

## Symposium Full Report | Al Jazeera at Fifteen Years

Prepared by | Jamal Abdullah - Sidi Ahmed - Yara Alnajjar - Hareth Adlouni



In collaboration with the [Centre for Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California](#) in the United States, [Al Jazeera Centre for Studies](#) organised a symposium entitled "Al Jazeera at Fifteen Years" on 31st October to 1st November 2011 at the Sheraton Hotel in Doha, Qatar as part of the Al Jazeera Network's Fifteenth anniversary celebration. Meanwhile, preparation and coordination of the symposium was overseen by Assistant Researcher Mariam Sharbash at Al Jazeera Centre for Studies.

Through research and discussion, the symposium addressed Al Jazeera's performance over the course of fifteen years by focusing on its coverage of major events and disasters of wars and revolutions, and its impact on Arab public opinion trends on Arab and international media. Major controversial issues were also reviewed and discussed on scientific and professional bases. The symposium discussed media

challenges facing Al Jazeera in the coming decade as well.

The symposium was attended by a group of experts, researchers and academics from within and outside the Arab world as well as the first prize winners of Al Jazeera's competition for young researchers, organised recently by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies in collaboration with Mass Communications Department at the University of Qatar. The event was also attended by a group of journalists and media professionals and researchers working at the various entities of Al Jazeera Network.

In its discussions, the symposium focused on four topics related to Al Jazeera's performance and explored its future role. The topics were as follows :

- Al Jazeera's coverage
- Al Jazeera's impact
- Critical visions
- Al Jazeera and the future of the media

The symposium was an opportunity to pose a number of questions about Al Jazeera's past, present and future. The Director General of Al Jazeera Network, Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani, stated in his opening speech that media professionals divide Arab media into two stages: the pre-Al Jazeera stage and the post-Al Jazeera stage. "How can we keep the compass direction of Al Jazeera pointing towards freedom and making sure it would not divert? And how can Al Jazeera prepare for a new stage?", he inquired. "If the media is covering events such as the Arab revolutions, for example, and these events have been predicted by study centres, then the question is how can we link a sound and influential relationship between traditional media and new media in light of the dynamic introduction of techniques of citizen journalism and new social media which are powerfully present in the newsroom, where news editors find it inevitable to adopt sources other than those of correspondents?", he carried on. He also questioned the credibility and loyalties of these sources to conclude that the symposium was organised by Al Jazeera Centre for Studies to answer most of these questions, through discussions and debates, taking into account various opinions and delving into the values that founded the Al Jazeera Network.



Al Jazeera Network Director General

It was a pause for review, criticism and the opening minds to change through presentations and discussions that were not limited to the cadres of Al Jazeera and their inside view, but included other researchers and media professionals of various orientations interested in Al Jazeera.



Director of Al Jazeera Center for Studies

Dr. Salah El-Zein, Director of Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, explained in his speech that the symposium, in the context of a complete series, was meant for the contemplation of the performance of Al Jazeera in the past decade and a half. He noted that what distinguishes the symposium is that it represents a space for the interaction of experts, researchers and interested parties with skills that contributed to the establishment of Al Jazeera, which will certainly benefit from the deliberations and recommendations drawn thereafter, and become a cognitive contribution to all of entire humanity. "In its fifteen-year career, Al Jazeera has not been busy highlighting itself as an institution, but rather focusing on performing its mission of presenting a true news story and providing a free platform for a variety of opinions. While doing so, however, it has not deviated as it became a phenomenon attracting the attention of interested researchers and experts worldwide, and should be benefitted from. The centre has prepared a guide on the

research that has been carried out on Al Jazeera, covering the period from 1996 to 2010, comprising over 200 academic works ranging from masters and doctoral theses to scientific books." This directory was launched on 1st November 2011 as part of the symposium proceedings.



Attendees at the opening session

### The First Session: Al Jazeera's Coverage

The first session of the symposium commenced under the title "Al Jazeera's Coverage" and was moderated by news and program presenter Mohamed Krishan, and included the following participants:

Dr. Mostafa Souag, Director of Al Jazeera Arabic, who presented a paper "Al Jazeera: Origin and Evolution"; Abdul Azim Mohammed, Al-Jazeera Bureau Chief in Tripoli, Libya, whose contribution encompassed "Al Jazeera's Coverage of the Wars"; Dr. Mohamed El-Moctar El-Shinqiti, Researcher at the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, who presented "Al Jazeera's Coverage of the Arab Revolutions"; Rima al-Baghdadi, journalist and news presenter, presented "Al Jazeera's Coverage of the Wars: Gaza as Model"; and Abdul Ghani Bouziane, Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities, University of Tebessa in Algeria, whose treatment was on

"The Use of Al Jazeera Programmes by Information and Communication Professors."

