NEW MEDIA IN THE ARAB WORLD:
A TOOL FOR REDESIGNING
GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES

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New Media in the Arab World:  
A Tool for Redesigning Geopolitical Realities  

Rabie Barakat  

Abstract  

This thesis highlights the role of new media in shaping public discourse and redesigning geopolitical realities in the Arab World. It examines the interrelation between media and politics as revealed by the Arab popular uprisings that swept away regional status quos in 2011. New media in general and Al Jazeera in particular were able to foster public dynamics and control their trajectories. The result was an introduction of the public sphere as an active player in shaping political realities and reconstructing the Arab World on different grounds. The new power formula also introduced media-sponsoring states as key players in the region. Qatar was greatly able to expand its leverage through “organic intellectuals” hosted by Al Jazeera to take part in the interactive discourse with the public. Moreover, the media effect created a turbulent stage with open possibilities, thus allowing foreign states to intervene in molding the new scene and drawing its horizons. Media escalation triggered an uncontrolled domino effect which threatened national identities and regional balances. It enticed previously contained dynamics in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain; and when developments broke loose from all restraining factors, as in the case of Libya, soft power was replaced by military intervention and the domestic character of the Libyan uprising gained international dimensions and was further complicated. The thesis presents an analysis of the phenomena uncovered by the media-politics interchange and finally suggests that new media will maintain its presence as an influential intruder in shaping the dialectical interplay between regional players in the foreseen future.  

Keywords: Public Sphere, Media Discourse, Constructivist Approach, Transnational Organic Intellectuals, Geopolitical Realities.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1- Situating the Thesis

In 2011, popular uprisings in various Arab states underscored the crucial role of new media in shaping perceptions, mobilizing masses, and orienting the course of exploding dynamics within Arab societies. Throughout these events, media tactics have been used to serve campaigns for popular mobilization or even long term social engineering. This was facilitated by the huge upgrade in media technology coupled with the expansion of new media and social media in the field of transnational politics. Little wonder, then, that actual revolts and bloody wars stretching from Yemen to Libya were fought side by side with massive efforts seeking to shape public opinion and catalyze (or control) the tide of change. Political permeability was reaching a new zenith in terms of speed and outcomes and the domino effect was sweeping away regional status quos. At this point, the Arab World seemed to be stepping into a new age, where media was not just a formulator of opinion but an actual intruder in drawing the road map for different political possibilities.

New media in the Arab World has provided popular uprisings with momentum, yet the evolution of events on the ground has played a counter role by reshaping media’s approach itself towards political changes. This thesis aims to problematize the relationship
between media and political developments before concluding that the dialogical interplay between both results in a reciprocal effect, whereby each has the tendency to shape the other depending on the different contextualizing variables. Such variables range from the geopolitical significance of the states witnessing uprisings, to the structures of their regimes, their social compositions, and foreign policy calculations on the regional level. In other words, the thesis will be proving that new media was able to “reshape the background assumptions of Arab views”¹ then cultivate social dynamics in the Arab World, yet it was by no means far from the aftershocks of political developments. In fact, it was part of the same “nested game” and thus could not have escaped the reverberations of its own regional milieu.

1.2- Research Questions

How did Al Jazeera and Al Arabia reflect the foreign policies of Qatar and Saudi Arabia towards popular uprisings in the Arab World? The answer to this question requires investigating the general guidelines underlying the diplomatic approaches of Doha and Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is a state known to have a conservative foreign policy with little interest in shaking the regional status quo. According to its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its foreign policy is a realist one “represented by avoiding slogans and overacting” since the

latter “negatively affect the security and stability of the Arab World”.² For the past decade, it has identified itself with a regional order based on the alliance of “moderate” dictatorships aligning with the United States, and has “responded to an age of revolution by leading what many now call a regional counter-revolution”.³ Riyadh’s policy towards the uprisings was founded on the aforementioned approach. Its stance has evolved with the evolution of the uprisings, and has thus shifted from taking a defensive position to adopting an offensive one, when preserving its regime security required this change. The Saudi-sponsored network Al Arabia reflected this policy with all its curves and turns, and was taking part in the Arab public discourse on these grounds. Its stance was defensive when KSA’s allies, namely the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen, were threatened by popular revolts. However, it was provocative in the cases of Libya and Syria, with both being the Kingdom’s main Arab foes.

