

Qatari Foreign Policy, Al-Jazeera, and Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa

by

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Abstract

Popular ambiguity surrounding the relationship between Qatar, Al-Jazeera, and the latter 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.

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.

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

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Introduction

This thesis is a geo-political case study with a specific focus on the dynamic relationship between centres of power and media. I argue that ever since a bloodless coup that brought Qatar's former leader Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani (SHBK) to power in 1995, Qatar, buttressed by the Al-Jazeera Media Network, the current body responsible for governing the operations of both the Al-Jazeera and Al-Jazeera English channels, has, with relative success, sought to play a dominant role in the Arab world. My thesis will demonstrate how Qatar has rendered this ambitious endeavour a reality through the projection of "Brand Qatar" (Morris, 2012, pg. 26), adapting its foreign policy to shifting geopolitical realities in the Middle East, mobilizing the Al-Jazeera Media Network in the service of its foreign policy aims vis-à-vis the current Syrian civil war, and attempting to shape the contours of the currently shifting geopolitical landscape in the Middle East and North Africa region, which will henceforth be referred to as the "MENA". A reoccurring theme throughout my thesis will concern the manner in which the Al-Jazeera Media Network's widely-perceived editorial independence has been compromised by the mobilization of the Al-Jazeera news channel in the pursuit of Qatar's foreign policy ambitions.

Chapter One will provide a historical overview based on academic literature of the Qatari government's geopolitical ambitions vis-à-vis the MENA region. A tiny country of no more than two million people, with less than a quarter of this number being actual citizens, Qatar has nevertheless established itself as a regional force to be reckoned with. Such clout is undoubtedly due to it boasting the world's third-largest proven natural gas reserves (Peterson, 2006, pg. 732)¹. More importantly, by forging close ties with the

¹ This figure is debatable with some estimates suggesting Qatar has the world's second-largest gas reserves.

United States of America, and by mediating regional conflicts, a country that at the beginning of the 20th century was nothing more than a small desert township centered on pearl diving in the Persian Gulf (Crystal, 1990, pg. 5) has found itself strategically positioned to play a, if not the, leading role in the future of the MENA region. Qatar has been hosting the headquarters (Al-Udeid Air Base) of the United States Military's Central Command since 2002, effectively providing the U.S. military with the logistical support necessary to maintain its military supremacy in the Middle East and Central Asia (Larrabee, 2002). Whilst this disparate relationship may be viewed as a classic case of the imposing presence of U.S. military might, it must be noted here that the U.S. military presence in Qatar affords Qatar's rulers strategic leverage over militarily more powerful neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. With its security guaranteed, at least to some degree, by the mere presence of the most powerful military in the world on its soil, Qatar's rulers have had ample opportunity to invest their financial and political resources into orchestrating diplomatic overtures aimed at earning regional credibility amongst Arab governments, and, significantly, contain Saudi Arabian influence in the region, (Khatib, 2013, p. 420) in the pursuit of its effort to lead the MENA.

The second chapter, composed of two subsections, will study the manner in which the Qatari leadership had adapted to the pro-democracy "Arab Spring" protests, and describes how Al-Jazeera provided an outlet to, and influenced the, revolutionary trends that drove the protests in Tunisia and Libya. My evaluation of Al-Jazeera's Arab Spring coverage will be based on interview data, and on the arguably correlative relationship between Al-Jazeera, the political outcomes of Tunisia's *Jasmine* Revolution and the Libyan rebellion, and Qatar's foreign policy objectives. Possibly Qatar's most successful diplomatic overture was its embracing of the Arab Spring protests, an anomaly considering the lack of political freedoms in the monarchical state. In this instance, Qatar utilised Al-Jazeera to influence the political outcomes of the Arab Spring protests. Such influence was most evident in the extensive and sympathetic coverage of the protests in Tunisia, and the armed insurrection in Libya, afforded by Al-Jazeera during the Arab Spring. Whilst one may plausibly argue that Al-Jazeera's coverage reflected its status as an alternative, populist news broadcaster, it is important to highlight here that Al-Jazeera's overwhelmingly supportive coverage of the Tunisian

revolution and the Libyan insurrection had been consistent with Qatari foreign policy interests. Moreover, I will speculate that the encroaching power enjoyed by pro-Qatari Islamist parties in the abovementioned countries following the Arab Spring may have been a direct result of an institutional pro-Islamist bias within the Al-Jazeera Media Network. At this juncture, it is of paramount importance to underline that my usage of the terms “Al-Jazeera Media Network” and “Al-Jazeera” will refer exclusively to Al-Jazeera’s Arabic-language channel. I will refer to Al-Jazeera’s English-language channel as simply “Al-Jazeera English”. The terms “Al-Jazeera’s Arabic language channel” will only be used when discussing the latter channel in relation to its English-language counterpart on pg. 29. Unless stated otherwise, all arguments in this thesis will concern Al-Jazeera’s Arabic-language channel.

The first subsection of Chapter Two, that dealing with the role played by Al-Jazeera in promoting Qatar’s regional interests, will be primarily based on academic literature relevant to the topic. The second subsection will rely mostly on academic material discussing Al-Jazeera’s mediation of the Qatari relationship with the post-Arab Spring governments, and will focus primarily on Al-Jazeera’s status as a vehicle of Qatari soft power.

Chapter Two will address how Al-Jazeera’s purportedly independent editorial policies may have been co-opted by Qatari soft-power; it will also scrutinize the perception of Al-Jazeera as a progressive alternative news broadcaster. In order to do so, I intend to provide a brief historical overview of Al-Jazeera’s creation that will demonstrate the channel’s status as a vehicle for Qatari public diplomacy, in similar fashion to how the BBC promotes the United Kingdom’s interests, and the implications this status has for Qatari foreign policy. How Al-Jazeera is both funded and directed will be brought to light in this chapter, in a fashion that critically assesses its ostensibly independent character. Such an assessment of Al-Jazeera, which is central to this thesis, will address what I believe to be the channel’s paradox: How has a channel that was launched by, and continues to receive the bulk of its funding from a pro-US, conservative Persian Gulf monarchy achieved a status as an alternative and counterhegemonic news broadcaster in the English-speaking World?

Chapter Three will focus on the militant Sunni-Islamist dimension of the Syrian revolution emanating from the relationship between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. I will also conduct an informal qualitative content analysis of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 21st of August, 2013, Ghouta chemical attack during the Syrian Civil War, and argue that the channel's heavily biased coverage in favour of Syria's armed opposition exemplifies its gravitation toward the Qatari leadership's vested interest in the removal of President Bashar Al-Assad's regime. This informal qualitative content analysis has been conducted by analysing televisual reports related to the Ghouta chemical attack within an eight-day period extending from the 21st of August, 2013, the day of the attack, to the 29th of August, 2013. My qualitative content analysis will illustrate the pro-rebel sentiment inherent in the linguistic and visual devices employed by Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Syrian conflict, borrowing heavily from scholarly work in media studies concerning the underlying ideological structures of journalistic practices and editorial policies. I will also situate the sentimental tone of this coverage in comparative relation to journalistic norms – i.e. accuracy, impartial sourcing, and value-free reporting. Conducting my qualitative content analysis was a task facilitated by Al-Jazeera's chronological database of televisual news reports and analyses that can be easily accessed through the channel's website and YouTube.

Chapter Three will also contextualise Qatar's geopolitical policies, its mobilization of Al-Jazeera, and the news broadcaster's portrayal of the Syrian crisis, within the discursive framework of Russian and Iranian geostrategic considerations, and the destructive dynamics of politicized religious sectarianism in the MENA. Chapter Three will rely heavily on published academic work discussing the social, economic, and political background of the Syrian Civil War, the geopolitical and security ramifications of Qatari support for Syria's armed insurrection, and the extremist nature of those groups leading the rebellion against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. More importantly, Chapter Three will demonstrate how Qatari involvement in the Syrian Civil War impacts the work ethos of Al-Jazeera's former and current journalists and enfeebles the channel's editorial independence by addressing high-profile resignations from the organization, shedding light on the restrictive nature of Qatari labour laws vis-à-vis Al-Jazeera's employees, scrutinizing the resignation of its former Director General Wadah

Khanfar and the events following it, and shedding light on the domineering influence of foreign policy considerations on Al-Jazeera's independence.

In Chapter Three, I seek to establish a parallel between Qatar's foreign policy ambitions, its anomalous embracing of the Islamist tendencies of the Arab Spring whilst maintaining a strong strategic relationship with Western powers, Al-Jazeera's editorial support for Syria's armed opposition, and finally link these three factors to the geopolitical order evolving in the Middle East and North Africa. I intend to account for the Middle East as one of the epicentres of the changing global geopolitical order. The Syrian crisis, I argue, is microcosmic of the manifestly sectarian conflict between Shiite Iran and its Sunni, Arab neighbours. Al-Jazeera's pro-rebel narrative of the Syrian Civil War obscures international and regional consciousness of how military, media, and diplomatic support for Syria's armed rebels threatens world peace and stability.

In my conclusion, I advocate the need for further communications research on the shaping of news discourse by cultural, religious, and political forces in order to advance future knowledge of the social, political, and economic environment in which the relationship between Qatar and Al-Jazeera exists. Such research, I also argue, should primarily focus on the overbearing strategic considerations that stifle Middle Eastern political freedoms in general, and media freedoms in particular.

Chapter 1.

Qatar: Rising from the Ashes

Stretching from the West African shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the western shore of the world's largest energy basin, the Persian Gulf, and historically the main gateway between Africa, Europe, and Asia, the MENA region has, not surprisingly, since time immemorial been an arena of power politics. The Muslim Conquests carried out by Bedouin tribes originating from the Arabian Peninsula that began in the 7th Century that heralded the introduction of Islam as both a religion and a social system on eventually Islamized peoples marked the first time in history a pan-Arab, pan-Islamic entity had established itself as a centre of power exercising sovereignty over geographical regions beyond the Arabian Peninsula. A polity encompassing the Iberian Peninsula, Northern Africa, and much of Central Asia; the Muslim Empire, or Muslim Caliphate, is attested to by historians as constituting the largest pre-Modern empire in documented history (Hourani, 1991). What is more important, at least for the purpose of this study, is that the six successive sovereign dynasties (the Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk) that respectively exercised power over this vast geopolitical entity between AD 632 and 1517 were ethnically Arab (Hourani, 1991).

The fall of the Mamluk Caliphate to the Turkish Ottomans in 1517 seemingly marked the end of the Arabs' role in power politics, and the Arabs soon found themselves submerged in the yoke of Turkish imperialism (Har-El, 1995). Ottoman domination of the Arab world ended with the Ottoman Empire's dissolution following the defeat of the Axis Powers in World War I (WWI). What followed was the partitioning of the Arab Levant and the Arabian Peninsula by the United Kingdom and Colonial France with the signing of the Anglo-Franco Asia Minor Agreement on the 16th of May, 1916. Lebanon and Syria fell under France's neo-colonial protectorate system. Palestine,

Jordan, Yemen, and the various oil states of the Persian Gulf, although purportedly autonomous states according to the wording of the 1916 agreement, were nevertheless placed under the authority of the British Residency of the Persian Gulf, a Colonial Subdivision of the British Empire (Fildis, 2011)². The Asia Minor Agreement between Britain and France had not applied to North Africa, however. The Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa had capitulated to European colonial rule much earlier as the Ottoman Empire was gradually disintegrating. Between 1830 and 1912, France had succeeded in colonizing present-day Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. As early as 1882, Egypt, which then included present-day Sudan, was annexed by the British Empire. Libya was surrendered to Imperial Italy following the Ottoman defeat resulting from the Italo-Turkish War in 1912 (Naylor, 2009). Virtually all of the modern-day Asiatic and North African Arab states, with the exception of Palestine, had gained full independence by the mid-1960s (Hourani, 1991).

The Cold War (1949-1991) was marked by a long, protracted struggle between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for influence in the MENA, and throughout the world. Of course, the factors contributing to the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the Cold War is a matter of historical debate outside of the purview of this thesis. Yet there exists an abundance of historical evidence attesting to the end of Soviet influence, and the emergence of the U.S. as the dominant superpower in the MENA and the much wider Muslim World, as resulting from three main factors: the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 (Dibb, 2010), the U.S.-led expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1990, and the ultimate internal dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Krauthammer, 2002). The United States' ability to unilaterally invade Iraq in 2003 and militarily overthrow a sovereign dictator outside of the legal framework of the United Nations reaffirmed its status as the primary hegemon of the region (Zunes, 2009), and the extent of the United States' political and military supremacy in the Arab world remains unparalleled, although not unchallenged (Nuruzzaman, 2006, pg. 246), till this very day.

This brief, yet telling historical trajectory illustrates the development of power politics in the Middle East, and how it evolved from an essentially Arab affair to one dominated by foreign powers. Significantly, it also illustrates the tumultuous political and geostrategic backdrop against which Qatar's emergence as a regional player must be gauged, and thus worthy of study and attention. Essentially, Qatar's ambition to lead and consolidate a region that for the past 500 years has been dominated by much larger Western powers may be an attempt to resuscitate a certain pan-Arab Islamism of the type witnessed during the "Golden Age of Islam" (Hourani, 1991). However, it may also be argued Qatari leadership of a new 'Golden Age of Islam may be dependent on U.S. hegemony.

1.1. Qatar takes to the Airwaves

Although Qatar's status as the primary regional power broker never truly crystallized until 2006, efforts to establish itself as the diplomatic leader of the Arab world began in earnest as early as 1995. It was in that year that the former ruler, or Emir, of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (SHBK), who recently relinquished his leadership of Qatar in favour of his son Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (STBK) on the 25th of June, 2013, overthrew his father in a bloodless coup. SHBK was apparently fraught with misgivings about his father's political and economic management of the country, in addition to the latter's inability to alleviate Qatar of overbearing Saudi influence – a trend that had proven to be a thorn in Qatar's side for more than a century (Khatib, 2013, pg. 418).

Indeed, SHBK had proven himself to be an ambitious leader determined to transform his tiny, oil and gas-rich country into an international political and commercial hub. His initial move to put Qatar on the world map was his government's launching of the Arabic-language *Al-Jazeera* (The Peninsula) *Space Channel* in November, 1996. The initial loan of 157 million USD provided to the organization by SHBK's government was intended to financially sustain it for the first 5 years of its existence in anticipation of what was expected to be its impending privatization (Zayani, 2005, pg.16), however the

substantial funding from the Qatari government continues to this very day for reasons that will be discussed later here.

Al-Jazeera's original cadre of employees following its 1996 creation was, interestingly, made up of the former employees of a joint venture between the Saudi-owned Orbit Communications Company and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to launch a BBC television and radio service in the Arabic language. A BBC Arabic radio and television service was successfully launched much later in 2007, but the original attempt to do so in 1996 ended acrimoniously when the Orbit Communications Company and its Saudi backers cut funding to the BBC's initial Arabic language service in protest at a *Panorama* episode entitled *Death of a Principle* that was aired on the 21st of April, 1996, highlighting Saudi Arabia's dismal human rights record – specifically its utilization of beheadings as a form of execution.

Yet the similarities between the BBC and Al-Jazeera does not only lie in the makeup of the latter's original pioneering cadre; much like the BBC World Service's role as a media platform for UK foreign policy, Al-Jazeera is also a public corporation (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 43), and, to all intents and purposes, is Qatar's primary media outlet to the outside world (El-Oifi, 2005, pg. 66-79). However, one should not account for Al-Jazeera as Qatar's most popular television broadcaster. According to Hugh Miles, Qatar's de-facto domestic state broadcaster is Qatar Television (QTV), although this latter claim is disputable. Tasked with the reporting of mundane domestic issues, QTV, Miles claims, is the most-watched television network in the country, not the internationally-renowned Al-Jazeera Media Network. Despite "the lacklustre appearance of a lot of its programming as an unreconstructed Arab state broadcaster...QTV is still widely viewed by Qataris, as well as by other Arabic-speakers inside Qatar" (Miles, 2013, pg. 43), as a source of news concerning Qatar.

Dr. Ali Al-Hail, a consultant to the Qatar Media Corporation, stresses the indifference of many within Qatar toward Al-Jazeera when he writes: "Qataris, especially in the media, feel alien to Al Jazeera – they don't feel it is a Qatari production. This is a legitimate feeling" (as cited in Miles, 2013, pg. 44). The alienation harboured by many

Qataris is possibly due to the reality that an overwhelming majority of Al-Jazeera's staff are non-Qataris. Nevertheless, the deemed importance of Al-Jazeera to SHBK's efforts to present his country to the world at QTV's expense is glaringly apparent in light of the fact that several of QTV's entertainment channels have had to outsource the production of soap operas to independent producers, whilst Al-Jazeera continues to receive two billion USD from the Qatari government annually (Miles, 2013, pg. 44-45).

Experts have particularly noted how Al-Jazeera's launch was preceded by SHBK's dissolution of Qatar's Ministry of Information, the main official body responsible for media censorship in Qatar, as part of a package of domestic democratic reforms, and have described SHBK's bold foray into the international media landscape as an attempt to assert Qatar's democratic distinctiveness in relation to its less-democratic Persian Gulf neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia. Media scholar Tarek Cherkaoui characterizes all of the above factors as constituting the "geopolitical rationale which allowed Qatar to develop a distinctive international media presence and to become a player in the international community". It has also been argued that the freedom and open debate exhibited by Al-Jazeera's news and political programmes, especially its talk-shows, is a televisual reflection of Qatari diplomacy and mediation efforts (Cherkaoui, 2014, pg. 17).

1.2. Shuttle Diplomacy and Peacemaking

With Qatar's ability, strengthened by Al-Jazeera, to gain influence and attention in an increasingly globalized and multilateral – as far as power politics are concerned – world, its rulers had since 1996 moved to inject further impetus into Qatari soft power (Nye, 1990) by mediating the various conflicts ravaging the Middle East. This hallmark of Qatari diplomacy has been embodied by Qatar's Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamad bin Jaber Al-Thani (SHBJ), a charismatic Al-Thani scion whose illustrious international portfolio, which ended with his June, 2013, resignation, has rendered his diplomatic significance second only to that of SHBK. In this respect, not surprisingly, Qatar's exorbitantly vast natural gas reserves has enabled it to embark on what Persian

Gulf history expert Allan Fromherz terms a “diplomacy of stealth and wealth” (2012, pg. 86).