Al Jazeera emerged at the right time, when official media was dominant everywhere, and its government-biased coverage was the order of the day. Also, means of success, such as funding and highly qualified, professional cadres, have been provided to Al Jazeera. Perhaps some of the most prominent types of coverage that made Al Jazeera's name were the coverage of the wars on Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, as well as the Israeli wars against Lebanon and Gaza Strip in 2006 and 2008, respectively.



Participants of first session

Al Jazeera's recent coverage of the Arab revolutions has been distinct as it rendered these revolutions media events by conveying live broadcasts of demonstrations and political dispensations in more than one country and all at one time, thus making demonstrators more insistent on and confident in their demands. It managed to expose the tyranny of despots, and, thanks to its coverage, the voice of the revolution reached everywhere.

In its coverage of the Arab revolutions, Al Jazeera has been the link, albeit unintentionally, between the rebels in different directions of the same country or countries that have seen revolutions. It also

contributed during coverage, though inadvertently, to preserving the lives of many people, especially in Cairo's Tahrir Square, where the cameras were focused on the area and its surroundings, thus preventing the former Egyptian regime from targeting the demonstrators violently .

Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab revolutions has established values such as:

- Complete inclination toward peoples and their choices of emancipation
- The ability to find various internal news sources
- Ensuring a balanced coverage
- Empathy and coordination among satellite TV channels; when the voice of Al Jazeera was muted and its broadcasting was interrupted, many other channels volunteered to air its content.



Al Jazeera Journalists involved in the symposium

Perhaps one of the major challenges faced by Al Jazeera's news coverage concerned the language used. The terminology it uses is often questioned and described as bearing connotations (martyr, the State of Israel, martyr operations, etc.). Opting to use terminology with certain connotations is explained in the content of Al Jazeera's Code of Ethics, which is based on a set of principles and professional ethics.

Some regimes question the credibility and neutrality of Al Jazeera and accuse it of double standards in its coverage of news. These are accusations Al Jazeera has faced very often. However, by committing itself to its professionalism and its ongoing quest to achieve unlimited freedom of media, the network is able to face this challenge .

Among the challenges presented to Al Jazeera's coverage is the comprehensive challenge put forward by new media, and the necessity of dealing with this a new reality that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, Al Jazeera's successes and media superiority are another challenge, as Al Jazeera should avoid slacking off in its coverage and work, and being too proud of itself.

### **The Second Session: Al Jazeera's Impact**

The second session was chaired by Dr. Rafik Abdessalem, Head of Research at Al Jazeera Centre for Studies. He discussed the impact of Al Jazeera on the Arab and international media industry and public opinion .

The session engaged the following commentators:



Participants of second session

Dr. Ali Kinana, cultural and media researcher and expert at the Ministry of Culture in Qatar, whose presentation was entitled, "The Impact of Al Jazeera on the Arab and International Media Industry"

Dr. El Sadiq El Faqih, writer and political analyst specialised in media and international relations, who presented "The Impact of Al Jazeera on the Trends of Arab Public Opinion".

Dr. Abeer Al-Najjar, Dean of the Jordan Media Institute, who presented "Al Jazeera's Impact on the Trends of World Public Opinion"

Hala Darwish, Assistant Lecturer in the Faculty of Qualitative Education, University of Port Said, Egypt, whose contribution was "The impact of Al Jazeera News Programs on Intellectual Trends of the Arab youth"



Dr. Kinana during his input

According to Dr. Ali Kinana, Al Jazeera came out in the mid-nineties to both the rulers and the ruled with a new discourse addressing the conflict directly with the prevailing system of values divided into three levels: the system of values rooted in the media, the system of public values, and the system of collective consciousness that has been affected positively by what had happened to the previous levels; and thus, Al Jazeera "has contributed to opening new windows that brought in fresh, healthy, oxygen to the aspirations of new generations".

In the context of his discussion of the impact of Al Jazeera on the Arab and international media, Dr. Kinana classified the structure of

the impact according to three levels, each producing a greater impact than its predecessor :

- The first level is the ability of Al Jazeera to impact Arab and international media.
- One of the results of the first level is that, in the second level, Al Jazeera started to affect Arab and international events.
- The result from the two preceding levels was that in the third level, Al Jazeera has affected the collective consciousness.