On the other hand, Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website states that the Gulf emirate is “keen on effectively participating in all issues and challenges that confront the gulf region”⁴. This “effective participation” could also be witnessed on the level of the Arab World in general, where Doha uses its vibrant public diplomacy in order to preserve its place as a key player in regional conflict resolutions. Qatar also uses this diplomacy to engage with the Arab public sphere and shape its dialogue in a manner that best suits


preserving its regional role. Al Jazeera is described to be the main tool for achieving this purpose. Ever since the channel’s launching in 1996, it has been extending its influence in the field of public discourse. After the eruption of popular uprisings, Al Jazeera enhanced its interactive engagement with Arab communities and participated in drawing the trajectories of political change throughout the Arab World. It was actively driving for further popular escalation in all the states witnessing upheavals except for neighboring Bahrain. The network’s editorial policies were an exact reflection of Qatar’s foreign policy towards the issues in concern.

How was Arab new media a tool for redesigning geopolitical realities? The dramatic development of events introduced the dilemma of preserving countries having diverse social compositions, in the absence of safety valves traditionally offered by central authorities. Such were the cases of Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The uprisings were targeting the states’ authorities, and at the same time widening the rift between different social groups. New media was the dynamo of all Arab uprisings. It was accused by the targeted autocracies of carrying out veiled agendas aiming to reconstruct the region on different grounds. In Libya, the regime immensely employed this rhetoric. It exaggerated fears relating to the tribal components of the Libyan society, the East-West sensitivities, as well as the rise of monarchic and fundamentalist groups. The battle between the regime’s propaganda outlets and Arab networks, mainly Al Jazeera and Al Arabia, was taking the course of discrediting Tripoli’s allegations. However, the states waging media war against the Gaddafi regime were benefiting from its collapse and creating a replacement holding tight relations with them. Qatar in particular was a key player in redesigning future Libya.
Its role was first established through Al Jazeera’s powerful public engagement, and through the manufacturing of Libyan organic intellectuals aired regularly on the network to comment on the events of the uprising and later on to be key players in the after Gaddafi regime. Qatar’s engagement was further boosted after providing the rebels with financial and military support. However, Al Jazeera’s engagement was a necessary prerequisite for Doha’s subsequent intervention.

1.3- Methodology

The thesis uses constructivist as well as realist explanations to interpret media coverage of Arab uprisings. It relies on both schools of thought to analyze media tactics in the context of grand strategies. It also uses comparative analysis in order to elucidate the distinctions between Al Jazeera and Al Arabia, and between the foreign policies of their sponsoring states, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

The research employs a variety of qualitative research tools. It makes use of empirical observations and daily interactions with news industry. It employs visual material extracted from accessible archives and other sources of social media, and relies heavily on videos uploaded on Youtube. It uses both, primary and secondary literature. It is backed up by the wide array of articles published in Arabic and Western papers and journals on the subject, and bases its analysis on the available literature pertaining to media and politics.

The thesis also uses personal interviews conducted in Beirut, Cairo, and Ben Ghazi to back up its assumptions. The interviews include Ghassan Bin Jiddo, a key figure in the
world of Arab media who resigned from Al Jazeera after accusing the channel of presenting biased coverage of the uprisings, a former consultant of Yemeni president Ali Abdallah Saleh, in addition to a former Libyan minister, the vice president of the National Transitional Council representing Libyan rebels, and several Libyan activists. The interviews pertaining to Libya were conducted during its popular uprising. They present a close inspection of relevant political developments and shed light on the evolving pattern of events.

1.4- Mapping the Thesis

The thesis is made up of five chapters. The next chapter presents a “genealogy” of new media in the Arab World, explaining how this field has developed and evolved. It focuses on the distinctions between Arab new media and its counterparts in the West, before presenting the map of the main news oriented satellite televisions until the year 2011. The chapter also introduces the idea of adherence between editorial policies of media outlets and foreign policies of their sponsoring states, and explains how the coverage of past events has exposed this relation. Moreover, it sheds light on social media as a complementary tool for satellite networks, especially noticed during the Arab uprisings.

