about immigration. Do you not believe that actually lots and lots of ordinary working class voters or middle class voters, in the United States have a real worry about uncontrolled immigration, and those things were never dealt with, as it were, on your watch

MA: Well, let me just say that I believe every country has the right to make its immigration laws, and the United States on the whole has had fairly liberal immigration laws. I think also that in terms of numbers actually there’s plenty of room for people in the United States and there are a lot of companies that are now saying – and agricultural -

AM: You need them.
MA: That we need them. So I think that the part that I find totally offensive is the language that President Trump uses about the people that are coming in are infesting or invading America. That is truly ridiculous.

AM: The language. And given your own background, what did you feel when you saw those children in cages, children being separated from their families on the border?
MA: I thought it was un-American. I’ve never seen anything like that, and it does remind one of things that have happened in fascist countries. So I think it is very bad, I’m very troubled by it, and one of the things I’ve been asked now, what do I think about what’s happening in Europe, on the same issue? And I’ve said it makes it very hard for America to tell Europeans what to do if we can’t figure out how to be more humane ourselves.

AM: When it comes to Trump’s supporters, they say two things at the moment: he’s had some big successes on the foreign stage. I mean, he went to North Korea.. as you did. And he’s brought something back as you were unable to do. And when it comes to the trade issue, the language may be inflammatory but nonetheless he’s doing exactly what core American voters in the rust – rust belt wanted him to do. They want a punch-up about trade, they want a fight about trade, they went their jobs back.
MA: I think that on the North Korean issue, first of all I have no idea what he brought back. I’m very glad, I believe in diplomacy. I have been asked whether it was that summit in Singapore was a win-win or a Kim-win. It was a Kim-win. Because Kim was able to stand on the stage with the President of the United States, with flags arrayed as if they were equal. And so far we don’t know anything that’s come out of that beyond the fact that the exercises were cancelled. So I don’t think it was a win.

AM: And on the trade issue?
MA: On the trade issue, I — I don’t happen to believe in trade wars. I think what is interesting, there are already unintended consequences, and I pointed this out a couple of days ago. Harley Davidson, which is a really symbolic American company — I’ve been to the Harley Davidson factory...

AM: Have you ever been on one?

MA: I haven’t — I’ve been — on a stationary one, not a moving one. But the fact that it is now going to move out of America is very bad, and President Trump is mad and he’s now saying that they made terrible mistake and blaming them for things. But I think that we do not need to get into a tariff war. A lot of people have asked me how this compares to the thirties, that was when a tariff, the Smoot-Hawley tariff was put in. It was determined in the end that it was very damaging to the United States.

AM: And we had the Depression.
MS: As — yes.
AM: (inaudible)
MA: Yes, yeah.

AM: The mid-term elections are coming up quite soon. The Democrats have really got to get their act together. At the moment it looks like the Republicans are getting hold of almost every aspect of American government for a long time to come. That’s going to need a new kind of rhetoric and a new kind of politics from your party. Do you see any sign of that happening?

MA: Well, I think that what we are seeing is a great interest in people running. There are an awful lot of people, women, that, especially, that have signed up to run and are going to be running. I think it’s going to be a very important election and one that has a lot of things going. But we have to get our act together too.

AM: And one of them will have the huge job of taking on Donald J. Trump themselves at the next Presidential election, perhaps a
woman. Do you see a female candidate coming forward again to take him on?
MA: I – I don't know. There are a lot of people out there and you’re assuming that he will be around to be – be a candidate.

AM: Dr Albright, thank you very much indeed for talking to us..
MA: Thank you very much. Thank you.
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