Dr. Kinana concluded in his contribution that since its birth, Al Jazeera has been a major event that has reformulated the Arab media scene and influenced the entire Arab world. It started off from Baghdad and Afghanistan to compete with Western media and managed to influence global media to become a global event with considerable impact on media and events. Thanks to its unique vision and professionalism, Al Jazeera has served as an alternative to Western media, and was able to penetrate the collective consciousness of Western audiences to reproduce the image of the Arabs. Al Jazeera is not only the greatest Qatari achievement in modern history; it is also the greatest achievement in the Arab world and has impacted all Arabs. It is thus the first Arab penetration of Western collective consciousness in the modern era

into. Many researchers consider it one of the major phenomena in the world.

In her presentation, Dr. Abeer Al-Najjar concluded that credit goes to Al Jazeera English for the reduction of Anglo-American dominance of world news reports on various important global issues. Al Jazeera English has shown on its screen what is happening in many areas in Africa and Southeast Asia through television stations located in different parts of the world in addition to in-depth coverage of substantive issues related to environment, health, education and other fields. Moreover, the channel has broken the silence about tmain news that does not match the trivial news stories that dominate international media.



Dr. El Faqih during his input

Dr. El Sadiq El Faqih explained through his input that Al Jazeera has considerable influence on Arab public opinion, especially among advocates of change who gaze at the Arab public horizon, anticipating changes within their own countries for the sake of a well-disciplined lawful political life with mechanisms of monitoring, implementation, accountability and follow-up whose legitimacy is a matter of consensus among all.

Dr. El Faqih concluded that Al Jazeera has allowed freedom of expression, which

implies the request for and presentation of information, the possibility of questioning and inquiring, positive interaction with events, and the ability to express an opinion with courage without official or psychological oppressive contraindications. This matter, in his opinion, has paved the way for the possibility of discussing Arab public opinion, which is a crystallisation of the freedom of expression available in the Arab public sphere, in which views are almost consensual and are more expressive of the general orientation of Arab public opinion in the Arab world.

### The Third Session: A Critical Vision

Then, a third meeting was held under the title, "Al Jazeera: A Critical Vision", moderated by Dr. Mohamed Zayani, Visiting Assistant Professor at Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service in Qatar, and engaged the following commentators:



Participants of third session

Dr. Shawn Powers, an academic researcher specialising in international political communication, whose participation came under the title, "Al Jazeera between Professionalism and Propaganda".

Ibrahim Hilal, News Director at Al Jazeera Arabic, who discussed "Al Jazeera's Coverage of Controversial Issues"

Dr. Rima Najjar, Lecturer, Department of English, University of Jerusalem," whose presentation covered, "Al Jazeera's Coverage of the War on Gaza from a Palestinian Perspective"

Nourhan Abdel Baki, Assistant Regional Director for the World Health Organisation in Egypt, whose presentation was one of the winning researches at Al Jazeera's contest for young researchers, and a comparative study under the title, "Al Jazeera between Criticism and the Pursuit of Development and Reform".



Fifteen years is a short period of time in the lifecycle of any institution. Yet, it is an important period for institutional self-assessment. Thus, the symposium was an occasion for Al Jazeera Network to conduct self-criticism and look into the course of its performance and evolution, detect deficiencies that marred its performance, whether structural or periodical, envisage future challenges, and interact with and benefit from the positive aspects of its experience.

The points of evaluation that emanated from all the discussions during the symposium, both within and outside Al Jazeera Network, mostly agree that Al Jazeera Channel is controversial in terms of origin, history, development and coverage. In many cases, it

turns from a news carrier into news material. It has emerged to fill the vacuum in Arab media and was launched with a high ceiling of freedom and sheer professionalism. The importance of having a self-critical vision is necessitated by the fact that it not only carries out media work, but also affects Arab public opinion, individuals, institutions and regimes. Even its English version is reaching out to internationally influential circles. Al Jazeera's critical vision is thus linked to the network's commitment to the values and principles that it has set for itself in its Code of Ethics.