The third chapter uses comparative analysis to reveal the differences in news coverage between the two main media outlets in the Arab World; Al Jazeera and Al Arabia. It analyzes the main drivers behind the policies carried out by each network, explaining how Al Jazeera reflects Qatar’s dynamic character and public diplomacy strategy, while Al
Arabia mirrors Saudi Arabia’s preferred maintenance of the regional status quo. The chapter also presents the main tactics used by each network to gain leverage; Al Jazeera through its vital engagement with events and creation of “transnational organic intellectuals” and Al Arabia through its extensive coverage and veiled politicization of news. Furthermore, it reveals how these strategies and tactics were used during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, and shows how the stances of Qatar and Saudi Arabia towards the uprisings were drawing the line of coverage for both.

The fourth chapter analyzes the domino effect of the uprisings, unfolding in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya. It emphasizes the role of geopolitics in rearranging media priorities and redrawing their approaches, and links this reassessment to the sectarian composition and social structures of Arab communities. The chapter uses Libya as a case study to show how media discourse has the tendency to introduce military action, and to incorporate international powers in a local dispute. It also sheds light on the specificities of the Libyan dictatorship when compared to its Arab counterparts, and establishes its interpretations on idiosyncratic, state, and system levels of analysis. The research mainly highlights Al Jazeera’s role in the uprising to unpack the layered interaction between media rhetoric and social dynamics, and to show how their interconnectedness was driven by both; constructed images of social evolution and realist policies. Both schools of IR (constructivism and realism) are used to explain the phenomenon and underscore the different trajectories of the discourse in concern, with special emphasis on media’s constructivist role framing inter-state relations in the Arab World.
The last chapter presents general conclusions and findings. It relates the overall analysis to IR theory, and introduces the author’s anticipations relating to the role of Arab new media in the foreseen future.
CHAPTER 2

ARAB NEW MEDIA: AN ACCUMULATING POWER

2.1- Introduction

The literature pertaining to Arab new media and its political functions relates to the fact that most news outlets are extensions of regional governments or global powers aiming to spread state interests or ensure regime survival. Profit making criteria and a public/private dichotomy do not hold the same significance as they do in the West, and the state rather than market forces represents the main player in this field. Understanding the background of this status requires tracing back the evolution of new media in the Arab World since its early beginnings.

This chapter examines the launching of Arab satellite channels that presented around the clock coverage of events in the second half of the 1990s. Since then, new media gradually established itself as a space for public discourse with reasonable margins for discussing realities and alternative possibilities on the Arab scene. However, such margins were restricted by various considerations. Restricting factors ranged from tight regulations adopted by Arab authorities to censorships practiced by their state apparatuses on media coverage. Moreover, they pertained to the fact that the Arab public sphere in the post-globalization era was still in a process of formation, with little malleability to adapt to new

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forms of information exchange or readiness to reconsider inherited perceptions and break established taboos. This gradual process of unleashing social potentials, and tendencies to redesign public discourse in the Arab World, was to a far extent introduced by new media. Its profound impact on shaping the framework of social and political dialectics rendered satellite networks a credible platform for discussing alternative possibilities on the Arab stage. However, up until recently, it was widely believed that satellite networks have given Arabs “the opportunity to discuss hardships and exchange answers, but not to offer solutions”, and that “viewers may well change their minds because of something they see on television but this might not effectively translate into political action”. The following sections will be examining the evolution of Arab new media basing on all these assumptions.

2.2- State Sponsored Networks

The comparison between Arab media and its Western counterpart invokes several questions. It is useful to raise the issue pertaining to the extent of influence that each exerts on its respective state policies. In the post cold war era, the term “CNN effect” denoted the ability to influence government decisions through extensive live coverage of certain events on the international scene. While American networks (notably CNN) were able to trigger

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American action in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and other places, Arab news media remained mainly connected to political agendas, and sustained its position as an executive tool for political decisions rather than an independent factor triggering political change within states or their foreign policies. Thus, policy change has always been induced in the opposite direction, where realignments or redistribution of power within Arab ruling elites have resulted in modifying the content presented by state sponsored networks.  