In 2003 Qatar demonstrated its diplomatic value to its neighbours when it finalized an agreement between Libya, the United States, and the United Kingdom that many observers credit with scrapping slain Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Al-Qaddafi’s then much-feared nuclear weapons programme, thus successfully ending Libya’s status as a pariah state. SHBJ also attempted to prevent the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq by asking former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to cede his authority in exchange for political asylum in Qatar. More still, Qatari diplomacy encroached on Egypt’s traditional role as the primary arbiter of the various Palestinian political factions by attempting to mediate a deal between rivals Hamas and Fatah. Although the latter effort proved futile when Hamas forcefully uprooted Fatah from the Gaza Strip later in June, 2007, and effectively ended the Palestinian Authority’s jurisdiction over the impoverished city, Doha’s ambitious efforts, which even broached the prospect of an implicit recognition of Israel by Hamas, did not go unnoticed – especially by its Arab counterparts. Former Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Aboul-Gheit even accused SHBJ of ‘exploiting the blood of the Palestinians to score political gains’, as the “Palestinians recognized the importance of Qatar’s involvement” (as cited in Fromherz, 2012, pg. 88). Lebanon was also witness to Qatar’s robust negotiation skills; political observers have hailed the success of the Doha Agreement, which was concluded on the 20th of May, 2008, much to the dismay of Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic credibility, in reconciling Lebanon’s warring political factions and arranging for the election of former President Michel Suleiman – ultimately ending the 18-month political stalemate in the country. Qatar yet again challenged Egypt’s strategic standing in the region, this time in Sudan, which Egypt long considered its very own backyard, when Qatar actively attempted to involve itself in peace talks between North and South Sudan (Fromherz, 2012, pg. 90).

The above outline contains only some of Qatar’s diplomatic maneuverings. Whilst shuttle diplomacy of this sort may simply be underestimated as nothing more than robust neutrality, with Qatar being a disinterested neutral negotiator, these overtures are by no means an outburst of altruism. Conflict resolution and the popular goodwill it

cultivates with state and non-state actors has provided the seventy billion USD Qatar Investment Authority with numerous investment opportunities, such as reconstruction projects in war-torn Lebanon following the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war in that country, which allow Qatar's leadership to simultaneously enhance its regional standing and promote Qatari business interests. Lina Khatib identifies Qatar's desire "to contain those conflicts and prevent their spreading closer to home" (2013, pg. 418) as the primary motivation behind Qatar's peace diplomacy. Mediating regional conflicts has also earned a reputation for Qatar – one that would be disputed as we shall learn later in this thesis – as a neutral mediator in a region rife with conflictual and conniving political calculations (Kamrava, 2013, pg. 63).

As far as this analysis is concerned, Qatar's negotiation record demonstrates two significant strengths of Qatar's strategic edge, enabling it to have "risen in less than two decades to become one of the leading regional actors in the international relations of the Middle East" (Khatib, 2013, pg. 417). The initial strength demonstrated is that of Qatar's financial clout. Qatar's ability to mediate conflicts would undoubtedly be impossible without the financial incentives it has been able to commit to rival parties when pushing for reconciliation of some sort. The amount of seemingly disposable money enjoyed by Qatari mediators was emphasized quite crudely when the International Crisis Group described Doha's mediation strategy in the late 2009 Yemeni conflict as "throwing money at a problem, hoping it would disappear" (International Crisis Group, 2009). Also, due to its success at the negotiating table, this tiny 11,571 km² country with a population of just over 2 million has attested to the ability of soft power, as opposed to conventional military power, to alter the contours of the Middle Eastern arena by challenging the diplomatic strength of regional giants Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Peterson, 2006).

Political pundits ascribe the swiftness of Qatari peacemaking to a void created by Arab states' indifference to assuming a more proactive role in managing regional affairs – a void Qatar's rulers are willing to fill (Peterson, 2006). The collective failure of the Arab League to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exemplifies such lethargy. Another, yet more subtle reason that explains the unabated nature of Doha's mediation efforts boils down to a very simple fact: Qatar is ruled by a monarchy in which major

foreign policy decisions can only be made by the country's Emir (Fromherz, 2011, pg. 126), currently Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (STBH), and the aligned Qatari plutocracy, whose respective executive powers preponderate over the countervailing influence of both legislative and judicial authority.

Of course, the democratic credentials of both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are nowhere near dazzling and both polities lack a traditionally institutionalized division of legislative, judicial, and, ultimately, executive powers. This is especially the case in Saudi Arabia, which, in contrast to Egypt's rich, albeit at times manipulated history of legislative politics, is a tribal monarchy. However, unlike Egypt and Saudi Arabia, both of which boast populations of 80.7 million and 28.2 million people respectively, Qatar's rulers have succeeded in securing the complacency of their citizens, especially public and civil servants, by providing them with the highest quality of life in the world. That Qatari citizens are "floating comfortably on a per capita income estimated at well over \$400,000 a year" (Hounshell, 2012, pg. 3), according to 2012 estimates, by virtue of vast natural gas reserves that show no signs of depletion in the near future, has spared the country the domestic upheavals that have affected virtually every country in the MENA region resulting from the Arab Spring.

The presence of 1.8 million foreign workers – 89% of the domestic workforce – who occupy every aspect of the economy (Fromherz, 2012) yet are deprived of any political rights, let alone the right to reside in the country permanently irrespective of how long they live there, means that Qataris do not have to engage in menial labour, and can rely on a largely disposable and disenfranchised workforce to do it for them. What is more important, with regard to the longevity of the Qatari leadership, is that the presence of these workers has prevented the emergence of an indigenous working class capable of delegitimizing the Qatari leadership, thus inadvertently perpetuating the complacency of Qataris toward monarchical rule, albeit of a relatively generous and benign form.

1.3. Cultivating Culture; Cultivating Power

The benign nature of Qatari monarchical rule has manifested itself within the academic realms of Qatari society as well, and is illustrated most prominently by Education City – a collection of education projects that is reportedly worth thirty-five to forty billion USD. The project is financially supported by the Qatar Foundation, an official, non-profit organization established in Doha, Qatar in 1995 as part of SHBK's package of reforms, and led by the current ruler's mother, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned (SMBN), and aims to “support Qatar on its journey from a carbon economy to a knowledge economy by unlocking human potential” (Verjee1& Robertson-Malt, 2013, pg. 4). Education City is a remarkably ambitious project that currently hosts satellite campuses from the English-speaking world's most renowned universities, including Cornell University, Northwestern University, Texas A&M University, and Georgetown University (Fromherz, 2012).

The apparent value of such an immense constellation of academic institutions can be discussed at great length; Education City's value lies not in how it serves Qatari academia, nor in capital accumulation, but rather how it serves Qatari diplomacy. By creating a Qatari intelligentsia and hosting such a vast research hub with the best Western academia has to offer, Qatar's rulers are aiming to engender a nascent, educated class strategically positioned to wield soft power well beyond Qatar's borders (Fromherz. 2012, pg. 10). According to Tantum Collins, “Education City aims for education what Al Jazeera did for media: achieve unparalleled quality and a global brand, matching or exceeding what the West has to offer, while remaining culturally rooted in the Middle East” (Collins, 2013, para. 23).

With culture representing one of three aspects of soft power envisioned by Joseph Nye (Nye, 1990, pg. 166-7), in addition to political values and foreign policies, Qatar has spared no effort in using its wealth to promote its coveted status as an athletics hub, too. On the 2nd December, 2010, Qatar learned it will become the first MENA country to host a World Cup, the most popular sporting event in the world (Scharfenort, 2012, pg. 209). Qatar's financial power may have been a major factor in

promoting the Qatar Brand throughout the World Cup bid process, I argue, as the volume of investment required for the tournament, if we are to use the recent 2014 World Cup in Brazil as a guide, can near twelve billion USD (Rapoza, 2014).

The decision made by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the main body that regulates international football, to award the tournament to Qatar is marred with widely-reported accusations suggesting Qatar had parlayed its financial clout – including bribery – when securing the bid. Although these allegations remain unsubstantiated (Scharfenort, 2012, pg. 210), they deserve more scrutiny for a variety of reasons, not least because of the health risks posed to participating athletes in the summer climate where the average temperature in Qatar during June-July, the two months in which the World Cup usually takes place, can exceed forty-five degrees Celsius. FIFA's decision to grant the World Cup to Qatar also contradicts its commitment to not discriminate on the basis of gender, religion, or race: homosexuality is illegal in Qatar. Also, the conservative nature of Qatar's liquor laws means that spectators may not be able to enjoy the time-honoured World Cup tradition of drinking alcohol at stadiums (Scharfenort, 2012, pg. 225-6). All of these factors present a convincing case that Qatar may have been exempted from *at least* some of the conditions required of any World Cup-hosting country.

Qatar's successful World Cup bid may accrue a significant human cost, too, particularly at the expense of the large number of Southeast Asian construction workers recruited to build the 2022 World Cup infrastructure, which lies at the heart of Qatar's aim to transform the country into an economic and cultural hub (Kamrava, 2013). An Amnesty International report on the plight of manual labourers involved in Qatar's infrastructure projects details how they are confronted with "not being paid for six or nine months; not being able to get out of the country; not having enough – or any – food; and being housed in very poor accommodation with poor sanitation, or no electricity" (Amnesty International, 2013, pg. 6). According to information compiled by the various embassies representing the home countries of these workers and Amnesty International, more than 1000 work-related deaths had occurred in Qatari construction sites in 2012 alone (Devi, 2014, pg. 1709). If we calculate this figure on a daily basis and at an annual

rate, we may deduce that in 2012 three work-related deaths occurred every single day at Qatari construction sites! Representatives of The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) investigating construction sites linked to the 2022 World Cup reported “poor migrant workers living in squalor, (who) are forced to work long hours in unbelievable heat six days a week...(And) kept in an apartheid situation (where) they are dying in unprecedented numbers” (ITUC, 2014, pg. 4).

Qatar’s Human Rights Committee, known for its pro-government outlook, was quoted as saying: “If we look at the numbers of Qataris who died...of natural causes...over the past two years, we see that numbers of deaths among the Indian community are normal” (ITUC, 2014, pg. 19). Although the latter statement suggests that the claims made by Amnesty International and UTIC are subjective, they must be scrutinized in light of the internationally acknowledged human rights abuses inflicted on the tens of thousands of migrant workers employed by Qatar’s construction sector. Their dire living and working conditions are generally representative of the disenfranchised and desperate status of Southeast Asian labourers working in the six member states that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman.

Despite the exponential economic growth rates of countries such as India and the Philippines, for example, the economies of the Southeast Asian countries from where these construction workers originate remain the world’s most overseas remittance-dependent economies in the world. National trade deficits combined with depreciated currencies only exacerbate their dependency on overseas remittances, which have proven to be substantial sources of investment made possible thanks to the hard work of migrant labourers in Qatar, amongst other Persian Gulf countries. According to the Qatar-based, English-language daily *Gulf Times*, remittances deriving from Qatar, the largest portion of which most likely flowed into Southeast Asian economies, exceeded 13.8 billion USD in 2013 alone (John, 2014). The importance of these remittance corridors to the economies of Southeast Asia may explain the perpetuation of the dismal working and living conditions migrant construction labourers

in Qatar have to contend with, and why “foreign embassies in Qatar are forced to keep quiet about the mass deaths of their citizens” (ITUC, 2014, pg. 4).

If these working conditions persist, then, based on official Qatari estimates indicating that the country will need the manpower of no less than 500,000 labourers to prepare the infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup (ITUC, 2014, pg. 6), significantly more work-related deaths can be expected. FIFA will have to grapple with the reality that the upcoming tournament in Qatar will be built on the exploited menial labour of an army composed of the enfeebled, vulnerable nodes of transnational remittance corridors that are characteristic of capitalism in the developing world. These remittance corridors not only sustain the livelihoods of these workers and their families, they also sustain the stability of the GCC economies.

Some critics of labour rights in Qatar look favourably upon the country’s hosting of the 2022 World Cup, as the increasing media scrutinization of labour rights in Qatar resulting from the latter prospect has been ironically touted as a possible incentive for the promotion of workers’ rights in the Persian Gulf by leaders wary of their international reputations (Gardner, Pessoa, Diop, Al-Ghanim, Le Trung, & Harkness, 2013). At the same time, according to a conversation I had with Dr. Adel Iskandar, an expert on the topic, such scrutiny may also be construed as the backfiring of Qatar’s strategic investment in sports broadcasting, particularly THE Qatari Sports Investments’ ownership of the *beIN SPORTS* network (HOPEWELL, 2013).

1.4. Open for Business

Launching the Arabic-speaking world’s most-watched news channel, successfully asserting itself as a neutral mediator in regional conflicts, developing local education and sport at a rate unparalleled by its neighbours, and securing the right to host the most popular international sporting event in history underscores two facets of Qatari soft power: promoting local culture and disseminating Qatari foreign policy. Soft power has been employed since the Cold War, and thus discussing it here would be a redundant

task. What is more important to discuss is the underlying motive of Qatar's soft-power strategy. Qatar's ruling Al-Thani family is possibly very well aware that the country's natural gas wealth, the *primary* financier of its soft power, is a finite resource. The Qatari leadership's almost total reliance on a finite natural resource, the value of which is vulnerable to armed conflict, the development of alternative energy, and the fluctuations of the global gas market, to generate income, coupled with the political volatility of the wider MENA region, renders marketing the country as a state qualified to lead the Arab world a strategy indispensable to its very own continuity and power. A progressive, stable, and culturally developed Qatar is a state worthy of attention and outward foreign direct investment – the latter prospect is particularly important when the possible depletion of Qatar's natural gas reserves is considered. In succinct terms, Qatar is open for business (Fromherz, 2012).

1.5. Diplomatic Maneuvering in a Volatile Region

Being engulfed in a highly politicized region has proven to be a recalcitrant challenge for Qatar's charm offensive. True, Qatar has enhanced its diplomatic standing in the region by being "friend to all and an honest broker" (Morris, 2012, pg. 27), but the implicitly propagandistic nature of Brand Qatar has received its fair share of regional scepticism by both state and non-state actors. In order to confront this scenario, Qatar's rulers have in a seemingly retroactive fashion reinforced Brand Qatar with what Nye identifies as the third facet of soft power, political values (Nye, 2008, pg. 96). What is most striking about this third and most salient feature of Qatari diplomacy is that it has required Qatar to provide refuge, and a public platform – Al-Jazeera – to several high-profile oppositionists escaping dictatorships and monarchies from across the Arab World, thus inadvertently countervailing the monarchical nature of the Qatari regime. Qatar's flirtation with these radicals is inherently strategic and embedded in augmenting its popularity amongst larger, more powerful neighbours, and containing the potential animosity of regional actors – especially transnational jihadist groups – who pose a potential threat to the survival of the Qatari state (Khatib, 2013, pg. 420).

1.6. Origins of the Qatari-Islamist Entente

The tradition of providing refuge to oppositionists, many of who were and continue to be Islamists, began in earnest at the height of the Cold War in the late 1970s. It was during this era that the Middle East was sharply divided between pro-Western and Non-Aligned Movement camps. Not surprisingly, the oil-rich monarchs of the Persian Gulf found themselves firmly situated within the pro-Western camp and viewed the relatively close military, cultural, and trade ties enjoyed between the Soviet Union and the nationalist republics of Syria, Iraq, Libya, and most importantly, Egypt, as a direct threat to their own interests (Mazrui, 1991, pg. 274). In similar fashion to its regional neighbours, most notably Saudi Arabia, Qatar had during the Cold War sought to court the various opposition groups within these countries to secure strategic leverage over its rivals (Haykel, 2013, pg. 1). For Qatar, this was a task facilitated by the convenient reality that although the Egyptian, Syrian, and Libyan regimes had been dominated by dictatorial military juntas that lacked any cohesive foreign policies, they did share a common enemy: the Muslim Brotherhood (Rubin, 2010).

A constellation of interests along these lines could not have been any more congenial to Qatar's attempts to play a dominant political, cultural, and economic role in the region. Whilst attempting to establish a parallel between ideologically heterogeneous opposition forces inside Qatar may be impeded by ideological and tactical contradictions, hosting figures from the MENA's arguably most well-organized and largest opposition force, which has branches in nearly all of the 22 member states of the Arab League (Rubin, 2010), has proven to be an amenable task.

The dynamic of the Qatari-Muslim Brotherhood relationship was shaped more by political expedience, and less by ideology (Haykel, 2013, pg. 1). Amidst the various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar's rulers have been exceptionally receptive to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, with Doha beginning to develop ties with them as early as 1961. During the second half of the twentieth century the various rulers of the Persian Gulf harboured a genuine fear of the populist discourse emanating from the Cairo-based, pan-Arab radio station *Sawt Al-Arab* (Musleh-Motut, 2006). *Sawt Al-Arab*, literally

meaning “Voice of the Arabs” in Arabic, was and continues to be dedicated to promoting Egyptian nationalism, but had during the Cold War quickly evolved into a transnational audio medium through which late Egyptian President General Gamal Abdul Nasser – who, along with Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and the former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Josip Bros Tito, personified Third Worldism – espoused an end to Western domination of Arab affairs. As far as the staunchly anti-communist, oil-rich monarchs of the Persian Gulf were concerned, Nasser’s Third Worldist ideology also spelled an end to the domination of monarchical rule (Valborn, & Bank, 2012, pg. 13) too: the continuity of their power depended on US military support, which in turn was guaranteed as long as they steered clear of the Soviet sphere (Yaqub, 2004, pg. 88). Interestingly, as early as 1956, pro-Nasser protests had broken out in Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman, with historians identifying the influence of Sawt Al-Arab as a major driving force behind these protests (Takriti, 2013, pg. 52)

With Abdul Nasser’s Third Worldism deemed a threat to monarchical rule in the Persian Gulf, and his attendant secularist socialism incurring the wrath of his theocratic rivals, it was almost certain that an area of common interest between the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar would emerge. On the 26th of October, 1954, a militant member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood named Mohammed Abdel Latif attempted to assassinate Abdul Nasser (Rogan, 2011, pg. 228). What followed was a nation-wide campaign to neutralize the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood that continued until Nasser’s death on the 28th of September, 1970, which resulted in the exile of several of the organization’s leaders and members to Qatar and other GCC countries. Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradawi, the “spiritual leader” of the Muslim Brotherhood whose significance to Qatari foreign policy will be discussed in chapters two and three, is possibly the most prominent of these Egyptian MB émigrés, and has lived in Qatar since 1961 (Soage, 2010, pg. 20). His weekly television show on Al-Jazeera, *Al-Shari’a wa Al-Hayat* (Islamic Law and Life), is reputed to command more than 60 million viewers³, and has enjoyed airtime since 1996 (Roberts, 2014, pg. 25).