#### The Fourth Session: **Al Jazeera and the Future of Media**

On the second day of the symposium, the morning session was held under the title, "Al Jazeera and the Future of Media" and involved the following participants:



Participants of fourth session

Dr. Abdulaziz Al Horr, Director of Al Jazeera Centre for Training and Development and Director of the Office of Institutional Development in the Al Jazeera Network, who presented "Al Jazeera and the Challenges of the Next Decade"

Professor Philip Seib, Professor of Journalism and Public Diplomacy, Professor of

International Relations, and Director of the Center for Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California in the United States," who presented "The Media, Al Jazeera, and Public Diplomacy"

Mr. Mohamed Nanabhay, Editor of Al Jazeera's English website, who presented "The Future of Media in Light of the New Media Revolution"

Mr. Mustafa Badaoui, philosophy teacher and activist in the field of new media in Morocco, who presented "Al Jazeera and New Media"

This session was moderated by Dr. Liqaa Makki, Assistant Managing Editor of Al Jazeera Net.

Through its mere fifteen years of evolution, Al Jazeera has become a milestone in Arab media, as it has given Arab media a new framework and has become a reference through its reading of events. With the launch of its English version in 2006, Al Jazeera's scope has stretched around the world.



However, the development of the internet and means of social communication (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and so on) offered people new media content, in turn posing a new kind of challenge to media in general but Al Jazeera in particular. Consequently, there must be an answer to

the following question: How can Al Jazeera reach viewers? Media strategy concerned with the future of media should take into account the factor of new media.

### **The Final Session: Ideas and Visions for the Future**

The final session of the symposium, "Al Jazeera in Fifteen Years", came as a free round-table discussion in order to put forward useful ideas for the work of Al Jazeera Network and explore its future role. The meeting was moderated by Dr. Salah El-Zein, Director of Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, and involved the following commentators: Ahmed Sheikh, Dr. Abeer Najjar, Dr. Rima Najjar, Professor Philip Seib, and Khadija Ben Ganna.



During the round-table discussion, participants presented a set of ideas that can be adopted when planning future goals and visions of the Al Jazeera Network. The most important ideas that were addressed and proposed were:

- The establishment of a partnership and a kind of alliance between Al Jazeera Network and other Arab and international media outlets
- The encouragement of deeper interaction with revolting communities to gain their loyalty



•Reference to competition with local satellite television channels, especially after the victory of some Arab revolutions

There was a question regarding the level of awareness within the Al Jazeera Network. There was also talk of the emergence of the challenge of maintaining professional and ethical standards in it, as well as another call for the separation of news reporting from opinion or personal impression.

On the other hand, the presenters at the round-table discussion addressed a number of issues and presented a set of proposals, some of which should be noted. For example, Mr. Mohamad Abdulati, Junior Researcher at Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, proposed the establishment of a section at Al Jazeera Network to attend to the “needs” of Al Jazeera audiences and check on the extent of satisfaction regarding its performance in aims to enhance performance on scientific bases. He also proposed the establishment of a section that would serve as a link between the network and researchers who wish to study Al Jazeera as their research subject in order to facilitate the acquisition of appropriate information from its main sources.



## اليوم الأول | Day One

Session	Details	إلى To	من From	التفصيل	الفقرة
Opening Session	Introductory Remarks & Welcome Notes,	09:30	09:00	كلمات افتتاحية	جلسة الافتتاح
	Prize Handouts for Competition Winners			تكريم الفائزين بمسابقة الجزيرة للباحثين الشباب	
Chairperson: Mr. Mohamad Krichen رئيس الجلسة: أ. محمد كريشان					
First Session: Al Jazeera's Coverage	-Al Introductory Overview: Jazeera's Beginning & Development Dr. Mostefa Souag	11:30	09:30	مدخل تمهيدي: الجزيرة.. النشأة والتطور د. مصطفى سواق	الجلسة الأولى: تغطية الجزيرة
	Al Jazeera's Coverage of the Wars Mr. Abdul Adheem Mohamed			تغطية الجزيرة للحروب أ. عبد العظيم محمد	
	Al Jazeera's Coverage of the Arab Revolutions Dr. Mohamed El-Moctar			تغطية الجزيرة للثورات العربية د. محمد المختار الشنقيطي	
	Media Attention to Israeli Aggression on Gaza on Al Jazeera & Al Arabiya Ms. Reema Elbaghdadi			تغطية الجزيرة للحروب (غزة نموذجاً) أ. ريماء البغدادي	
	The Use of University Professors of Al Jazeera News Programs Mr. Abdelghani Bouziane			استخدام برامج الجزيرة من قبل أساتذة الإعلام والاتصال أ. عبد الغني بوزيان	
Break	12:00	11:30	استراحة		