To some scholars, Arab new media can be categorized according to the extent of autonomy from conventional patterns of government-controlled speech. This margin differentiates a channel like Qatari based and funded Al Jazeera from a traditional governmental channel like the Syrian, Jordanian or even Qatari national televisions. It was notable that the Qatari prince Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani abolished the Ministry of Information, responsible for censorship in Qatar. This step was unprecedented by any other Arab authority, where all governments include such a ministry or its equivalent. However, Arab governments maintain their influence over “liberal” networks (like Al Jazeera and Saudi funded Al Arabiya) through legal provisions and dominant representation in their boards of directors. Editorial policies are thus bound to express the general policy of the state in concern, despite their apparent adherence to professional guidelines and objective journalistic standards. States remain until this moment the

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masters of media monopoly while the private sector and civil society have little to do with managing this field. The link between states and media monopoly partially explains the reason why media content is shaped within the historical and political contexts of the Middle East and the Arab World as we shall see next.

2.3- The Dominance of Transnational Politics in News Industry

The question of why news agendas in the Arab World have been politicized is also an important and legitimate one. The Arab region has been witnessing ongoing turbulence for the past five decades, and this has created a sense of affiliation to political causes and events within Arab masses, which rendered political news most significant to the general public. Media agendas were thus dominated by political news rather than subjected to normative standards of selection, while areas of cultural, social, and humanitarian news were excluded or given subordinate rank.\textsuperscript{11}

The past two decades in particular were full of dramatic political conditions and meaningful events to Arab masses as well: Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait followed by the siege of Iraq and its devastating humanitarian effects during the 1990s, the Palestinian \textit{Intifada} in 2001, the 9/11 attacks against the US and the consequent “War on Terror”, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Israeli wars waged on Lebanon and Gaza in 2006 and 2009. This chain of developments added further engagement in politics to a medium which has already been politicized and drowned with “Grand Causes”, regional wars and domestic

\textsuperscript{11} Ayishy, \textit{Political Communication}, p 149.
disturbances. Arab new media was acting in this context. In a sense, it was an “articulation of a common identity”\textsuperscript{12}. It was also gathering all these common grounds and interests to “create a collective discourse that raises issues that have meaning to all Arabs”\textsuperscript{13}. For instance, Al Jazeera’s coverage of the second Palestinian Intifada reflected Arab views by using descriptive terms to which Arab spectators can relate. Palestinians killed by Israeli troops were thus described as martyrs and the Israeli army was often termed as “occupying forces” in news bulletins.\textsuperscript{14} However, it was widely believed that such a discourse could hardly penetrate local barriers and was deemed to remain passive in terms of effect, and transnational in terms of space. Media outlets were thus a complementary tool for interstate rivalry and their impact seemed to be more obvious on the regional rather than the domestic political scene.\textsuperscript{15} Before the eruption of recent popular uprisings in the Arab World, many were skeptical concerning the ability of new media to mobilize masses and extend its intrusion towards the local environments of Arab states.


\textsuperscript{13} Khalil Rinnawi, \textit{Instant Nationalism}, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{14} El-Nawary and Iskandar, \textit{Al Jazeera}, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{15} Musa Shteiwi, \textit{Arab Media in the Information Age}, (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006) p. 131.
2.4- Al Jazeera: Setting the “Model” for Many

If one were to draw a current map of Arabic speaking news channels, s/he would notice the rapid growth of such networks within the last fifteen years. The end of 1996 witnessed the broadcasting of the first twenty four hour dedicated news service: Al Jazeera. Rising from the ashes of the newly founded yet insufficiently funded BBC Arabic, Al Jazeera achieved great success in capturing wide Arab audience, with its high quality around the clock news service. The new born channel made use of an unemployed, well trained BBC staff to launch programs that for the first time introduced unconstrained political debates with live audience interactivity.16