³ This figure is difficult to corroborate

Thirty-eight years later, in 1999, Qatar opened its doors to Ali Al-Sallabi, a radical Libyan Muslim cleric whose opposition to the secularist ideals of Al-Qaddafi drove him into the arms of Qatar's rulers (Steinberg, 2012, pg. 5). Known to have been influenced by, and an ardent supporter of Gamal Abdul Nasser, Al-Qaddafi came to power in Libya on the 1st of September, 1969, after overthrowing King Idris I, who had ruled Libya since the 24th of December, 1951. In similar fashion to Abdul Nasser, Al-Qaddafi was a dictatorial military coupist who had to contend with a relentlessly demagogic and well-organized Islamist opposition led primarily by the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). A series of failed, armed uprisings by the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood and its armed affiliates throughout the mid-1980s and 1990s against Al-Qaddafi's regime resulted in the expulsion of several high-profile members of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood to the Persian Gulf in the years between 1996 and 1999 (Ashour, 2012, pg. 2), chief amongst them Ali Al-Sallabi. Not too long after being granted asylum in Doha, Al-Sallabi would later become an associate of Al-Qaradawi and studied under his mentorship until returning to his home country on the back of the Qatari-supported, Islamist-dominated armed uprising that deposed Al-Qaddafi on the 23rd of October, 2011 (Lebl, 2014, para. 41).

One may argue that the credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood – which had historically prided itself on an anti-imperialist platform amongst its support base, particularly its armed affiliates, (Leiken, & Brooke, 207 pg. 120) owing to its historical opposition to British colonialism – has been tarnished by its alliance with Qatar, a pro-western monarchy that served as the logistical hub for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq (Rabi, 2009, pg. 453). At the same time, maintaining a pro-American foreign policy whilst cultivating ties with a theocratic organization that has publicly lauded jihadist tendencies amongst Muslim youth (Rubin, 2010, pg. 27) may be an extremely difficult task for Qatar's leaders to undertake, whilst maintaining strong ties to the Western nations grappling with the problem of extremist Muslim youth in their own societies. What is obvious, nevertheless, is that both the Qatari leadership and the Muslim Brotherhood have determined that this set of contradictory political calculations is a price worth paying for the benefits that can be reaped from their mutual alliance (Dorsey, 2013).

Qatari patronage has not only secured the steady flow of petro-dollars toward the Muslim Brotherhood (Rich, 2010, pg. 162), it may have also led to the group becoming more tolerated by the US and its allies, as evidenced by the military cooperation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Libyan Islamists in overthrowing Al-Qaddafi (Vira & Cordesman 2011). Qatar also stands to gain from its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, too. Financial and diplomatic support for the Muslim Brotherhood has, it has been argued, prevented the outbreak of militant Islam within Qatar's borders (Khatib, 2013, pg. 431). Whilst evidence of even a tacit understanding between Qatar and Al-Qaeda and its affiliates does not exist, it is worth noting that, despite having a significantly high concentration of U.S. military personnel on its soil, Qatar has been mostly spared the high-profile terrorist attacks that have ravaged neighbouring Saudi Arabia (Holderness & Loughrey, 2007, pg. 111).

Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood seems to have succeeded even in deflecting criticism of Qatar's pro-US foreign policies. Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradawi did not hesitate to discuss the liberation of "Iraq from American colonialism" (MEMRI, 2007, 0:24) in a 2007 speech aired on Qatar TV, but did not make any mention of the U.S. military presence in his host country, from where he was speaking. Even Hamas, the militantly jihadist Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood whose "titular leader" Khaled Mish'al is currently based in Qatar, seems to have no qualms with Qatari investment in the Gaza Strip despite the well-publicized existence of once high-level trade relations between Qatar and Israel (Fromherz, 2012, pg. 103). Indeed, Qatar is widely deemed to have become "an important patron of the international Ikhwani (Muslim Brotherhood) movement" (Lund, 2013, pg. 7).

1.7. Challenging Saudi Arabia and Acquiring the Islamist Mantle

Support for the Muslim Brotherhood has allowed Qatar to seize the Islamist mantle from Saudi Arabia with which, as mentioned earlier, it has been engaged in a struggle for regional domination since 1995, and thereby discredit Saudi rulers in the

public opinion of the MENA's religiously conservative masses whilst promoting Qatari political values (Dorsey, 2013). However, Qatar's commandeering of the Islamist mantle at the expense of Saudi Arabia was not always the case. Saudi Arabia had throughout the Cold War been a sanctuary for prominent militant Islamists from all across the MENA region, and Saudi finances had played a pivotal role in funding the jihadist war effort led by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989 (Riedel, 2008, pg. 42). It is also possible that Saudi Arabia's pro-Western ruling family and the anti-imperialist, anti-monarchical Muslim Brotherhood had agreed to set their ideological differences aside, to confront what they commonly perceived to be the threat posed by Third Worldism and Communism, to salvage their marriage of convenience.

Several of the militant Islamists who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia acquired teaching positions in Saudi Arabian universities that enabled them to instil the country's youth with militant Islamic fundamentalism (Hegghammer, 2010, pg. 4). One such figure was an Egyptian theologian named Mohammed Qutb, the brother and ideological vanguard of Sayed Qutb, who was part of the original nucleus organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1926. Another figure was Abdullah Azzam, an influential member of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. Both Qutb and Azzam lectured in Islamic studies at the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and taught a young and pious man named Osama bin-Laden. Bin-Laden was particularly influenced by the teachings of Azzam, and by the early 1980's Azzam and bin-Laden, who had by then become Azzam's protégé, had moved to the remote Afghanistan-Pakistan border to create, under the auspices of the Saudi Arabian and Pakistani security apparatuses, the Al-Qaeda organization to wage jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Some Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports even suggest that bin-Laden was "recruited" to the Muslim Brotherhood before the emergence of Al-Qaeda (Riedel, 2008, pg. 41-44).

However, by early August, 1990, the dormant ideological contradictions embedded in the alliance between the Islamists and their Saudi patrons came to the fore. The Muslim Brotherhood and the affiliated transnational jihadist community that was spawned by the Afghan jihad had publicly denounced the US-Saudi military alliance

that was set up to confront Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait and a much-feared invasion of Saudi Arabia (Hegghammer, 2010, pg. 31-3). Bin-Laden, who had by then become somewhat of a figurehead amongst this community, was adamantly opposed to the requested presence of US troops on Saudi Arabian territory. He had even approached Saudi Arabian authorities and proposed to mobilise a jihadist army against Saddam Hussein to not only contain what he, the Muslim Brotherhood, and their affiliates throughout the MENA viewed as Iraq's secular, socialist regime, but also to avoid what they viewed as unwarranted Western foreign intervention in the Muslim World. His proposal was rebuffed in September, 1990. Bin-Laden and the community around him were increasingly dismayed, and by 1991, when a US-led military coalition successfully expelled the Iraqi army from Kuwait, the history of strained relations between Saudi Arabia and the transnational jihadist community in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, began (Haykel, 2013, pg. 6). Bin-Laden would later become an advocate for the violent overthrow of the Saudi Arabian monarchy (Riedel, 2008, pg. 49).

James M. Dorsey, Senior Fellow at the University of Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, contends that the divergent approaches toward dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood, which are "at the core" of the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are not ideological but merely a reflection "of fundamentally different strategies of self-preservation" (2013, p. 7). True, the ruling families of both countries have relied on lavish amounts of spending and the provision of highly-subsidized lifestyles to consolidate their rule. Conversely, whilst the Saudi Arabian government had been quick to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood in line with its essentially monarchical state ideology, Qatar adopts:

A strategy of making itself valuable, if not indispensable, to multiple regional and international actors...Along these lines, Doha's foreign policy successes constitute a "branding" strategy that seeks to showcase Qatar as uniquely able to influence Arab and regional politics, well above what might be expected based on its relatively small size (Haykel, 2013, pg. 2).

Qatar's rivalry with Saudi Arabia, and the Muslim Brotherhood's role within it, is also manifest in the composition of Al-Jazeera's staff. Several observers of the Arab

media have suggested that Al-Jazeera's Qatari backers had set out to recruit a significant number of journalists and media workers affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood since the channel's inception, in a direct challenge to Saudi Arabia (Cherkaoui, 2014, pg. 27). An exact number of how many of the organization's employees are actual Muslim Brotherhood members is extremely difficult to corroborate. However, available literature attests to a prevalent culture of Islamism in Al-Jazeera's news gathering and editorial practices (Cherribi, 2006). Although Al-Jazeera's embracing of Islamism has been the subject of much commentary and speculation in the Arabic-language media for the past decade, how the magnitude of the Islamist presence's impact on the organization's editorial practices crystallized during the events of the Arab Spring, which I will discuss in Chapter Two.

1.8. Conclusion

Qatar's projection of soft power does, indeed, entail a high degree of brinksmanship. Irrespective of the risks involved in Qatar's power ambitions, Qatari diplomacy is unabashedly pragmatic. Its ability to conflate all of the geopolitical and ideological contradictions implicated in its soft power overtures exhibits "a case of realpolitik" (Zayani, 2005, pg. 64). Launching Al-Jazeera, developing Qatari culture and sport at a rate unparalleled in either the Arab or Muslim world, mediating regional conflicts, and embracing the Middle East's largest and most organized opposition movement – all of these policies are what would be expected of any state striving to assert itself as a regional leader. Moreover, an ambiance of political lethargy prevalent throughout the Arab World has meant there is plenty of fertile ground for the projection and positive reception of Brand Qatar.

Qatar's rulers have since 1995 craftily utilized the leeway afforded to them by the absence of any competent regional competitors to play a proactive, even interventionist role in Arab affairs. In the first half of 2011 a series of indigenous grassroots protests broke out in Tunisia and Libya led by youths disenchanted with high levels of state corruption, poverty, unemployment, and a general lack of political freedoms. The mostly

young, embittered masses in both countries had been struggling for political transparency and accountability, both of which continue to be elusive in most countries of the Arabic-speaking World, and harboured a widespread sense of hopelessness by the indifference and absolutism of their leaders (Al-Momani, 2011, p. 160-3). It was only a matter of time before they decided to take to the streets to protest against their living conditions. “The wonder is not that they took to the streets in the Arab spring, but that they did not do so sooner” (The Tragedy....., 2014).

Expectedly, popular tension evolved into nationwide protests, which in turn led to a collapse in the social and political order in Tunisia and Libya. It was this interregnum that allowed Qatar to play an even more robust role in Arab politics. This time, however, Qatar had relied considerably on the Al-Jazeera Media Network, in addition to diplomacy, to determine the future course of events. Bob Simon of the CBS program *60 Minutes* characterized the threat posed by Al-Jazeera to Arab dictators very befittingly when he said, in relation to the broadcaster’s role in advancing Doha’s interests vis-à-vis the Arab Spring, that Qatar is “admired or feared by everyone in the Middle East...because of its television network, Al Jazeera” (Qatar, 2012). Nehad Ismail of the *Huffington Post* goes even further and suggests “the Arab Spring would not have been possible without Al Jazeera” (Ismail, 2011). The deemed influence of Al-Jazeera’s coverage on the protests aside, what chapter two will attempt to determine is whether or not the unequivocally supportive coverage granted by Al-Jazeera to the Arab Spring protests was driven by a premeditated Qatari policy, possibly stemming from its alliance with Islamists throughout the Arab world, to ensure the success of the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideological affiliates on the back of the Arab Spring.

Chapter 2.

Qatar Responds to the Arab Spring

2.1. Introduction

My intention in Chapter Two is to focus on Al-Jazeera's role in legitimizing the pro-democracy protests in Tunisia and Libya. I decided that I should not attempt to discuss events in Egypt, as the sheer depth and complexity of the relationship between Egypt and Al-Jazeera is beyond the scope of this thesis. Individual case studies of the extensive coverage afforded to Tunisia and Libya will be illustrated, and this coverage will be analyzed in reference to journalistic norms and ethics, and more significantly, the essentially Qatari social, political, and economic forces that shape Al-Jazeera's journalistic and editorial practices. I will also discuss the relationship between Al-Jazeera and its Qatari backers, and the problematic political context against which the latter influences the former. Academic literature surrounding the gravitation of media organizations to existing power structures will serve as the backdrop of this chapter. Before this, however, it would be useful to briefly review the historical conditions from which the Al-Jazeera Media Network emerged, and how those conditions influenced its editorial orientation as an ostensibly alternative, populist media outlet.

Chapter one shed light on how Al-Jazeera's launch in 1995 coincided with an endeavour by the then ruler of Qatar SHBK's drive to place his tiny country at the forefront of Arab affairs. In tandem with challenging Saudi and Egyptian domination of Arab politics, SHBK was intent on attenuating Saudi, and to a lesser extent Egyptian domination of the Arab media environment, too (Da Lage, 2005, pg. 12-14). In the diplomatic and political spheres, the challenges facing the drive to contain the historically prestigious regional standing of Saudi Arabia and Egypt were numerous and entailed a

great deal of diplomatic audacity in a fashion quite unique to the Arab world. The challenges facing Al-Jazeera's *raison d'être*, however, were relatively minimal, as the televisual media landscape in the Arab world at the time of its launching was overwhelmingly characterised by mediocre public broadcasters – namely, state-owned media broadcasters that had a specifically domestic-level public service role aimed at raising awareness of issues of deemed public interest – touting official narratives when media audiences were hungry for, and in dire need of a counter-hegemonic narrative concerning Arab affairs (Zayani, 2005, pg. 5).

2.2. Winning the Media War

To further my knowledge of the environment in which Al-Jazeera emerged, I spoke to Yazan Al-Saadi, who writes for *Al-Akhbar English*, a print and online English-language newspaper which envisions upholding the “principles of anti-imperialist struggle, progressive politics, and freedom of expression” (Al-Akhbar, 2014). When asked, Yazan defines himself as an alternative journalist although he, in similar fashion to many members of the trans-national community of independent Arab journalists, deems the term ambiguous unless the media discourse which “alternative media” stands in relation to is clearly identified. “At the outset”, he told me during a Skype interview, “Al-Jazeera was an important hallmark in Arab media” as it “filled a void created by elitist public broadcasters that failed to address issues of concern to the Arab masses”. The initial euphoria surrounding Al-Jazeera’s launch”, he went on to say, stemmed “not from its editorial policies, but from its populist coverage widely perceived as supportive of the Palestinians and confrontational toward U.S. hegemony”. Al-Saadi’s comments regarding the Palestinians may be correct, as it has even been speculated that the Palestinian cause would not enjoy the global attention it does today were it not for Al-Jazeera’s depiction of images of Palestinian life under Israeli military occupation (Seib, 2008, p. 74). Al-Jazeera’s “alternative” status was thus ascribed to it by a pan-Arab public coveting a form of televisual journalism exhibiting a narrative that countered state-owned broadcasters primarily concerned with covering stately visits and the exchange of

diplomatic formalities between leaders mostly out of touch with their peoples (Al-Zayani, 2005).

Nowhere is the notion of Al-Jazeera's alterity more palpable than in North America and Western Europe, wherein Al-Jazeera was cast as the primary communication medium between the Western and Muslim worlds following the terrorist attacks of the 11th of September, 2001 (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003). The so-called 'Clash of Civilizations' believed by Samuel Huntington to have been augured by the latter attacks spurred a collective attempt by political pundits, academics, media scholars, and ordinary members of the public living outside of the Muslim world to fathom the underlying causes of the anti-Western hostility harboured by Al-Qaeda and the transnational jihadist community (Abrahamian, 2003, pg. 531).

Constituting the only English-language Arab source of news and information on events unfolding in the Muslim World amidst the 'Clash of Civilizations', the Al-Jazeera Media Network's English-language news website, launched in March, 2003, became unprecedentedly popular (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 163). At the same time, Al-Jazeera sealed its reputation as the mouthpiece of the Global South when it became the first and only channel to broadcast videotaped messages made by Osama bin-Laden directed toward the West. Western news channels, foremost amongst them the Cable News Network (CNN), successfully scrambled to secure broadcasting rights to these videos, although at a significant financial cost, and would subsequently move to broadcast translated versions of them to their respective audiences (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003). For many outside of the Muslim world conscientious of a real, or even contrived clash between Western and Islamic civilizations, Al-Jazeera epitomized the Arab and Muslim world's collective psyche, which up until that time had been shrouded in ambiguity, for Western media audiences.

The launching of Al-Jazeera English, the first ever 24/7 English-language channel based in the Middle East, but with four news centres in Doha (Qatar), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Washington D.C. (USA), and London (England), in November, 2006, reinforced the Al-Jazeera Media Network's role as a Western outlet to the Muslim World.

Al-Jazeera English was launched with the stated aim of “balancing the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the Southern to the Northern Hemisphere. The channel gives voice to untold stories, promotes debate, and challenges established perceptions” (Figenschou, 2010, pg. 86).

For non-Arab audiences around the world, Al-Jazeera English remains the only reputable English-speaking mouthpiece of the Global South. Many observers and pundits continue to praise Al-Jazeera English for affording adequate coverage to the developing world, and for observing an internationalist outlook when reporting on news events. Al-Jazeera English’s internationalist outlook stands in contrast to the pan-Arab platform of the Al-Jazeera Media Network’s Arabic-language channel, which, although shrouded in a mystique of alterity, neither boasts nor enjoys a reputation for internationalism due to the employment of the Arabic language as its medium of news delivery. More importantly, as we shall learn later in this thesis, the editorial bias exhibited by Al-Jazeera’s Arabic language-channel when covering certain news events affecting the Arab world *would* be obvious to non-Arab audiences were it not for the Arabic-language barrier. Al-Jazeera English’s internationalism is deserving of particular attention here, as this facet of the latter channel stems from English-language audiences’ perception, just as much as it stems from its purported aim of ‘balancing the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the Southern to the Northern Hemisphere’ (Figenschou, 2013) .