## اليوم الأول | Day One

Session	Details	إلى To	من From	التفصيل	الفقرة
<b>Chairperson: Dr. Rafik Abdessalem</b> رئيس الجلسة: د. رفيق عبد السلام					
<b>Second Session: The Influence of Al Jazeera</b>	<b>The Influence of Al Jazeera on the Arab &amp; International Media</b> <b>Dr. Ali N. Kinana</b>	14:00	12:00	تأثير الجزيرة في منظومة الإعلام العربي والدولي د. علي كنانة	<b>الجلسة الثانية: تأثير الجزيرة</b>
	<b>The Influence of Al Jazeera on Arab Public Opinion</b> <b>Dr. El Sadig El Faqih</b>			تأثير الجزيرة في اتجاهات الرأي العام العربي د. الصادق الفقيه	
	<b>The Influence of Al Jazeera on Global Public Opinion on the Issues of Arabs and the South</b> <b>Dr. Abeer Al-Najjar</b>			تأثير الجزيرة في اتجاهات الرأي العام العالمي د. عبير النجار	
	<b>The Impact of Al Jazeera's News Programs on the Intellectualization of Arab Youth</b> <b>Ms. Hala Darwish</b>			أثر برامج الجزيرة الإخبارية على التوجهات الفكرية للشباب العربي أ. هالة درويش	
	<b>Lunch</b>	16:00	14:00	<b>الغداء</b>	
<b>Chairperson: Dr. Mohamad Zayani</b> رئيس الجلسة: د. محمد الزياتي					
<b>Third Session: Al Jazeera.. Critical Perspectives</b>	<b>Al Jazeera between Professionalism and Propaganda</b> <b>Dr. Shawn Powers</b>	18:00	16:00	الجزيرة بين الحرفية وممارسة الدعاية د. شون باورز	<b>الجلسة الثالثة: الجزيرة.. رؤى نقدية</b>
	<b>Al Jazeera's Coverage of Controversial Issues</b> <b>Mr. Ibrahim Helal</b>			تغطية الجزيرة للقضايا المثيرة للجدل أ. إبراهيم هلال	
	<b>Palestinian Perspective of How Al-Jazeera English Covered the Israeli Attack on Gaza</b> <b>Dr. Rima Najjar Merriman</b>			تغطية الجزيرة للحرب على غزة من منظور فلسطيني د. ريم النجار	
	<b>Al Jazeera Amidst Criticism, Development and Reform</b> <b>Ms. Norhan Abdelbaki Ahmed</b>			الجزيرة بين النقد والسعي إلى التطوير والإصلاح أ. نورهان عبد الباقي	

## اليوم الثاني | Day Two

Session	Details	إلى To	من From	التفصيل	الفقرة
<b>Chairperson: Dr. Liqaa Maki</b> رئيس الجلسة: د. لقاء مكي					
<b>Fourth Session: Al Jazeera and the Future of Media</b>	<b>Al Jazeera and the Challenges of the Next Decade</b> <b>Dr. Abdulaziz Al Horr</b>	11:00	09:00	الجزيرة وتحديات العشرية القادمة د. عبد العزيز الحر	<b>الجلسة الرابعة: الجزيرة ومستقبل الإعلام</b>
	<b>The Media, Al Jazeera and Public Diplomacy</b> <b>Prof. Philip Seib</b>			الإعلام، الجزيرة، والدبلوماسية العامة أ. د. فيليب سيب	
	<b>Media Amplifications; between Social Networks and Mass Media</b> <b>Mr. Mohamad Nanabhay</b>			مستقبل الإعلام في ضوء ثورة الإعلام الجديد أ. محمد ناناباي	
	<b>Al Jazeera and New Media</b> <b>Mr. Mustafa Badaoui</b>			الجزيرة والإعلام الجديد أ. مصطفى بادوي	
<b>The Launch of the Academic Research on Al Jazeera</b>		11:30	11:00	إطلاق دليل البحوث الأكاديمية حول الجزيرة	
<b>Break</b>		12:00	11:30	استراحة	
<b>Chairperson: Dr. Salah Eddin ElZein</b> رئيس الجلسة: د. صلاح الدين الزين					
<b>Closing Session</b>	<b>Round Table Discussion and Concluding Remarks</b>	14:00	12:00	مائدة مستديرة للنقاش الحر وملاحظات ختامية	<b>الجلسة الختامية</b>
<b>Lunch</b>		16:00	14:00	الغداء	