

MA Defence: “Qatari Foreign Policy, Al-Jazeera, and Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa”

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Our dear colleague, Salameh Ayaad, successfully defended his MA thesis on November 27, 2014. Here is the abstract of his thesis “Qatari foreign Policy, Al-Jazeera, and revolution in the Middle East and North Africa”.

Abstract

This thesis examines the political, cultural, and socio-economic ramifications of Qatar’s assertive – yet at times contradictory – foreign policy ambitions in the Qatari, regional, and international spheres, since 1995. I draw particular attention to the commendable launching of the Al-Jazeera Media Network, the organization responsible for both Al-Jazeera and its English counterpart, and account for it as possibly the Qatari leadership’s most successful foreign policy initiative. The progressive, counter-hegemonic reputation eventually enjoyed by Al-Jazeera in the Middle East and beyond was primarily driven by the relatively autonomous and populist editorial policies distinguishing the channel from its counterparts in an Arab media landscape dominated by state-controlled elitist broadcasters. Whilst empathetic coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings may have been consistent with the channel’s populist approach to covering Arab affairs, my thesis maintains that such coverage is also congenial to Qatar’s foreign policy interests vis-à-vis the Arab Spring and obscures the underlying geopolitical motives driving Al-Jazeera’s seemingly revolutionary editorial policies. I use two major research strategies: (1) a quantitative analysis of data on the promotion of “Brand Qatar”, of which Al-Jazeera is a part and parcel, and (2) three country-specific case studies of the relationship between Qatar, Al-Jazeera, and the Arab uprisings comprising Tunisia, Libya, and Syria. Data was collected from academic journals and books, press reports, Al-Jazeera archives, and interviews. Popular ambiguity surrounding the relationship between Qatar, Al-Jazeera, and the organization’s championing of the Arab Spring has inhibited transparent and constructive debate on the geopolitical ramifications of Al-Jazeera’s coverage of events inside Tunisia, Libya, and Syria, thus indirectly leading to the deteriorating security situation being witnessed in the Arab world today, which runs counter to liberal-democratic reform. My thesis ultimately argues that Al-Jazeera’s journalistic ethos must be reformed in order to promote media democracy, liberal-democracy, and to contain the incessant growth of militant fundamentalism in the Arab World.

Keywords

Al-Jazeera; Arab Spring; Qatar; Geopolitics; Islamism; Revolution