According to communications scholar Tine Ustad Figenschou, Al-Jazeera English exhibits three editorial strategies that ensure the dearth of any substantial English-language competitors within the framework of representing the Global South. Primarily, Al-Jazeera English has an international agenda that eclipses Qatar’s domestic issues. Al-Jazeera English also relies on an immense network of local, culturally embedded, non-Western correspondents when covering news events affecting disenfranchised and marginalized populations in neglected areas of the Global South. Finally, the channel affords airtime to counterhegemonic, controversial, and oppositional voices that are otherwise shunned by the mainstream media in the English-speaking world (2010, pg. 86).

But to define alternative journalism as simply ‘counterhegemonic’, ‘controversial’, or ‘oppositional’ is a reductionist measure. Professor Christian Fuchs of the University of Westminster, UK, argues that alternative media is not simply media that challenge “established, hierarchical, systems of politics, economics, and culture; critical media...question dominative society” (2010, p. 174). Furthermore, the theorization of alternative media, Fuchs goes on to say, must be divorced from its anarchistic perspectives that “idealize the small-scale production” (Fuchs, 2010, p. 174) of news, and must be explicated within the framework of a social theory typology that conflates subjectivism and objectivism. According to Fuchs, rather than adopting approaches to understanding alternative media exclusively based on either human agents that produce and consume media (subjects), or the products, norms, institutions, and values (objects) that shape the media, an alternative media system must be understood as a “dynamic system that is reproduced through a dialectic of media subjects (human actors who engage in media production and reception) and media objects (media structures)”. Fuchs’ theorization of alternative media, and media in general, ultimately suggests that the production of media texts deemed alternative, and how the receiver derives meaning from the signs and symbols embedded within them, depends largely on how media messages, or objects, are interpreted by receivers, the subjects, according to their lived experiences and societal contexts (2010, pg. 174).

It may thus be plausibly argued that, although official sponsorship belies Al-Jazeera’s alternative status (Iskandar, 2006), the network’s ability to appeal to popular, oppositional sentiment widely prevalent throughout the region reinforces such a status. Al-Jazeera’s most successful experiment in alternative, populist journalism was the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000. Both the depth and emotional tone of Al-Jazeera’s extensive coverage of the Palestinian uprising in 2000 surpassed that of its competitors, and sealed its reputation as an anti-imperialist counterhegemonic media outlet at a time when the mainstream media had been monopolized by a handful of Arab dictators indifferent to the Palestinian cause, and Western media outlets with structurally biased pro-Israeli editorial policies (Zayani, 2005, pg. 171-9).

2.3. Al-Jazeera: An Experiment in Arab Media Democracy?

During our conversation, Al-Saadi spoke at length about the democratic characteristics of Al-Jazeera with regard to the relationship between media and democracy in the Arab World. Describing the early stages of the network as resembling the Habermasian notion of a public sphere (Benson, 2009, pg. 177), Al-Saadi pointed to how Al-Jazeera was indeed the first channel, thanks to the advent of satellite television, that allowed for the free and dialogic exchange of ideas by ordinary members of the public from across the Arab World – a quality that remains elusive in much of the Arab World to this very day (Touzani, 2010, pg. 258).

One program regularly referred to when discussing Al-Jazeera and democratic dialogue is the channel's flagship program, which commands more viewer ratings than any other television show in the Arabic-speaking world, *Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akes*. Literally meaning "The Opposite Direction"; the show's host Dr. Faisal Al-Kassem argues in *The Al-Jazeera Phenomenon* that the democratic value of the program is only discernible when evaluated in comparison to its "terrestrial ancestors" (Al-Kasim, 2005, p. 93). For the purpose of this study, a comparison of the type mentioned should be made in relation to the only Arab news channel that demonstrated a willingness to widen the then narrow scope of debate in the Arab world through live political debate shows, BBC Arabic. Yet not only did the BBC Arabic fail as a result of editorial differences between its staff and its Saudi financiers, its shows "were not free-to-air to the masses; (and) the signal was scrambled and made available only to subscribers" (Al-Kasim, 2005, pg. 94). The transmission of Al-Jazeera's shows, by contrast, could not be jammed by governments, and thanks to the wide spread usage of satellite dishes, Al-Jazeera had been more accessible than ever (Jasperson & Kikhia, 2003, pg. 68).

Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akes' format is quite formulaic; two individuals qualified to speak authoritatively on an issue of popular interest engage in a 46 minute debate with a view to advancing his/her arguments. Viewers, many of who preserve their anonymity, are allowed to phone into the show and contribute their opinions toward the debate. It is this multilateral dialogue, Al-Kasim argues, which "has caused a great deal of anxiety

amongst official circles in the Arab World” (2005, pg. 97). The anxiety alluded to by Al-Kasim is exacerbated even further by the fact that dialogic programs such as The Opposite Direction represent a prominent and widely accessible platform for Arab dissidents living outside of their native countries upon which they can expose the corruption of their leaders on live television (Al-Kasim, 2005, pg. 97). Another Habermasian characteristic of the Opposite Direction lies in the plurality of oppositional trends exhibited within the show, with communications scholar Mohammed El-Oifi writing that most of the show’s participants represent the three main oppositional bastions against authoritarianism in the Arab World: secular-liberalism, Islamism, and nationalism (El-Oifi, 2005, pg. 72).

As a matter of fact, the democratic potential of The Opposite Direction is such that a 2002 meeting involving the information ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates was convened solely to debate the supposed “campaign” waged by the show against their respective rule (Al-Kasim, 2005, pg. 96). This meeting was later followed by these governments pressuring private companies operating in their territorial jurisdiction to avoid advertising on Al-Jazeera or risk having their business licenses revoked. Communications scholar Muhammad Ayish emphasizes the democratic service performed by Al-Jazeera when claiming: “We Arabs have so much dirt buried under the carpet...Al Jazeera is revealing that dirt, politically, culturally, socially and religiously” (Ayish, 2005, p. 110).

In the first decade of the 21st century, a series of wars in the Arab and Muslim world and the humanitarian crises they engendered provided Al-Jazeera with an opportunity to carve a niche for itself where other Middle Eastern news broadcasters had failed. The first such event was the US-led bombing campaign of Afghanistan in 2001 following the terrorist attacks of the 11th of September, 2001, launched by Al-Qaeda. Then, as was the case with the channel’s journalistic policies towards the 2000 Palestinian intifada, the daily sufferings of Afghani civilians affected by the violence was brought to the fore with immense coverage unparalleled in terms of both empathy and depth (Jasperson & Kikhia, 2003, pg. 115). Two years later, when a US-led coalition invaded Iraq in 2003, Al-Jazeera’s cameras had proved to be a thorn in the side of the

administration of former US President George W. Bush by exposing the collateral damage caused by US military operations in densely populated urban centres throughout Iraq (Miles, 2006, pg. 21). Al-Jazeera's role in covering Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006 after the kidnap of two Israeli soldiers and the killing of six more by Lebanon-based Hezbollah militants on the 12th of July, 2006, was applauded by Arab public opinion. The channel had during the conflict embedded its field correspondents with Hezbollah militants in a fashion that humanised Hezbollah, thereby legitimizing the very rationale behind the movement's political platform, which Hezbollah describes as "armed resistance against Israel" (Kalb & Saivetz, 2007, p. 14).

Al-Jazeera's editorial policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian Intifada, US-led bombing campaign of Afghanistan, invasion of Iraq, and the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war bears a common trait: Arab and Muslim people were consistently depicted, or framed, within a thematic framework as victims of the aggressive neo-colonial machinations of stronger powers (Sharp, 2003, p. 10). This shouldn't suggest, however, that Al-Jazeera's portrayal of Palestinians, Afghans, Iraqis, and Lebanese as victims is unwarranted – Arabs and Muslims are no exception to the neocolonial subjugation of the Global South (Mansour, 1996, p. 180). What I intend to assert here is that Al-Jazeera's thematic, rather than episodic framing of the abovementioned events has delineated the parameters within which intellectual, popular, and democratic debate may take place, in a fashion that excludes the much larger episode within which those events have occurred.

Whilst episodic framing treats news events as isolated incidents, or episodes, thematic framing situates the same events in a social, economic, and political context. Thus, although the employment of episodic, as opposed to thematic, framing of political crises and events by television news "trivialises political discourse and weakens the accountability of...officials" (Iyengar, 1996, p. 59), with Al-Jazeera, the opposite holds true. Al-Jazeera's employment of the thematic frame of Arab/Muslim victimization has obscured debate addressing episodes of political crisis and upheaval inflicting both Arabs and Muslims in which Qatari foreign policy is, ultimately, implicated.

The trials and tribulations faced by Palestinians living under the decades-old Israeli occupation has been widely documented by Al-Jazeera, but the network has its own double-standards. For example, reportage on trade relations dating back to 1996 between Qatar and Israel involving the sale of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the latter country (Shafer, 2001, pg. 5380) is virtually non-existent in the channel's reportage database. Thanks to Al-Jazeera's coverage, viewers throughout the Arab and Muslim world are aware that civilians continue to bear the brunt of US military operations in Afghanistan, but the channel has been noticeably silent on credible allegations made in leaked US diplomatic cables alleging that a lot of the funding for militant Islamism, which has claimed an immensely larger number of Muslim victims compared to non-Muslim victims in Afghanistan and elsewhere, originates in Qatar (Kamrava, 2013, pg. 80).

When describing the difference between Al-Jazeera and English-speaking media in covering the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, renowned British television news reporter and interviewer Rizwan Khan, who, following stints at both the BBC and CNN, hosted his own show on Al-Jazeera English, remarked that whilst American news channels "show missiles taking off, Al-Jazeera shows them landing" (as cited in Powers, 2009). However, beneath this veneer of respectability is a reality that Khan apparently overlooked: the 2003 invasion of Iraq was in large part coordinated from the US Central Command's Forward Headquarters' *Al-Udeid* Air Base, located in Doha, Qatar (Russel, 2005, pg. 292). The U.S. military presence in Qatar may have been covered by Al-Jazeera (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 201), but the scale of such coverage has historically been negligible. Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was undeniably supportive of Hezbollah in both its tone and depth, but would Israel have enjoyed the military supremacy it wielded over Hezbollah during that conflict were it not for the logistical support provided to the United States – Israel's foremost ally – by countries such as Qatar? (O'Reilly & Renfro, 2007, pg. 138).

The well-known preferential treatment afforded by Al-Jazeera to Qatar (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 89-90) does not require elaboration here. Nevertheless, it would suffice to contend that the four examples referred to earlier indicate a tendency by Al-Jazeera to frame political events and crises affecting the Arab and Muslim world

according to the thematic framework of Arab/Muslim victimization, rather than in episodic terms related to Qatari foreign policy decisions, when Qatari policies are implicated in their occurrence. More still, the Al-Jazeera Media Network's framing of news events according to the unifying theme of Arabs and Muslims as victims of stronger neocolonial power precludes alternative framing themes, such as the destabilizing effect Qatar's support for Islamic extremists has on the MENA and the world. One plausible explanation for this exceptionalism would be an editorial deference to Brand Qatar, the state ideology pursued by Qatar's leadership aimed at securing consent for Qatar's projected role as the leader of the Arab world.

In *Media and Power*, when discussing the media's gravitation towards existing power structures, James Curran refers to a dominant ideology as a "dominant discourse", arguing that the presence of a dominant discourse severely restricts the type and number of subjects that can be addressed by the media. He adds that many media workers are hesitant to broach a subject they deem to be taboo, whilst at the same time governments can use a state ideology to silence its critics (Curran, 2002, pg. 150-151). The Propaganda Model developed by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman addresses not only how a dominant ideology directly affects the work of journalists in that it constrains what type of content they may or may not include in their reportage, but views it as a socio-cultural phenomenon borne out of the political context in which any given mainstream media system operates (Herman & Chomsky, 2008, pg. 31). Needless to say, that the bulk of Al-Jazeera's funding is derived from Qatar's state budget is a factor that very likely figures in the journalistic ethos of the channel's journalists.

All of this notwithstanding, the success with which Al-Jazeera's thematic coverage of events in the Palestinian Territories, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon has insulated Qatari foreign policy from public scrutiny does not stem from the channel's uncritical viewership, but from the fact that the issues covered in all four cases are framed in a naivety-inducing victim vs. aggressor binary. With the victims of Al-Jazeera's reportage sharing a common religion, language, culture, and history with the vast majority of the channel's viewership, it is only expected that the viewer will eschew contextualizing, or questioning the implicit episodic frame s/he is exposed to and focus

instead on the theme of Arab/Muslim victimization. And thus Al-Jazeera has knowingly, or perhaps unknowingly, relied on a sense of solidarity between its viewers and the subject matter featured in its reportage for the thematic interpretation of news events. More still, the Al-Jazeera Media Network's framing of news events according to the unifying theme of Arabs and Muslims as victims of stronger neocolonial power precludes alternative framing themes, such as the destabilizing effect Qatar's support for Islamic extremists has on the MENA and the world.

It is also possible, however, that in the Palestinian, Afghani, Iraqi, and Lebanese cases Al-Jazeera practices what El-Nawawy and Iskandar term "contextual objectivity", a journalistic standard that permits Al-Jazeera to "reflect all sides of any story while retaining the values, beliefs, and sentiments of the target audience", as opposed to the deliberate, decontextualized thematic framing of news events. If this were to be the case, then, Al-Jazeera's victimization of Arabs and Muslims is consistent with the democratic demands of its viewership (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 27).

Cultural theorist and media scholar Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model assists us in attaining a thorough understanding of the restrictive ideological parameters within which meaning may be derived from televisual media messages. Hall's model illustrates how the television viewer decodes ideologically encoded, hegemonic televised signs in accordance to an affinity between the ideology signified by such signs and the receiver's inherently biased ideological inventory. Although the codification, or construction, and decodification, the de-construction, of mediated messages are both autonomous processes, Hall's model suggests that the method in which signs are encoded exercises a degree of influence over how they are decoded. Based on the Encoding/Decoding Model, there are three separate vantage points from which a viewer decodes televised messages (Pillai, 1992).

The first position is the dominant-hegemonic code; a hypothetical position that describes the receiver's ideological imprisonment, it may be proposed, in the dominant code, by consuming the connotations associated with the media messages and decoding them within the delimited affinity between signification and biased ideological

inventories. Hall proceeds to identify the second position as the negotiated code: The negotiated code involves majority audiences detecting what is defined by dominant discourse, but these dominant definitions are hegemonic by virtue of their being representative of definitions that are in dominance. Finally, the third position is that of the oppositional code, which is the ability of the viewer to understand the literal and connotative meaning of the mediated dominant discourse s/he is exposed to, but rather than decode it according to a dominant and biased ideological inventory, the receiver interprets these signs in an oppositional manner according to a counter-hegemonic framework (Hall, 2009, pg. 171-73).

Borrowing from this model, it may be feasible to assume that the Arab or Muslim receiver, inundated with a sense of ethnic irredentism and solidarity, signifies the thematic victimization of Arabs and Muslims in Al-Jazeera's reportage in a dominant-hegemonic code congenial to Qatari foreign policy. Nabil Echashaibi describes this dynamic in very blunt terms when he writes: "if we situate its controversial coverage in a general climate of political profiteering and impunity of leaders, then Al Jazeera appears more a network on a mission" (Echchaibi, 2011). The Hoover Institution's Fuad Ajami suggests Al-Jazeera "are broadcasters who play to an Arab gallery whose political bitterness they share...and feed" (Kessler, 2012, pg. 47).

Notwithstanding, the applicability of traditional media framing research to the Al-Jazeera Media Network is debatable for a variety of reasons. Magdalena Wojcieszak contends that traditional media framing research methodologies, which are based on the unilateral impact of political elites on the media framing process, are not relevant to what she describes as "relatively autonomous" satellite channels such as Al-Jazeera that are not subject to domestic governments and regulations. Moreover, Wojcieszak claims that media framing research methodologies are applicable to analyzing state influence on domestic media, but not state broadcasters, a media category under which she classifies Al-Jazeera. In line with trends to de-westernize scholarly perspectives of media representing "the Global South", she further suggests that traditional framing studies tend to overlook "the cultural and sociopolitical contexts of foreign media organizations" (Wojcieszak, 2007, p. 116). Finally, framing research must be adapted to the

decentralized flow of information and relative independence from domestic regulations afforded by new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) utilized by Al-Jazeera and other satellite channels (Wojcieszak, 2007).

Wojcieszak's arguments can easily be construed as technologically deterministic, yet they do possess validity when studying satellite technology's transnationalization of live public debate through Al-Jazeera's flagship programme, *The Opposite Direction*. Rather than incorporating political elites' agendas into news discourse, shows such as these that are broadcast by satellite technology evade state influence by operating "within a geopolitical reality where restrictions and influences are transnational" (Wojcieszak, 2007, pg. 119). Indeed, the Habermasian characteristics of *The Opposite Direction* have been explored earlier, but were it not for the democratic and transnational agency of satellite technology it is possible that Wojcieszak, amongst others, would not conceive of Al-Jazeera as a "counter-hegemonic force" (Wojcieszak, 2007, pg. 116) in the Arab media landscape.

In order to substantiate the alternative status ascribed to Al-Jazeera by Arab and Muslim audiences sympathetic with its journalistic championing of the oppressed populations of the Global South, and by media scholars cognizant of the value of democratic dialogue embodied by Al-Jazeera's utilization of satellite technology, I decided that it would be useful to interview someone who could speak to me about the professional ethos of the organization's journalists. A former high-ranking employee of the Al-Jazeera English-language channel, who, in adherence to a request for anonymity, I shall heretofore refer to as "ABC", was interviewed for this purpose. When asked about his/her opinion regarding whether or not Al-Jazeera English's journalists considered their organization 'alternative', ABC's response was:

I think that, at the beginning of each day, Al-Jazeera English journalists, if they reflect on whose interests they're working for, it would be the interests of the general population as opposed to the various elites in the Arab World. I don't think Al-Jazeera English is left-wing or right-wing, I think it's *progressive*. It's *investigative*. When I was a member of that organization; I was a proud member of that organization and my pride stemmed from the fact that Al-Jazeera English...in a quite authentic

way...Al-Jazeera English feels that it has a commitment to be a voice of the voiceless; the voice of the victims of excessive political power. Al-Jazeera English's approach with events in the Middle East is more or less consistent with its journalistic mission...to 'shake things up'.

2.4. Al-Jazeera Covers the Jasmine Revolution

As with any other media entity Al-Jazeera would need an event, a *cause célèbre*, in order to assert its counter-hegemonic character. On the 17th of December, 2010, in the small and impoverished Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, a 26 year-old fruit vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of his local governor's office (Hanley, 2011, pg. 12). Bouazizi, who financially supported his five siblings and ailing father, was reportedly harassed on an almost daily basis by municipal officers who accused him of not having a permit to sell his fruits and vegetables – from which he generated only US \$140 a month. Matters came to a head that very day when, after being insulted and beaten by local police officers who later proceeded to throw his produce on the street (Hanley, 2011, pg. 12), Bouazizi approached the office of Sidi Bouzid's governor to protest his mistreatment by the local authorities, only to be turned away. He later stood in the middle of a street facing the governor's office and publicly threatened to immolate himself unless his concerns were addressed. The governor refused and at 11:30 am Bouazizi, doused in kerosene, set himself on fire after reportedly screaming: "How do you expect me to make a living?!" (Soper & Demirkan, 2012, pg. 21). Mohammed Bouazizi died of his wounds on the 4th of January, 2011 (Rayher, 2012, pg. 89). Whilst undergoing treatment Bouazizi was visited by the then Tunisian Prime Minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had attempted to contain the social repercussions of the immolation, but to no avail. News of Bouazizi's death was rapidly spread by relatives and the 5000 ordinary members of the public who participated in his funeral, and the news engulfed the entire nation (Dutta, 2013, pg. 142).

The sheer desperation of Bouazizi's act, however, should not be exaggerated and conceived as the catalyst for the series of protests later coined the Arab Spring that

began in Tunisia, spread throughout much of the Arab World, and which continue to this very day. A historical alliance between Tunisian trade unionists, the far-left, Islamists, human rights organizations, and even the business elite had been actively opposed to Ben Ali's policies since early 2000 (Haugbbolle & Cavatorta, 2011, pg. 325-8). Youth unemployment, a lack of political freedom, and the concentration of both wealth and power within the confines of Ben Ali's immediate family had been a source of popular discontent since a coup brought the autocrat to power in 1989 (Schraeder & Redissi, 2011, pg. 9). And during April of 2010, in what may be construed as an indicator of the protests that were to occur later that year, a prominent Tunisian journalist named Taoufik Ben Brik had begun a 43-day hunger strike against media censorship (Gobe, 2010, pg. 339).

In the Muslim world, where suicide is culturally frowned upon and regarded with disdain (Aamer-Sarfraz, & Castle, 2002, p. 49), Bouazizi's death should not have attracted the publicity it did, but two facets of the event led to the most spontaneous and significant outbreak of civil action ever witnessed in the MENA's history. Initially, Bouazizi's desperate act epitomized the frustration and hopelessness of a significant number of young Tunisian women and men who felt helpless in the face of an autocratic ruler. His self-immolation had galvanized an already disenchanted Tunisian public that was quick to embrace the event and harness it as a springboard for what would become a nation-wide protest movement aimed at toppling Ben-Ali (Hanley, 2011, pg. 13). More importantly, news of Bouazizi's death was rapidly disseminated by the smartphone-carrying individuals present at the scene of his immolation who, in the absence of domestic media covering the event, readily supplied footage to Al-Jazeera (Howard & Hussain, 2011, pg. 37-9).

As if to exemplify the transnational, counter-hegemonic approach to news reporting many have unreflectingly ascribed to Al-Jazeera; the channel, which had virtually no presence in Tunisia due to the prohibition of its operations under Ben Ali, spared no effort in popularizing Bouazizi's death and the protests that subsequently followed it throughout the MENA and the world, through satellite technology. With the ability of ICTs to circumvent Tunisian censorship, it was not too long before Al-Jazeera

found itself positioned to present daily news broadcasts on the successful Jasmine Revolution supplied by young and willing citizen journalists on the ground. These reports had been juxtaposed with raw, awe-inspiring footage of placard-carrying Tunisians (Wulf, Misaki, Atam, Randall, & Rohde, 2013) loudly chanting the slogan that would subsequently be emulated by protesters around the MENA: 'The People Want the Regime's Downfall!'

According to the former Director of the Al-Jazeera Media Network Wadah Khanfar, Al-Jazeera had originally been "reluctant" to carry footage of the Tunisian protests because of its poor quality but decided to air them after realizing the channel's viewers thought these "mobile video images" were "more authentic than what professionals are doing" (Khanfar & Kinninmont, 2012, pg. 8). Ultimately, the images and news items constantly being supplied to Al-Jazeera by Tunisians through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are what "saved us (Al-Jazeera)" (Khanfar & Kinninmont, 2012, p. 8). Khanfar, I believe, may be correct in his assessment – drawing from both raw news and images provided by regular ICT users undoubtedly reaffirmed Al-Jazeera's 'alternative' mystique.

It was not too long before the impact of Al-Jazeera's raw coverage of the Tunisian protest movement demonstrated the fashion in "which emotional and relational capital...generated by transcendent events" would subsequently be employed as "strategic communication" (Jacquie L'Etang, 2013). Of course, L'Etang's description of the strategic manipulation and subsequent communication of emotionally-ridden, transcendent events does not specifically refer to Al-Jazeera's handling of Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, but rather to how global events in a general sense galvanize any given population's collective psyche into harbouring an emboldened sense of purpose and accentuating its desire to pursue and realize a common goal (L'Etang, 2013).

In a country where state media had become synonymous with censorship, Bouazizi's act of civil disobedience and the protests that it had inspired would have expectedly remained an exclusively Tunisian affair, and not the emboldening global event it would later become. Al-Jazeera's editorial policies belied that notion. Aware of

their visibility to at least 40 million viewers in the MENA, the protesters' resolve had only been strengthened by the globalizing effect of Al-Jazeera's coverage, which in turn was only possible with the transnational transcendence of the ICT technology at the protesters' disposal. At the same time, the Jasmine Revolution endowed Al-Jazeera with yet another opportunity to embody its *modus operandi*: 'the opinion, and the other opinion' (Esposito, 2003, pg. 316).

Al-Jazeera was astutely quick to respond to the spontaneity and indigenous nature of the Jasmine Revolution and to employ the event for the strategic communication of Qatari foreign policy interests. Tunisia had prior to the emergence of the Arab Spring been situated outside of the prism of Qatar's strategic interests, but that did not prevent Qatar from courting Tunisia's Islamist opposition. Doing so would require Qatari diplomatic tact and, needless to say, financial clout. Qatar had thus donated 500 million USD to the electoral campaign of the *Ennahda* (Renaissance) Movement, the Tunisian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood that by virtue of Qatar's financial support had secured a landslide victory in Tunisia's first ever democratic election since 1987 (Talbot, 2014, pg. 18). As if to assert the Qatari dimension in the Tunisian electoral process, the former Head of the Research and Studies Office at the Al Jazeera Center for Studies, Rafik Abdessalem, was appointed as Tunisia's Minister of Foreign Affairs following the announcement of Ennahda's election victory on the 23rd of October, 2011 (Mahjar-Barducci, 2012, pg. 7). It was not surprising, then, that less than a month later, the then Tunisian Prime Minister Sheikh Rachid Al-Ghannouchi made Qatar the site of his first ever international visit after Ennahda's election victory (Cafiero, 2012). Of course, it would be unwise to assert that Qatar is directly responsible for Ennahda assuming power in Tunisia. It would, however, be problematic to not ascribe Ennahda's *electoral advantage* to Qatar's financial support.

At first glance, it would seem a complex constellation of interests involving Al-Jazeera, Qatar's government, and Tunisia's Muslim Brotherhood was successfully woven. However, that constellation was confronted with opposition from the outset of Qatar's venture, as Ennahda and its secular-leftist opponents were at loggerheads over

the former group's reluctance to fight youth unemployment and economic stagnation (Gartenstein-Ross, Moreng, & Soucy, 2014).

More importantly, as far as democracy – which in this thesis, will be construed in its Euro-centric liberal sense to include governmental transparency, the protection of civil liberties, and freedoms of speech and thought – is concerned, Ennahda had seemingly tolerated a malignant campaign of Islamic fundamentalism that had systematically targeted individuals, institutions, and organizations representing what was deemed to be Tunisia's civil, yet non-Islamic society. This campaign waged by the pro-Ennahda militia, the Leagues for Protecting the Revolution (LPR), also targeted Al-Ghannouchi's political opponents (Redissi, 2014, pg. 385). On the 28th of September, 2013, after months of political pressure amidst a faltering economy, widespread public anger with Ennahda's alleged collusion with militant Islamism, and a failure to stabilize the country, Tunisia's Muslim Brotherhood had finally agreed to step down and cede power to a technocratic caretaker government that would preside over the country until new parliamentary elections can be held (Guazzone, 2013, pg. 41-2).

Both the extent of Qatari interference in post-revolutionary Tunisian affairs, and the failure, whether deliberate or otherwise, of Ennahda to consolidate Tunisian liberal-democracy, is a matter of debate that will not be addressed here. An insightful lesson on the role played by media in the empowerment of liberal-democracy in the Arab World can nevertheless be drawn from the pattern of events in Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution involving Al-Jazeera's empowerment of the protests, Al-Ghannouchi's Qatari-supported electoral victory, and, ultimately, Ennahda's employment of democratic means to implement non-democratic policies. As a media organization Al-Jazeera had, indeed, provided a "voice to the voiceless" (Figenschou, 2010, pg. 85) by defying official Tunisian censorship laws and affording emboldening coverage to the pro-democracy protesters on the ground who eventually succeeded in overthrowing Ben Ali. In spite of this democratic service, Tunisian democracy had, conversely, been curtailed by the policies of Al-Ghannouchi, whose government was propped up by Qatar.

When analyzed in the light of Qatari financial support for Al-Ghannouchi and the claim made that “Al-Jazeera has heavily promoted the group (Ennahda)” during the elections (Hammond, 2011), we may infer that Al-Jazeera’s editorial support of the Jasmine Revolution was a Qatari policy aimed at hastening Ben-Ali’s departure and installing a pro-Qatari Islamist leadership in his stead. Addressing the question of which regional actors stood to gain, and lose, the most from Ben-Ali’s departure vindicates my inference pointing to the correlation between Qatari foreign policy and Al-Jazeera’s reportage. “Al-Jazeera TV’s constant coverage of the protests in Tunis was crucial in building their momentum to the extreme displeasure of Riyadh” (Saudi Arabia), Qatar’s main rival for regional dominance, and following his departure from Tunisia, Ben-Ali was granted asylum in Saudi Arabia (Maddy-Weitzman, 2013, pg. 180).

To be sure, my assessment of the possible preponderance of Qatari foreign policy demands on the democratizing nature of Al-Jazeera reflected by its Arab Spring coverage is contestable. ABC explained to me that, rather than constituting an editorial diktat prompted by Qatar’s promotion of Islamist organizations during the Arab Spring, “Al-Jazeera (English) populist tone with regard to the so-called Arab Spring was very predictable and...consistent with what Al-Jazeera (English) claims it stands for”:

In the Arab World, certainly before the Arab Spring, you were dealing with a vast number of tyrannies and dictatorships...and in various parts of the developing world...So in that sense; if you said to me 5 years ago ‘The Arab World is going to implode because what stitches that part of the world together – unlike the Soviet Empire – is really so fragile and artificial, that it’s going to implode. And if it does, and when it does, what would the posture of Al-Jazeera English be?’ If you had asked me that 5 years before I joined Al-Jazeera, I’d say that they would probably be aggressively determined to support a lot of the popular movements that were up to then denied any role in decision making. The follow up to that; ‘Is Al-Jazeera (English) fomenting or directing that change to a certain end?’ My response is ‘no’.

What we’re trying to do is; just imagine a dark room, and that room is dark because there are forces that can get their way if people remain in the dark...I think Al-Jazeera’s (English) role, and I think this is the goal of a lot of journalists with integrity, is to turn the lights on so that everyone in a society becomes part of determining the direction of that society. Does that mean Al-Jazeera (English) enters that process to determine that

direction? Again, the answer should be 'no'. Given a choice between tyrannical dictators or some sort of popular democracy, would Al-Jazeera (English) have any difficulty in indicating which they favoured? The answer would be 'no'. But that doesn't mean that you should abandon your journalistic ethics and become a megaphone for one side...So, in that sense, the aggressive coverage by Al-Jazeera (English) of this incredible revolution that took place throughout the Arab World was both predictable and consistent with what it states is its journalistic mission.

ABC described the notion of Al-Jazeera English being a mouthpiece of the Qatari government as "very simplistic". When reflecting on time spent in the channel's newsroom, he told me: "I never got any sense that there was undue pressure coming from the Qatari government as to how we would cover things...Whilst in Qatar, I felt no such pressure, stated or unstated, as to what they (the Qatari government) wanted me to do". Much later in the interview, however, ABC did surmise that "there are some journalists in key positions whose independence I would not trust. They would, in my experience, be vulnerable to self-censorship that would be consistent with what the Qataris would want from Al-Jazeera (English)".

Although the overall impression of my interview with ABC suggests otherwise, Middle East expert Mehran Kamrava states that, although Al-Jazeera's editorial policies are not dictated "simply by the foreign policy agendas" of Qatar, an "overall, at times tenuous coordination between the two...cannot be denied" (Kamrava, 2013, pg. 77). Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution had spawned similar uprisings in Egypt, and later Libya. As if shaped by path dependency, Al-Jazeera framed both the Egyptian and Libyan uprisings in an almost homogenous fashion by providing live news feeds of street protests on the ground in Egypt and Libya in violation of local censorship laws prohibiting Al-Jazeera's operations, and by documenting peaceful, pro-democracy protests against the security apparatuses of dictatorial regimes in its coverage. It would be permissible to dismiss an assertion that the Qatari state deliberately manipulates Al-Jazeera's coverage as mere conjecture. An alignment between Al-Jazeera's editorial policies and Qatar's foreign policy interests is, nevertheless, as we shall learn later, particularly evident within the framework of the Arab Spring.

2.5. Qatar Flexes its Muscles in Libya

Qatar had a historically vested interest in determining the political outcome of the Libyan revolution, soon after the pro-democracy protests broke out in the Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi on the 15th of February, 2011. Indeed, in similar fashion to the rest of the GCC monarchies, Qatar had seemingly harboured an enmity toward Al-Qaddafi's regime since the heyday of Libyan Third Worldism in the 1970s, and had provided refuge to Al-Qaddafi's Islamist opponents.

On the 12th of March, 2011, as the Libyan protests, which exhibited legitimate and democratic demands, were increasingly developing into an outright armed insurrection against Al-Qaddafi, Qatar radically broke with the Arab tradition of non-interference in inter-Arab affairs by successfully lobbying the Arab League to endorse UN Resolution 1973, which would authorize NATO's imposition of a no-fly zone in Libya. Of the 22 member states of the Arab League, only eleven were present at the latter meeting. Algeria and Syria voted against the resolution, and six of the nine Arab League members that voted in favour of foreign military intervention in Libya comprised the GCC member-states. Ironically, the majority of the countries that endorsed UN Resolution 1973, which Al-Jazeera had framed as a humanitarian measure intended to "protect" Libyan civilians from Al-Qaddafi's forces as they carried out their counter-insurgency campaign, were member states of the GCC, all of which respectively have checkered human rights records (Campbell, 2013, pg. 48). On the 17th of March, 2011, UN Resolution 1973 was passed at the UN Security Council and laid the ground-work for NATO's eventual destruction of the Al-Qaddafi regime's military capability in the face of the rebels (Jones, 2011).

In addition to supplying NATO with six fighter jets during the imposition of the no-fly zone (Roberts, 2011), Qatar had become the second country in the world, after France, to recognize the rebel-led National Transition Council (NTC), which would later assume administrative powers following Al-Qaddafi's overthrow, as "the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people" (Smith, 2011). On the 27th of March, 2011, the Al-Thani Family had agreed to help finance the war effort by signing a deal with the NTC's

Oil and Finance Minister, Ali Tarhouni, providing for Qatar's export of Libyan oil to international markets (Fromherz, 2012, pg. 23). It is also estimated that Qatar had supported the armed rebels with up to 400 million USD in lethal aid (Kamrava, 2013, pg. 170).

Qatar had "been involved in every phase of the armed conflict in Libya" (Steinberg, 2012, pg. 5), and as Qatari Special Forces were reportedly on Libyan soil assisting the rebels' military effort to topple Al-Qaddafi (Romao, & Pilot, 2013, pg. 12), Qatar's leadership utilized its links with Libyan militant Islamists in support of the armed rebellion. Ali Al-Sallabi, who, as we learned earlier, had been living in exile in Doha, Qatar since 1999 and is a close associate of Al-Qaradawi, was tasked with administrating Qatari funds to the various Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islamist militias operating in Libya's capital, Tripoli, and Libya's second city, Benghazi (Steinberg, 2012, pg. 5). In Benghazi, Qatari petro-dollars went directly toward the 17th of February Brigade, a militant Islamist group headed by Al-Sallabi's younger brother and prominent Muslim Brotherhood-linked activist, Ismail Al-Sallabi. In Tripoli, the military operations that had culminated in the overthrow of Al-Qaddafi on the 23rd of October, 2011, were spearheaded by the LIFG, the internationally designated terrorist group (Ashour, 2012, pg. 3) affiliated with Al-Qaeda whose leader, Abdelhakim Belhadj, is a veteran of the Afghan Jihad (Vira & Cordesman, 2011, pg. 68). The Islamist dimension had been reinforced even more so by the extensive airtime offered by Al-Jazeera to anti-Al-Qaddafi Islamist sympathizers, and Al-Qaradawi himself, who had used an episode of of Al-Sharia wa Al-Hayat, in early February, 2011, to issue a religious edict explicitly advocating Al-Qaddafi's assassination (Al-Sharekh, 2011, pg. 58).

In an ideal scenario, the Arab League would have scrutinized the potential security threat posed to regional and global stability by groups such as the LIFG more scrupulously before endorsing a no-fly zone over Libya at the Arab League's 12th of March, 2011, meeting. For Alex J. Bellamy, one of the factors that may have influenced the Arab League's decision to support military intervention inside Syria, and thus inadvertently provide air-cover to designated terrorist groups, in addition to Al-Qaddafi's unpopularity amongst the GCC, may have been the generation of "humanitarian

solidarity” and interventionist sentiment by the “al Jazeera effect” (2011, pg. 266). The degree to which Al-Jazeera influenced foreign policy decisions is, of course, a matter of debate.

Bellamy’s employment of the term “al Jazeera effect” undoubtedly derives from the notion of the “CNN Effect”, which media scholars define as the ability of “empathetic feelings triggered by the media” (Krieg, 2012, pg. 64) to drive foreign policy-makers to undertake humanitarian intervention in states’ affairs. The CNN Effect is predicated on the highly idealistic assumption that in times of humanitarian crises altruistic concerns, combined with public pressure, drives policy-makers to intervene humanitarily – even outside the narrow prism of their strategic interests (Krieg, 2012, pg. 64-5).

Foreign policies driven by humanitarian concerns notwithstanding, my intention here is to adopt a realist approach to ascertaining why Qatar spearheaded the drive for foreign intervention in Libya; if the Qatari regime had a genuine interest in humanitarian issues, it may be useful for it to address the systematic human rights abuses suffered by foreign labourers working in the member states of the GCC. Al-Jazeera’s considerably extensive coverage of the armed Libyan uprising, and the framing of the conflict in the victim (Islamist rebels) vs. aggressor (Al-Qaddafi’s forces) binary, with little if any attention paid to the radicalism of the LIFG, may have constructed a humanitarian narrative. Nevertheless, monarchical rule supersedes public opinion, and media “sometimes become(s) an influential tool of policy makers to induce public opinion that is favourable to their policy goals” (Krieg, 2012, pg. 65).

It may be premature and unjust to situate the blame for Libya’s current woes at Qatar’s doorstep. Irrespectively, Qatar’s financial support for the LIFG and its allies possibly contributed to the unchecked Islamist militant activity that continues as of this writing, particularly following Al-Qaddafi’s ouster and his subsequent summary execution at the hands of militants belonging to the LIFG on the 20th of October, 2011, which contributed to Libya’s continuing descent into anarchy. Al-Qaddafi’s summary execution is deserving of specific attention here. The illegality of the latter incident, according to Aktham Suliman, a former Al-Jazeera journalist who resigned from the channel over

what he saw as its unprofessionalism in covering the Arab Spring, was not discussed in Al-Jazeera's reportage (Allmeling, 2012). In the political sphere, Qatari support for Libyan jihadists was criticized in the early stages of the Libyan democratic process by Libya's former Permanent Ambassador to the UN Abdurrahman Shalgham who in early November, 2011, told the Reuters News Agency:

There are facts on the ground, they [Qatar] give money to some parties, the Islamist parties. They give money and weapons and they try to meddle in issues that do not concern them and we reject that. Qatar wants to dominate Libya (Khatib, 2013, pg.424).

Despite not tolerating political dissent domestically, Qatar's leadership appears to have championed a revolution outside of its borders. Silvia Colombo maintains that Qatar's "striking double standard" (Colombo, 2013, pg. 163) in dealing with external and internal political dissent stems from a Qatari perception that support for the Arab Spring, and for Libya's rebels in particular, grants Qatar the opportunity to aggrandize its popularity as a vanguard of the Arab masses, especially those with Islamist proclivities, revolting against authoritarian regimes. Another opportunity granted by the Libyan rebellion, according to Colombo, was the possible emergence of Qatar as a valuable and viable interlocutor between radical Islamists, and the West, which, in turn, encourages Islamist co-optation as a means to moderate any anti-Western sentiments they may harbour (Colombo, 2013, pg. 169). Al-Jazeera was indispensable to Qatar's goals; it "skilfully exploited Al-Jazeera...to rally the Arab public opinion in favour of the foreign intervention in Libya and of its own role as a key Arab player, a role commensurate to its wealth and clout" (Colombo, 2013, pg. 169).

2.6. The Manifestation of Qatari Political Discourse in Al-Jazeera's Editorial Room

Media research must investigate media as a "totality....by emphasizing the circulation of social meanings from production to content and reception" (Fursich, 2006, pg. 138) in order to illuminate the degree to which such coverage is representative of an inherent institutional bias. An approach of this type would assist our efforts to measure

the magnitude of the official Qatari influence on Al-Jazeera's political discourse, the production of the channel's media texts, and how these messages are finally received. To carry out the latter task, it would be useful to scrutinize certain aspects of the relationship between Al-Jazeera's editorial policy and the Qatari government during late 2011.

On the 20th of September, 2011, in the midst of the Arab Spring, Palestinian-born Wadah Khanfar resigned from his position as Director General of the Al Jazeera Media Network, the official body that presides over the operations of both Al-Jazeera, Al-Jazeera English, in addition to Al-Jazeera America, and the plethora of children's and sports channels operated by the network, and was temporarily replaced by Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Al-Thani (SABJ), a member of Qatar's Royal Family (Meltzer, 2013, p. 664). According to popular legend, Khanfar was such an influential figure within the network that when spending Friday afternoons with his children at home he would grab the remote and ask: 'Okay kids, which Arab government do you feel like overthrowing today?'

Widely credited with establishing the channel as the global media network it is today, throughout a career that saw him began as a correspondent for Al-Jazeera's South Africa Bureau, his resignation sent shockwaves throughout the global media landscape. However, for observers aware of Al-Jazeera's gravitation toward the Qatari government, particularly those living within the MENA region, Khanfar's replacement with a wealthy Al-Thani scion did not possess the same shock value. Prior to his appointment, SABJ was a board member of Qatargas, the world's largest liquefied natural gas company (Al-Sulaiti & Subedar, 2014), and a subsidiary company of the state-owned Qatar Petroleum, which in turn sponsors the Al-Jazeera Media Network (Figenschou, 2013, pg. 41).

When gauged in relation to the importance of the news production process on shaping the content of media texts, a correlative relationship between the alignment of Al-Jazeera's Arab Spring coverage, ABJ's appointment, and Qatar' projected leadership role is only too apparent. This correlative relationship is also theoretically supported by

the radical approaches to media studies advanced by figures such as James Curran. Writing in *Media Power*, Curran maintains that news content is the result of journalistic choices and politicized organizational processes, particularly the methods in which news is sourced, and the organizational practices and the institutional requirements of the organizations – such as Qatargas – media workers serve. Yet Curran is careful to not fully embrace radicalism. He concedes, in a seemingly revisionist fashion, that many in the radical tradition are predisposed to characterizing the various factors that potentially influence media output as being geared toward one direction in support of the status quo. Moreover, revisionist radicalism shuns the reality that, in liberal democracies especially, media organizations are susceptible to influential factors that assume conflicting directions with the result being that some media adopt a critical, even radical stance (Curran, 2002).

Notwithstanding, Curran's revisionist radicalism is not applicable to Qatari media. Qatar has been a monarchical state since the 19th century, and Qatari media, and to a certain extent Al-Jazeera, reflects this monarchical rule in a seemingly time-honoured reluctance to seldom produce news critical of Qatari society (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 85-9). Al-Jazeera does, indeed, enjoy a degree of relative autonomy in relation to an established power centre unparalleled by its Arab rivals. However, the autonomy that was exercised during the Khanfar-era had been constrained within the parameters of what Daniel C. Hallin describes as a "Sphere of Legitimate Controversy", the only sphere of a total of three in which media coverage may exercise limited autonomy, and by the same token objectivity, through extending its coverage to all strands of conflictual discourse (Hallin, 1994, pg. 147). News even remotely critical of the Al-Thani Family is, and always has been an exception to this tradition. With Khanfar's departure, and the temporary appointment of SABJ, the parameters of that relatively pluralistic sphere contracted. Dean of the Mohammed bin Rashid School for Communication at the American University of Dubai characterised the repositioning of Al-Jazeera's editorial orientation when he told the Abu Dhabi (UAE)-based *National* newspaper:

This is a political decision rather than a professional one. It should indicate (the) displeasure of the shareholders of Al Jazeera about the political performance of the station lately. It will reflect in a clearer way the direct

interest of the state of Qatar and the royal family. It can only change towards a less troublemaking editorial (Safdar, 2011, para. 8).

Moreover, according to Article 46 of Qatar's Press Law: "The emir of the state of Qatar shall not be criticized and no statement can be attributed to him unless under a written permission from the manager of his office" (Duffy, 2013, pg. 50). As of this writing it is impossible to quantify whether or not Al-Jazeera administratively adhered to that law, but it is worth noting that issues related to Qatar tend to fall outside of Al-Jazeera's outward focus ((El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, pg. 85-9).

Equally inapplicable to Qatar, in addition to Curran's revisionism, are the ethical constraints that curtail the encroachment of elite discourse on the practices of media workers suggested by Curran. The overwhelming majority of the Al-Jazeera Media Network's employees, whether they are journalists, technical staff, administrative staff, etc., are expatriate workers subject to Qatar's sponsorship system that "ties" their presence within the country to a specific sponsor, which could either be a Qatari company or individual. With this authority, an employee's sponsor effectively regulates every aspect of his/her employee's life in Qatar, including working and living conditions, residential status, salary, and their "potential expulsion". In many cases and with impunity, sponsors reserve the right to withhold the personal and legal documents of sponsored employees, who are acutely aware of the employment-related risks were s/he to dispute the terms and conditions of his/her employment. Naturalization of expatriate workers is exceptionally rare. What results from this disparate employer-employee relationship, even within organizations such as the Al-Jazeera Media Network, is the presence of a largely disposable workforce subservient to the whims of their Qatari sponsors. Alienated by a "subtle social hierarchy that elevates the Qataris above the expatriate workers and secures significant economic benefits for the national sponsors", the journalistic ethos of Al-Jazeera's employees may very well be shaped by apprehension and material necessity, and not professional objectivity (Figenschou, 2013, pg. 40).

The timing of Khanfar's replacement could not have come at a more opportune moment for the Qatari government. His last days at Al-Jazeera coincided with the embarrassing release of a series of secret US diplomatic cables by *Wikileaks* revealing Al-Jazeera's manipulation of coverage related to the 2003 US-led Invasion of Iraq at the behest of official US pressure. One of the cables, dated from 2005, details a meeting between Khanfar, and the former US Ambassador to Qatar Chase Untermeyer, in which Khanfar had acquiesced to US demands to edit some of its coverage of the invasion of Iraq deemed unconvincing to US public diplomacy. Khanfar is said to have told his US interlocutor that Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already supplied him with reports produced by the United States Defense Intelligence Agency scrutinizing two months of Al-Jazeera's Iraqi coverage – a move seeming to suggest that a consensus had already been arrived at binding Al-Jazeera, Qatar, and the US government together (Kessler, 2012, pg. 53).

Khanfar reportedly told Untermeyer that his organization acceded to US requests by removing images of hospitalized Iraqi women and children wounded by a US military strike from its coverage (9/17 Meeting with...., 2011). Whether or not the end of Khanfar's career at Al-Jazeera was precipitated by the Wikileaks revelations remains a matter of conjecture, but there is one factor surrounding his resignation that is deserving of consideration for the purpose of this study. Qatar's stability is contingent on US military support. Were it not for the US military presence in the Persian Gulf, the stability of Qatar, and the rest of the GCC member states, would be perilous, to say the least. The importance of US military might to Qatari security is hence a feasible reason as to why Al-Jazeera may have capitulated to US demands.

There are indicators, however, that Al-Jazeera may eventually become more independent of the Qatari government due to its projected steps toward privatization. After all, it is highly doubtful that Qatar's leadership is capable of financing the salaries of, according to 2009 figures, a reported eight-hundred journalists scattered across sixty-nine international bureaus who work for both Al-Jazeera and Al-Jazeera English (Helman, 2009), in the long term.

According to the Dubai-based, English-language daily *Gulf News*, in May, 2011, Qatar's former Emir, SHBK, ratified Law 10/2011 amending the Al-Jazeera Media Network's legal status to a self-proclaimed "private organization devoted to public interest", a legal move effectively opening the company up to private shareholders. The ostensible aim of this plan is to attain a higher degree of administrative and editorial flexibility for the Al-Jazeera Media Network. Nevertheless, a handful of media pundits throughout the Persian Gulf have publicly questioned how a 'private' media organization can be 'devoted to public interest', and whether or not such devotion to public interests is a euphemism for not covering issues deemed harmful to Qatari interests and national security (Toumi, 2011).

Alongside privatization, and the sale of rights to exclusive footage, expansion is also a source for revenue generation for the Al-Jazeera Media Network. A 2009 article published in *Forbes* magazine claims two of the Al-Jazeera Media Network's very popular four sports channels boast 1.7 million subscribers, who pay 70 million USD in annual subscription fees. Needless to say, the latter figure is irrespectively dwarfed by the Qatari government's alleged investment of one-billion USD in the launching of Al-Jazeera English, alone (Helman, 2009). However, according to Dr. Iskandar, who spoke to me about this topic, Law 10/2011 is yet to be applied, and official Qatari funding for the Al-Jazeera Media network will be ongoing for the foreseeable future.

Funding mechanisms aside, Al-Jazeera's reputation for alternative journalism, particularly its supportive coverage of the Arab Spring, has not only served to insulate Al-Jazeera from public scrutiny regarding the Qatari leadership's role in shaping the channel's editorial orientation. Alternative journalism also secured for Al-Jazeera the strategic leverage it aims to achieve, through popularizing the channel throughout the Arab world. By ordaining itself a platform for Arab populism, both Qatar and Al-Jazeera had set in motion a course of action that forces within Qatar, with the support of Al-Jazeera, would opportunistically adhere to, yet again, when peaceful protests broke out against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad on the 15th of March, 2011.

Chapter 3.

The Arab Spring reaches Syria

That the street protests which had occurred in the Syrian city of Der'aa in 2011 were overwhelmingly peaceful is a matter of consensus. Much like their Tunisian, Egyptian, and Libyan counterparts, Syrians had since 1971 lived under the military dictatorship of the Al-Assad family which seized power by means of a military coup. Bashar Al-Assad's assumption of power in June, 2000, was predicated on his projected commitment to instituting political and economic reforms aimed at liberalizing the country's political system, and strengthening its stagnant economy, respectively. Al-Assad's ascension in 2000 was met with a period of political pluralism and economic innovation not witnessed in Syria since 1971, and a general sense that the political cronyism and corruption that had restricted political and economic freedoms, and marginalized large sectors of the Syrian population during the era of his predecessor and father, Hafez Al-Assad (1930-2000) had ended, became prevalent. These tantalizing hopes soon diminished (Hinnebusch, 2012, pg. 95-99).

Throughout the first decade of the 2000s Bashar Al-Assad's political reforms quickly subsided with increasing large-scale security crackdowns on his regime's opponents. More importantly, his economic reforms exclusively benefited the relatively small urbanized, bourgeois communities in the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo that were connected to the ruling Ba'ath Party through either familial or business ties. Socio-economic inequalities were embedded in the country by the free market policies initialized by former President Hafez Al-Assad, and accelerated by his son Bashar between the years 2000-2011. Conditions for popular, organized discontent against his regime were hence ripe in the midst of the Arab Spring protests that erupted in early 2011. The glaring reality that the Al-Assad family, the upper echelons of the Ba'ath

Party, and the bourgeoisie belonged to the minority Alawite sect – an offshoot of Shiite Islam – and ruled over a mostly disadvantaged, rural majority-Sunni population comprising nearly 60% of the Syrian population concentrated in the country's agricultural regions only served to isolate the regime even further in the eyes of many Syrians (Hinnebusch, 2012, pg. 95-99).

3.1. Militarizing the Conflict. Sectarianizing the Conflict.

The internal conditions that led to the militarization of the Syrian rebellion are various and subject to debate, and thus require an entire body of research that cannot be undertaken here. I also do not intend to analyze the inextricable and complicated internal machinations of the Syrian opposition movement and its de-facto government-in-exile, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition (NCSRO). Yet it is of paramount importance to note here that the traditional opponents of the Ba'ath Party in general, and the Al-Assad family in particular, have, unsurprisingly, been the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

By October, 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood had opportunistically re-established a foothold in Syrian politics when its current leader, Mohammad Riad al-Shaqfeh, had utilized the wealth of his Qatari supporters to play an instrumental role in forming the Syrian National Council (SNC), the predecessor of the NCSRO. Both bodies have and continue to function under the auspices of myriad international powers, chief amongst them Qatar, with the influence of the latter state reflected in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's compositional domination of the executive board of the now-defunct SNC. In November, 2012, when the SNC was dissolved and superseded by the NCSRO in Doha, Qatar, the Former Imam of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Moaz al-Khatib, was elected president of the new body. Although not administratively a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, he is renowned for his sympathies toward the Muslim Brotherhood and ensured that the demagogic movement's influence would remain intact following the subsequent integration of the SNC into the NCSRO. Al-Khatib's tenure did not last long. On the 24th of March, 2013, he resigned citing, amongst other factors, the restrictive

nature of Qatari funding on the independence of the Syrian opposition. His resignation did not, however, contain Qatari meddling in Syrian politics (Lund, 2013, pg. 11-15), as the networking power (Castells, 2011) wielded by the Qatari state has historically enabled it to adapt and accommodate the constantly changing geopolitical realities that unfold in the Arab World.

One such geopolitical reality was the emergence of the Free Syrian Army on the 29th of July, 2011. It was then that a former Colonel of the Syrian Air Force named Riad al-Asaad and a group of army deserters announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army with the stated aim of defending Syrian protesters from the Syrian regime. The latter event was met with a dual-pronged approach: Outside of Syria's borders, Syria's exiled opposition was courted by Qatar in order to exercise Qatari influence over the Free Syria Army and render it accountable to the SNC, and subsequently to the NCSRO. Inside Syria, funding channels originating in the Persian Gulf, including, allegedly, in Qatar, led to the creation of a plethora of Islamist-jihadist armed groups linked to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood that would military cooperate with both the FSA, and Al-Qaeda, which is now a substantial element of Syria's armed opposition (Jones, 2013, pg. 55-60).

Of course, the intricate nature of transnational terrorism financing and the ambiguity that obscures any distinction between official, semi-official, and private donors (Reese, 2013, pg. 7) has resulted in a severe lack of empirical evidence that would enable us to identify, specifically, the armed groups which receive direct funding from donor channels inside or outside Qatar. What does exist, however, is a sufficient amount of empirically-tested evidence based on which we may plausibly deduce the historical support for armed Islamist groups, many of who are linked to widespread violence, originating in Qatar and other GCC states. Qatar's patronage of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group which played an immense role in both the ideological and military mobilization of radicalized Persian Gulf youth during the Afghan jihad (Hegghammer, 2010, pg. 40), may also have contributed to the outbreak of specifically Sunni-oriented militant jihadist activity witnessed in Syria today. Secret diplomatic cables originating from the US Embassy in Doha, Qatar in 2009 reveal that the US Department of State considered

Qatar to be “the worst in the region when it comes to cooperation with the United States in counterterrorism efforts” (Kamrava, 2013, pg. 80). Qatar has also been described as a “permissive environment(s) for extremist fundraising” (Gendron, 2012, pg. 81). Even the former Emir of Qatar himself, SHBK, is reported to have explicitly acknowledged his government’s dealings with Islamist radicals in an interview aired by Al-Jazeera on the 7th of September, 2011. Qatar’s logic behind such dealings, according to SHBK, was that he believed “this extremism will transform into civilian life and civil society” (Exclusive Interview – Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, 2011) within the wider context of the democratic aspirations of the Arab Spring.

Available research attests that most observers of the conflict share a consensus that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which launched a failed armed uprising against Syria’s Baathist Regime in 1982, has a significant and vested interest in determining the course of the ongoing war with a retributory-like zeal. Mohammed Abu Rumman claims that “the Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest political organization and has the most significant presence in the modern political history of Syria” (Abu Rumman, 2013, p. 19) in relation to other Syrian opposition groups. A report published for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace concerning the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s role in the uprising states “the Brotherhood is leveraging its strength in the external opposition to gain control over internal groups” (Lund, 2013, pg. 16). Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma Dr. Joshua Landis describes how secular opponents of the Al-Assad regime “often complain that the Muslim Brotherhood is the real power behind the organization (Syrian National Council)” (Landis, 2012, p. 75). Due to a lack of a popular Syrian support base resulting from the demographic character of the uprising, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has had to rely “on their strategy of buying loyalty and trying to empower allies and relatives in Syria through targeted financial and political support” (Lund, 2013, pg. 15).

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to identify the source of funds directed toward militant Islamist activity, and the fact that both civil and militant Islamist groups share horizontal, independent relationships rather than vertical, interdependent relationships (Hegghammer, 2010) complicates the task of ascertaining the trajectory of terror

financing even further, in both Syria and beyond. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that finances originating in Qatar have *not* been channeled toward armed jihadist groups ideologically-linked to the Muslim Brotherhood prioritizing Bashar Al-Assad's overthrow (Lund, 2013, pg. 7). Empirically-tested information related to which of the various armed groups inside Syria receive Qatari-sourced Muslim Brotherhood funding is also difficult to access. However, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's militant activities were disclosed by prominent Syrian Muslim Brotherhood member Mohammed Taifour during an August, 2012, interview with the UK-based, Arabic-language *As-Sharq Al-Awsat* (The Middle East) newspaper, in which he claimed that his organization began forming armed units inside Syria as early as May, 2012 (Lund, 2013, pg. 18). Considering the disproportionately high number of jihadists in the rebels' ranks, the Muslim Brotherhood's violent past, and the latter organization's Islamist outlook, it may be plausible to assume that the groups Taifour is referring to are of an overwhelmingly jihadist orientation. Mohja Kahf asserts that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is funding roughly a third of the armed groups operating in Syria (Kahf, 2013, pg. 17). One group that exemplifies the extent of a possible Qatari role in the radicalisation of the Syrian opposition is *Liwaa Al-Tawhid* (the Unity Brigade), a 3000-member group formed under the auspices of Mehdi Al-Harati, a former member of the LIFG and associate of Belhadji, who had previously received military training from the Qatari Special Forces (Cepoi, 2013). A memorandum compiled by the Swedish Defense Agency estimates that Qatar funded 70 cargo flights of weapons to Syria's armed opposition between April, 2012, and March, 2013, alone (Johnson, 2013, pg. 9).

The most substantial threat to regional and global security posed by Syria's armed opposition stems from the presence of various Al-Qaeda-linked groups fighting in Syria, particularly *Dawlat Al-Islamiyyah fi Al-'Iraq wa Al-Sham* (Islamic State of Syria and the Levant, also known as ISIL) and *Jabhat Al-Nusra l'Ahl Al-Sham* (The Support Front for the People of the Levant, or JN). Although both groups are internationally designated terrorist organizations, Al-Shaqfeh had once described JN as "brothers in arms", whilst Deputy Comptroller-General of Syria's Muslim Brotherhood Mohammed Farouk Taifour publicly referred to the latter group as a "group upon which it is possible to rely" (Lund, 2013, p. 20). Colonel Al-Asaad voiced his support for JN too, and had once referred to

the Al-Qaeda-linked groups as “our brothers in Islam” (Jones, 2013, pg. 60). It would be disingenuous to underestimate the threat to regional and global security posed by militant Sunni jihadist groups linked to funding channels in the Persian Gulf.

Many of the jihadist groups inside Syria regard the country as “a stage for the international struggle that allows al-Qaeda to grow and to build capacities and experience...The goal is to lay the groundwork for setting up a universal Caliphate system” (Abu Rumman, 2013, p. 62). Hardly democratic, their ultimate goal is to set up an Islamic state inside of Syria, and more recently Iraq, governed by a particularly regressive and intolerant form of Shari’a Law. As far as groups such as ISIL are concerned, such a state will serve as a springboard for a “global Islamic Caliphate” (Abu Rumman, 2013, pg. 62). What emerged as an indigenous rebellion driven by democratic aspirations in early 2011 had by early 2012 been transmuted into a sectarian, armed radical-Islamist insurrection, this thesis argues, that has less to do with championing democracy, and more to do with employing radical Sunni Islamic fundamentalism to confront the most obstinate obstacle to Sunni-Islamist domination of the Arab World: the Islamic Republic of Iran and its Arab allies (Khoury, 2013).

3.2. Al-Jazeera sets the Stage for Military Intervention in Syria

Throughout the duration of the ongoing Syrian conflict, Al-Jazeera has emulated its populist editorial approach with regard to the Arab Spring uprisings by affording extensive and emphatic coverage to Syria’s armed opposition (Reese, 2013, pg. 17). What distinguishes Al-Jazeera’s handling of the Syrian crisis, in comparison to those that unfolded in the countries mentioned earlier in this thesis, is the incendiary tone of such coverage, possibly reflecting the joint Qatari-Muslim Brotherhood interest in regime change in Syria. On the 21st of August, 2013, an estimated 1,300 civilians were killed as a result of a chemical weapons attack targeting the *rebel-controlled*, Ghouta agricultural region surrounding Damascus.

I conducted an informal qualitative content analysis of all the fourteen televisual news reports retrieved from Al-Jazeera's comprehensive video database after entering the keywords "Syria", "chemical attack", and "Ghouta", comprising twenty-seven minutes and three seconds of televisual reportage, that were broadcast within the eight-day period beginning with the day of the attack⁴. The verbal discourse of all the televisual reports were analyzed. The content reviewed led me to believe such discourse was symptomatic of an editorial bias. Eleven of the fourteen reports analyzed within the August 21-29, 2013, timeframe contain statements made by citizen-journalists, whose Islamist backgrounds are rendered obvious from their usage of religious and sectarian terminology and prominent beards, and militants belonging to the FSA and its armed affiliates, directly accusing the Syrian regime of launching the attack. Virtually all of the raw footage displayed in the reports bears the logos of the various armed Islamist groups operating in Syria, which suggests that they supplied the footage to Al-Jazeera, and are juxtaposed with images of asphyxiating civilians, including women and children.

Only three reports carried official statements made by the Syrian regime – statements made by regime supporters were absent from any of the footage – and officials representing its Russian and Iranian allies disputing the allegations made by the

⁴ The analytical methodology employed when conducting the informal qualitative content analysis of the fourteen Al-Jazeera reports was primarily centered on scrutinizing both explicit and implicit verbal accusations, made by both citizen journalists and ordinary Syrians, accusing the Al-Assad regime of launching the attack. The total number of reports carrying these two categories of accusations was counted, and compared to the number of reports containing statements by the Al-Assad regime and its allies refuting the former's responsibility for carrying out the attacks. Another component of my analytical methodology is my identifying and subsequently ascertaining that Al-Jazeera prioritized its own citizen journalists as sources of news surrounding events inside Ghouta, and determining that virtually all of the footage purportedly covering evidence of the attacks that was supplied to Al-Jazeera displayed the logos of the various armed Islamist groups fighting the Al-Assad regime. My informal qualitative content analysis of the fourteen reports also studied the mannerisms, terminology, and appearance of the various individuals who blamed the Al-Assad regime for launching the attack in order to establish their Islamist, thus anti-Al-Assad proclivities. My analysis was situated against the backdrop of criticisms levelled by former high-ranking employees of Al-Jazeera who later resigned from the organization in protest at what they viewed as its lack of professionalism when covering the Syrian crisis. Finally, Qatar's advocacy of regime change in Syria is underscored as a possible incentive as to why Al-Jazeera would hold the Al-Assad regime accountable for launching the attack.

civilian and military opposition, with the duration of these statements' coverage only a mere 1 minute and 58 seconds. One report broadcast on the 26th of August, 2013, described the latter statements as "stories peddled by the Syrian regime". A similar search for media texts originating within the August 21-29, 2013, time frame containing the words that one would associate with a counter-narrative, such as "United Nations; Syrian regime; Russia; Iran; denies; chemical; weapons; allegations" failed to generate any results.

That the Syrian regime is militarily more advanced than its armed opponents may be deemed as a plausible rationale behind Al-Jazeera's textual incrimination of the Syrian army, but the veracity of these claims are highly debatable due to a number of circumstances surrounding the incident. Initially, a stern public warning, issued by US President Barack Obama on the 20th of August, 2012, that Al-Assad's use of chemical weapons would cross a redline and provoke what would be a devastating US military strike (Sorenson, 2013, pg. 5) against his already beleaguered and isolated regime casts doubt on any motivation to use his stockpile of weapons. Al-Assad and his allies are acutely aware of the United States' military strength. They acknowledged the dominant superpower's military prowess on the 14th of September, 2013, when Al-Assad capitulated to the Russian-sponsored, UN Security Council Resolution 2118 obliging Syria to obliterate its chemical weapons stockpile by mid-2014 in the face of what was expected to be a possible US military strike (Trapp, 2013, pg. 10).

Given Al-Assad's determination to maintain absolute power over Syria and preserve the business interests invested in his regime, a fact attested to by his reluctance to cede power even after the armed insurrection raging in his country has now passed the three-year mark, his embarking on political brinksmanship of that sort is highly questionable. Ironically, UN weapons experts were already present in Damascus, Syria at the behest of the Syrian regime to investigate earlier official claims alleging that the FSA had used chemical weapons earlier that year in the Syrian city of Aleppo on the 19th of March, 2013 (Trapp, 2013, pg. 9). The absurdity of the Al-Assad regime launching a chemical weapons attack on a region bordering Damascus only two days

following the arrival of UN chemical weapons experts in the Syrian capital defies logic and common sense.

Ruling out the notion that the various jihadist groups operating in Syria would be capable of fomenting the type of international outcry that would justify militarily-inflicted regime change in the country would be imprudent. Indeed, this notion was injected with a high degree of cogency on the 19th of December, 2013, when renowned journalist Seymour Hersh cited evidence revealed to him by members of the US intelligence community suggesting that Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Al-Qaeda-linked group operating in Syria reportedly linked to donor networks in the Persian Gulf (John, 2013, pg. 105), had “mastered the mechanics of creating Sarin and was capable of manufacturing it in quantity” (Hersh, 2013, pg. 1). After all, Al-Assad’s Islamist opponents even received the blessing to do so by Al-Qaradawi himself when he instructed viewers tuned into a 3rd of December, 2012 episode of *Al-Sharia wa Al-Hayat*: “We (Muslims) should kill everyone who cooperates with the regime (of Bashar Al-Assad); military personnel, civilians, religious figures, laymen. We should kill them” (Fatwa by Al Jazeera's..., 2013).

Reportage studied as part of my discourse analysis also revealed certain media texts audaciously encouraging military intervention, which Qatar had been vocally advocating since mid-2012 (Khoury, 2013, pg.76). On the day when the attack occurred, a report broadcast by Al-Jazeera titled *The Opposition Blames the Regime for Attacking Ghouta with Sarin Gas* carried a statement by a citizen-journalist claiming to the camera: “These children were sleeping, but the regime couldn’t allow them to be in peace and bombed them with chemical weapons!” In *International Observers Investigate Ghouta Today*, broadcast on the 22nd of August, 2013, an Al-Jazeera correspondent rhetorically asks: “What happened to the red lines imposed by Obama on the use of chemical weapons?” She then proceeded to conclude her report by warning that the “victims (of the chemical attack) are at the mercy of humanity’s conscience!” In another report, dated on the 29th of August, 2013, and entitled *The Third Day for the Investigators in the Ghouta Area of Damascus*, the correspondent introduces the story by emphasizing that the investigators’ mission is being conducted “in anticipation of the decisiveness of the international community (in determining) a time to strike the Syrian regime”.

Ultimately, the chemical attack on the 21st of August, 2013, led to an immediate restructuring of the mission of the UN weapons inspectors, who had originally been invited to Syria by Al-Assad to investigate chemical weapons attacks in Aleppo earlier that year. On the 25th of August, 2013, the Syrian regime had granted permission for UN weapons inspectors to investigate the attack sites. The investigation concluded on the 29th of August, 2013 (Sellström, Cairns & Barbeschi, 2013). A report broadcast on the same day of the investigation's conclusion carried footage supplemented by an armed group containing a statement made by an armed, citizen-journalist claiming: "The investigators' mission will likely be followed by a press conference in a few hours that will confirm their findings that the regime used chemical weapons". That press conference never took place, and is thus not available in Al-Jazeera's video database when searching for footage of it after I entered relevant key words.

3.3. Questioning Al-Jazeera's Veracity

The findings of the UN Mission would only be published a few weeks later on the 13th of September, 2013, in a report submitted to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. Despite the content of Al-Jazeera's reportage, the *Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013* did not hold any of the parties responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Ghouta on the 21st of August, 2013. It did assert that "the environmental, chemical and medical samples, we have collected, provide clear evidence that surface-to-surface rockets containing the nerve agent Sarin were used in the Ghouta area of Damascus" (Sellström, Cairns, & Barbeschi, 2013, pg. 5). An interesting aspect of the report is the investigators' descriptions of the conditions in which they were operating. Chief of the UN Mission, Professor Åke Sellström, wrote that he and his team were accompanied by a "rebel leader" throughout the duration of their investigations in the rebel-held area of Zamalka in the Ghouta region who took "custody" of the mission (Sellström, Cairns, & Barbeschi, 2013, pg. 10). In the same report Sellström also claims witnessing "individuals...carrying other suspected munitions indicating that such potential evidence is being moved and

possibly manipulated” whilst in rebel-controlled Zamalka (Sellström, Cairns, & Barbeschi, 2013, pg. 10).

In addition to the discrediting of Al-Jazeera’s veracity by events on the ground, the objectivity of its Syria coverage was also publicly criticized by members of the channel’s Beirut (Lebanon) Bureau, the location tasked with covering the Syrian civil war due to reporting restrictions imposed by Syrian government. Several of the Beirut Bureau’s employees were dismayed by Al-Jazeera’s emergence as “the chief media cheerleader of the rebels taking up arms against Bashar al-Assad”, and resigned from their positions in protest at “directives from above” (Kraidy, 2014, pg. 17). They were particularly disenchanted with the discrepancy between the extensive coverage afforded to the Syrian rebellion as opposed to the the minimal attention the equally popular Bahraini uprising received from Al-Jazeera, and allegations that the Qatari channel had contrived footage of supposed atrocities by the Syrian regime (Kraidy, 2014, pg. 17).

Possibly the most prominent resignation was that of the former Chief of Al-Jazeera’s Beirut Bureau, Ghassan bin Jeddou, who resigned from his position as early as April, 2011, citing a lack of professionalism over Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the Syrian crisis. Before his resignation, Bin Jeddou had been one of Al-Jazeera’s most salient figures. The souring of his relationship with Al-Jazeera became public when, on the 11th of June, 2012, Bin Jeddou oversaw the launch of the privately-owned, Arabic-language satellite television channel named *Al-Mayadeen* (The Public Squares), which claims to be “committed to nationalist, pan-Arab and humanitarian issues within the template of professional journalistic objectivity” (Al-Abdeh, 2012, pg. 21). Both Al-Mayadeen and its aforementioned mission statement are widely perceived in the Arab world as a snub to Ghassan bin Jeddou’s former employers.

According to Arab media scholar Marwan Kraidy, “the most important change in the television news industry brought about by the Arab uprisings has been the editorial realignment of Al Jazeera and the ensuing advent of Al Mayadeen”, which, in turn, is a reflection of how “shifting geopolitical agendas” can effect a “major reshuffling of the pan-Arab television news industry” (2014, pg. 17-18). Bin Jeddou claims that Al-

Mayadeen is funded by private shareholders who share the channel's political vision (Al-Abdeh, 2012, pg. 21), although Arab skeptics adopt a more critical view of Al-Mayadeen, and see it as nothing more than a Syrian and Iranian-funded media campaign against Al-Jazeera, catapulted by the Syrian crisis.

Afshin Rattansi, the award-winning journalist whose portfolio includes work with the BBC, CNN, and Bloomberg Television, and who was one of the first employees of Al-Jazeera English, also resigned from the Al-Jazeera Media Network. He shared his thoughts regarding his resignation during a televised news report broadcast by *Russia Today* on the 12th of March, 2012:

It is very disturbing to hear how Al Jazeera is now becoming this regional player for foreign policy in a way that some would arguably say the BBC (for the United Kingdom) and others have been for decades. If Al Jazeera Arabic is going to take a war-like stance after [the] Qatari government, this would be very ill. There is the courage of these journalists, however, in saying 'Look, this is not the way we should be covering this. There are elements of Al-Qaeda in there (Syria's opposition). The way Al-Jazeera Arabic has covered the story of Syria is completely one-sided. (Russia Today, 2012)

Excerpts from an interview with Ghassan bin Jeddou were also aired in the same report, in which he described a tendency, throughout the duration of the Syrian conflict within Al-Jazeera's news and political programmes, to provide airtime to guests advocating foreign military intervention inside Syria.

Al-Jazeera's former Syria Correspondent Ali Hashem, who also resigned over Syria, went even further than Bin Jeddou and Rattansi and claimed Al-Jazeera's reporters were actively supporting the rebels. In an interview with *Russia Today* aired on the 25th of April, 2012, Hashem claimed that he witnessed members of his former network paying up to 50,000 USD to smugglers, who were recruited to supply satellite ICT's to citizen journalists linked to Syrian rebels through the Syria-Lebanon border. Al-Hashem decried Al-Jazeera's "unprofessionalism" in covering the Syrian conflict, and later told the interviewer "as a journalist, I really felt that I was pushed to do my job for the sake of a certain state's agenda, which is Qatar. The channel was taking a certain

stance. It was meddling with each and every detail of reports on the Syrian revolution” (Russia Today, April 2012).

A very-high ranking and well-known Al-Jazeera Media Network personality was generous enough to discuss how the channel’s coverage of the Syrian crisis impacted journalistic professionalism with me. “Yes, backing these protests was very justified as it was against the dictatorship and for freedom and dignity”, was the initial response to my question asking whether or not the sympathetic tone of Al-Jazeera’s coverage was a justified moral obligation. This individual, whose anonymity I prefer to maintain, later conceded:

We should admit that as long as the protesters became armed, and the armed groups increasingly became religious extremists, this sympathy no longer had the same impact because moral obligation should lead [one] to condemn both the regime and the extremist group[s]. Al-Jazeera were not very quick to assume that role. Recently, however, they have, when reporting the recent reports of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International assumed this direction.

3.4. Assessing the Impact of Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the Ghouta Attacks

The “certain stance” alluded to by Ali Hashem on pg. 67 proved too pugnacious in the period following the Ghouta attack. Questionable information disseminated by Al-Jazeera during that 8-day period had served to set the stage for a military strike against a sovereign state, the consequences of which – if we can use the chaos unfolding in neighbouring Iraq as a guide – would have been disastrous. Rather than fulfilling its motto: ‘The opinion, and the other opinion’, Al-Jazeera had invested most of its resources in advancing only one opinion congenial to certain foreign policy objectives, resulting in the likelihood of yet another armed conflict in arguably the most volatile region in the world. Indeed, that other opinion, historically lionized by Al-Jazeera, was only afforded a mere 1 minute and 58 seconds in the eight days following the Ghouta attacks.

It would be rash to immediately assume that Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Ghouta Attacks wielded the invulnerable influence unscrupulously attributed by early 20th century behaviourist media scholars to the effects of mass media messages (Wartella & Reeves, 1985, p. 120). Ignoring the ability of viewers to read media messages critically would be equally unwise, yet this does not mean we should dispense with the behaviorist emphasis placed on the domineering nature of media effects, completely. The Media System Dependency Theory (MSD), developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur, enables us to assess the potentially detrimental impact of media effects with regard to the Syrian crisis through the appropriate contextualization of the relationship between Arab society, Al-Jazeera, and Al-Jazeera's audiences. MSD hypothesizes that media effects increase in correlation with dependence on media as a source of information, and how such dependence augments the centrality of media (Rubin & Windahl, 1985, pg. 185). Al-Jazeera had already established itself as a reliable and popular source of information vis-à-vis the Arab revolutions. Its coverage was professional yet personal, analytical, extensive, and considerably empathetic with what were unprecedentedly popular and indigenous movements advancing universal goals, prior to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. Most importantly, Al-Jazeera was without serious competitors as far as covering the Arab Spring was concerned.

The Arab Spring has thus allowed Al-Jazeera to accumulate a repository of alternative and revolutionary news coverage in a media landscape dominated by docile and incompetent state-owned media broadcasters whose elitist sycophancy reinforces Al-Jazeera's status as the Middle East's only independent, alternative broadcaster. This status, coupled with the extent to which Al-Jazeera's correspondents are embedded with the Syrian militants operating on the ground, has transformed Al-Jazeera and its English counterpart as the only internationally reputable Arabic-language media network deemed by audiences both inside and outside the Arab world as a credible purveyor of news surrounding events inside Syria. There exists virtually no other channel with the necessary human and material resources capable of offering the scale of coverage the Al-Jazeera Media Network offers the Syrian crisis.

Ideally, such an esteemed status would expectedly necessitate practicing more responsibility when covering events inside Syria, rather than disseminating questionable information that would have provided the pretext for another episode of military intervention in the Arab world. The latter argument may be mistakenly construed as a veiled expression of support for Bashar Al-Assad, which it is not. Along with the rest of the Arab world, Syria is in dire need for peaceful democratic reform, and Al-Assad's peaceful departure from power would be a positive aspect of any reformative process.

3.5. Islamism and the Challenge Facing Media Democracy in the Arab World

In the international sphere, Al-Jazeera's editorial support for Syria's Islamist-dominated opposition conforms to Qatar's prioritization of regime change in Syria. At the professional level, this support may be embedded in the Islamist proclivities of many of Al-Jazeera's employees, particularly the large number who are politically affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and occupy the channel's upper echelons. Needless to say, chief amongst them is Al-Qaradawi, widely considered to be the spiritual figurehead of the global Muslim Brotherhood. Another prominent Al-Jazeera figure with links to the Muslim Brotherhood is Ahmed Mansour, the host of popular weekly programs *Bela Hudood* (Without Borders) and *Shahed 'Ala Al-Asr* (Witness to the Era), who served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Mujtama'* (The Society), a publication associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, prior to being employed by Al-Jazeera. Ahmed Zaidan, a correspondent serving Al-Jazeera's Syria Desk who enjoyed unfettered access to spokespeople for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda throughout his career, had been exiled by the Syrian Baath Party for his involvement in the failed, Muslim Brotherhood-led armed uprising against Hafez Al-Assad in 1982 (Kraidy, 2014).

Criticism of Al-Jazeera's overrepresentation of Islamists is centered on the contradictions inherent in the relationship between the channel's commitment to media freedom and its Islamist bias. For communications Professor Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, as far as shows such as *Al-Sharia wa Al-Hayat* are concerned, Al-Jazeera exclusively

promotes “the opinion and the same opinion” of orthodox Sunni Islam (as cited in Ferghani, 2010, pg. 90). Interviews with Al-Jazeera’s editorial staff conducted between 2005 and 2007 by communications scholar Riadh Ferghani revealed that discontent with Al-Jazeera’s pro-Islamist bias has been expressed not only “within the middle and lower ranks of editorial staff”, but also by “anchors or news editors”. Ferghani explains that, whilst the possibility of an attenuation of Al-Jazeera’s demagogic editorial line, and the limited margin of editorial freedom they have, has preserved the latter group of employees’ commitment to continue working for the channel, other anchors and news editors have resigned (Ferghani, 2010, pg. 89). One such individual was the former Washington Bureau Chief of Al-Jazeera, Hafez Al-Mirazi, who blamed Khanfar for his resignation in 2007: “From the first day of the Wadah Khanfar era, there was a dramatic change, especially because of him selecting assistants who are hardline Islamists” (as cited in Ferghani, 2010, pg. 89).

Khanfar publicly justified the disproportionately large amount of Islamists employed under his management as a reflection of the growing influence of Islam as a political force in the region (Ferghani, 2010, pg. 89). His assessment is correct. As a Palestinian Muslim myself, who has spent most of his life in the Arab world, I am acutely aware that Arab society is overwhelmingly conservative, and Islamist parties are, and will continue to be part and parcel of the political fabric of the Arab world for the foreseeable future. Yet the popularity of Islamism does not absolve Al-Jazeera of its responsibilities to practice journalism that emphasizes conflict resolution, rather than incentivizing extremism – when covering the Syrian civil war, and to promote media democracy in defiance of all forms of dictatorship, including in the form of violent religious demagoguery.

By editorializing Islamism, Al-Jazeera creates the space in which “background frames of reference can hang over professional practices and lead to a simplification or even reification of reality” (Ferghani, 2010, pg. 90). This is particularly true, for example, with regard to how Al-Jazeera insulates Qatar from public criticism by politically decontextualizing news events through the application of thematic framing that victimizes the subject matter in its coverage. The latter argument is also applicable to Al-

Jazeera's outward focus when covering the Arab Spring whilst turning a blind eye to the ongoing popular and peaceful protests in neighbouring Bahrain, seemingly due to an anti-Shiite bias, and Bahrain's geographical proximity to Qatar (Barakat, 2013, pg. 33). Finally, the Islamist permeation of Al-Jazeera's work ethic has inhibited the growth of Arab democracy by providing a public platform to figures such as Al-Qaradawi, thereby facilitating his "ability to issue death warrants and induce an absolutist mindset fuelled by fundamentalist, intolerant manifestos" (Al-Sharekh, 2011, pg. 58). Despite Al-Jazeera's championing of the democratic forces that initiated the Arab uprisings, Al-Jazeera would later consolidate the subsequent Islamist domination of these revolutions by becoming the "primary ideological and communication network" for Islamists in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria (Phares, 2014, pg. 79).

3.6. Perpetuating the Syrian Civil War: Geopolitical Ramifications

Syria's civil war is microcosmic of the competing geopolitical designs harboured by the country's various West Asian neighbours that have a vested interest in determining the outcome of the conflict (Valborn & Bank, 2012). Fearful of the emboldening effect jihadist expansionism in Syria would have on the Islamist-dominated Chechen insurrection in Russia itself, apprehensive of NATO's eastward expansion, and in apparent defense of its only foreign naval base situated in the Syrian port city of Tartus, a resurgent Russian Federation has provided Al-Assad's regime with the diplomatic and military support required to sustain itself during the three-year conflict (Katz, 2013, pg. 38). The People's Republic of China, too, has frustrated diplomatic efforts to chastise the Al-Assad regime using its veto power at the United Nations, but this particular Chinese policy has more to do with a decades-old policy of non-interference in foreign affairs (Large, 2008).

At the same time, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Syria's closest ally in the MENA region, has supplemented Russian support, both financially and militarily, to the Syrian

regime in pursuit of its own strategic interests. Many of the jihadist groups inside Syria are motivated by an intolerant Sunni-Islamist ideology that is antithetical to Shiite-Islam, and are predisposed to subjugating that denomination's theology, adherents, and all institutions representative of it – Hezbollah, the Al-Assad regime, and, ultimately, Iran. Iran's leaders are conscientious of this reality and have responded to it with unequivocal logistical and financial support for Al-Assad (Ziadeh, 2013).

As we have learned earlier in this thesis, Al-Assad's Islamist opponents also have international backers. Elements within the GCC member states share a common animosity to what they view as encroaching Shiite and Iranian influence in the region, of which the Al-Assad regime, according to their sectarian logic, is a mere extension. Although a sufficient amount of available peer-reviewed academic research indicating official funding for the rebels does not exist, there exists a consensus amongst Western intelligence reports that donor channels in Qatar and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf are important sources of funding for the armed insurrection against Bashar Al-Assad. Whether or not these channels are official or unofficial is a question that cannot be addressed here.

The potent threat, posed by ISIL/ISIS and their allies, to not only global security, but also to the very livelihood of everyone, especially in the MENA, who does not conform to their radical interpretation of intolerant Sunni Islam, is the by-product of the Syrian Islamist insurrection perpetuated by these aforementioned Persian Gulf fundraising channels. In the short term, the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and the terrorizing, rape, and genocide of religious minorities in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon occurring as of this writing has now rendered this threat more palpable. How the jihadist environment fostered in Syria and Iraq by Persian Gulf donors will threaten geopolitical security cannot be predicted. Despite this absence of foresight, the destructive repercussions of the logistical and financial funding for the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union more than thirty years ago serves as an indicator of how grave it actually is.

Conclusion

Due to the virtual absence of any other Arab state capable of projecting its interests beyond its borders, Qatar will very likely continue to play a robust role in the Arab world for the foreseeable future. However, this independent role may not be independent of the domineering influence of U.S. strategic hegemony in the MENA, and it is difficult to determine whether or not Qatar will be able to transform the Arab World into the united, influential regional entity it deserves to be – a powerful and constructive member of the international community. Moreover, Qatar is set to continue developing for the foreseeable future, and become a financial, cultural, and educational hub in the MENA, where human resources remain grossly underdeveloped.

Those who deservedly stand most to gain from the development of human resources are Qataris themselves, and, more importantly, the hundreds of thousands of foreign labourers upon whose manual labour Qatari infrastructure rests. The latter's status as a disposable, disenfranchised foreign underclass deprived of the most basic rights granted by citizenship irrespective of the length of residence in Qatar, whose livelihoods are constrained within transnational remittance corridors, is an affront to the basic principles of human rights. Humane and sustainable development in the Persian Gulf is contingent on the salvation of the Southeast Asian workforces who constitute the backbone of the Persian Gulf's economies. Without the cultivation of any form of nonmaterial attachment to their host countries, their hard, skilled work may not be secured in the long-term.

An indispensable component of Qatar's drive to assert itself in the international arena has been the launch of the Al-Jazeera Media Network in 1996, possibly Qatar's most successful public diplomacy feat. According to ABC, the contributions of both Al-Jazeera Arabic and English to world journalism are unprecedented, and, "in terms of its

coverage, it's better than the competition. It does give voice to much of the global south in a way that others don't attempt...Al-Jazeera has a lot to offer". Al-Jazeera's fulfillment of the ideal role generally envisioned for journalism as a disseminator of information that serves as a watchdog monitoring encroaching power structures, and of its own commitment to being a voice for the voiceless, was realized with the advent of the Arab Spring. The revolutionaries in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya would neither have enjoyed the international recognition they did, nor the moral support of tens of millions of people throughout the Arab world, were it not for Al-Jazeera's extensive and emboldening coverage. Qatar's leadership is deserving of specific praise here, as the country's leaders have boldly championed the region's popular democratic aspirations when others have actively sought to subdue them. Empowering the protesters in these three North African countries was representative of Al-Jazeera's alternative and independent character. However, the alignment of Al-Jazeera's editorial approach to the protests with Qatar's pro-revolutionary foreign policy ambitions toward the Arab Spring disputes the channel's supposed independence.

Is Al-Jazeera co-opted by its host country? After all, how independent can Al-Jazeera, in light of what has been discussed in this thesis, really be? For Al-Jazeera to adhere to its alternative ethos – an ethos that must be adopted by all Arab media broadcasters if liberal democracy were ever to be implemented in the MENA region – it should, in the interest of journalistic objectivity, offer equally extensive coverage to the ongoing, nationwide, and liberal-democratic protests in neighbouring Bahrain. Nevertheless, it is possible that the scant attention offered Bahrain is due to an inherent sectarianism: Bahrain's revolutionaries are from the majority Shiite population, and are demanding more freedoms from the Sunni monarchy ruling over them. It is also possible that the Bahraini protests do not figure prominently in Al-Jazeera's coverage due to the geographical proximity of Bahrain to Qatar.

Al-Jazeera is the Arabs' most successful experiment in audio-visual independent media. It has raised the standard for media freedom in the MENA and, possibly, the world. Before the advent of the Arab Spring, it had been the only genuinely transnational Arab public sphere, and continues to fulfill this role in many of the countries in the Arab

world today. The uprisings in the Arab world compelled Al-Jazeera to utilize its commitment to media democracy in the popular struggle against tyranny. If Al-Jazeera is to continue adhering to its progressive logic, it may have to confront the new form of tyranny facing the MENA region – theocratic tyranny.

The perpetuation of the Syrian Civil War has reinforced dormant, albeit existing sectarian divisions throughout the Arab world that manifest themselves in episodes of fatal conflict whenever aggravated. The mutual enmity between the various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and the secular camp had been discussed in great detail earlier in Chapter Two. Another divisive bone of contention marking the Middle Eastern political landscape has been the Sunni-Shiite cleavage. On the Sunni side of this cleavage, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, its ideological affiliates, and the plethora of armed groups acting alongside it on the ground in Syria have undoubtedly underlying sectarian motives that are evident in their avowed opposition to the Shiite identity of the Al-Assad regime.

Violent Sunni sectarianism is personified by none other than Al-Qaradawi. Perhaps the most glaring example of this came in June, 2013, when he instructed “every Muslim trained to fight and capable of doing so” to join the Syrian uprising to defend against the “continued massacres to kill and devour Sunnis”, in a televised sermon broadcast by Qatar Television addressing a congregation of prayers (El qardaway, 2013, 1:02:00). A more thorough review of the speech indicates that it was aimed at both Iran and its main Arab proxy, Hezbollah. Whilst deference to his religious edicts is a matter of subjective interpretation, they should not be reduced to mere propaganda. Alongside being regarded as the spiritual leader of the global Muslim Brotherhood movement, he also serves as the leader of the Qatar-based International Union of Muslim Scholars (Graf, 2007) and *Al-Shari’a wa Al-Hayat* remains one of Al-Jazeera’s most popular shows. Neither is this previous statement an aberration or isolated incident; Al-Qaradawi has become the quintessential and mainstream ideologue of a radical, increasingly popular strand of Sunni-Islamism antithetical to secularism and Shiite Islam.

Numerous media reports studied for this thesis suggest that ISIL/ISIS have begun to impose an especially regressive form of Shari’a Law on the large swathes of

territory under their control, and intend to use this territory as a springboard for an Islamist invasion of the entire Arab World. My intention here is neither to fear-monger, nor am I attempting to provide justification to any form of anti-Muslim sentiment wherever it may be present. I merely aim to invite the reader to take stock of the repercussions that the empowerment of armed groups harbouring a sectarian, militant and violent demagogic ideology in pursuit of foreign policy objectives has had. Sectarian and religious-based violence is now claiming dozens of lives on an almost daily basis in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Egypt as of this writing. For many people living in these countries, any sense of social, political, and economic stability has all but diminished as a result of sectarian and religious-based violence.

A more responsible form of journalism that underscores the Sunni jihadist ideology's propensity toward sectarian violence and religious intolerance must be exercised by Al-Jazeera. If conflict resolution is emphasized by Al-Jazeera vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis, greater awareness of the threat posed by Syrian jihadist organizations and their co-jihadists in neighbouring Iraq may possibly have averted the rapes, massacres, and refugee crises resulting from ISIL/ISIS's territorial advances in Iraq and Syria. Al-Jazeera will need to confront its Sunni-Islamist sectarian bias and distance itself from the Muslim Brotherhood in order to institutionalize a more ethical form of journalism.

Further communications research on the shaping of news discourse by cultural, religious, and political forces is needed to advance future knowledge of the social, political, and economic environment in which the relationship between Qatar and Al-Jazeera exists. Such research should primarily focus on the overbearing strategic considerations that stifle Middle Eastern political freedoms in general, and media freedoms in particular. Only then, in my opinion, can a coherent and constructive debate on the possible transformation of Al-Jazeera into a genuinely independent media organization dedicated to strengthening liberal democracy and human rights take place.

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