Al Jazeera’s success triggered regional as well as international actors to work on replicating the experience. Saudi Arabia launched Al Arabiya in March 2003, in an attempt to create balance in the media scene. The new network was first regarded as a similar copy of the former, only with a more liberal style in presenting and interacting with the audience. On the level of editorial policies however, a dramatic divergence between both began on the eve of the war on Iraq, when Al Jazeera reflected a wide Arab opinion rejecting the invasion, whereas Al Arabiya revealed a relatively pro American stance that overlapped with the official Saudi posture. Henceforth, several state sponsored media outlets appeared on stage. In 2004, both Washington and Tehran took the initiative. The American Al Hurra (The Free) was launched to balance Al Jazeera and redraw the collective Arab opinion, especially that relating to the stance towards the United States. It was seen as a tool for

propagating American ideals of “democracy promotion” in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, though many believe that it has failed to fulfill its objectives. To William Rugh, a former ambassador and public diplomacy expert, Al Hurra has simply “struggled unsuccessfully to fuse information and advocacy broadcasting”. Iran on the other hand launched Al Alam (The World) during the invasion of Iraq. The channel focused primarily on Iraqi, Palestinian, and Lebanese audiences. All three constituted environments in which Iran has managed to build a firm political presence (Shiites of Lebanon and Islamist factions in Palestinian territories) or that demonstrated potential spheres of influence (Shiites of Iraq).

In 2006, Moscow decided to take part in this media rally: “Russia Today” began broadcasting in Arabic in the second half of that year. BBC was relaunched in 2008 from London, and France 24 offered a twenty four hour Arabic news service starting 2010. Even China managed to place its foot (although generally unnoticed) in this mosaic, with its CNTV launched in 2009, whereas Turkey tried to make use of the growing admiration of its Erdogan government in the Arab World by establishing TRT Arabic in middle 2010, a step that was densely publicized by the Turkish government, with Erdogan himself speaking on the occasion.

On the Arab stage, Egypt has consistently announced its intentions to substantially upgrade its governmental media outlets, though little was done in that regard. Abu Dhabi Channel previously showed promise, especially during the war on Iraq, and was even

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18 This information is offered by the official websites of each of the mentioned channels.
competing with Al Jazeera’s coverage. Later on, however, it suffered a significant reduction in budget and underwent a gradual transformation from a news network to a commercial one, in what seemed to be an attempt from the Emirates authorities to refrain from political media engagement. The two main media actors remain Qatar’s Al Jazeera and Saudi Arabia’s Al Arabiya; both having full support from their respective governments, though not directly owned by either of them. Several other channels of a primarily local identity relied on the same type of support system: Iran sponsors Al Manar (launched in 1991) which is owned by the Lebanese Hezbollah. It also finances Al Quds (2008) and Palestine Today (2011), both mainly targeting Palestinian spectators. Several Iraqi channels are being funded by Tehran in the same way. Saudi Arabia in turn supports Future TV (owned by Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri), while Libya has had several unproductive attempts (namely Assa’a and Al Ghad) that were distorted due to the lack of clear vision or even interest in defining its own media strategy.19

2.5- Inter-State Proxy Wars

The documents published by Wikileaks in 2010 best demonstrate how Arab states deal with media content and employ it as a tool of conflict. One is able to notice how Al Jazeera offered wide coverage of the “scandalous” documents described as the 9/11 of

19 The stated information is partly dependent on my work in this field and with several of the mentioned networks, particularly Al-Alam, Assa’a, and Palestine Today.
diplomacy, especially that hundreds of them highlighted secret stances and decisions claimed by Arab leaders. To Al Jazeera, this coverage strongly adhered to the general policy of Qatar in which the small emirate practiced influence through media power. To Al Arabiya on the other hand, the conservative political stance of KSA, especially when it comes to the Kingdom’s internal affairs, imposed restraints on the network because many of the uncovered documents pertained to hardly defendable stances or actions practiced by Saudi figures, princes, and high officials. The Saudi network did not show the same enthusiasm revealed by Al Jazeera on the issue. Wikileaks was a tool in Al Jazeera’s hand; a weapon against Al Arabiya’s sponsoring state. In previous situations, the two channels contested more vigorously in propagating antagonistic viewpoints of a given case. During the 33-day Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, Al Arabiya broadcasted reports accentuating Israel’s commercial relations with Qatar. On the other hand, Al Jazeera played an integral role in bolstering emotions of sympathy and solidarity with Hezbollah (KSA’s unpleasant Iranian ally). Both engaged in a fierce rivalry of heavy propaganda and mutual image undermining.

Different battle grounds for Media outlets can be identified throughout the last few years. Iraq played a central role in defining Middle Eastern strategies for both the United States and Iran. The main purpose of Iran’s Al Alam TV channel was to win the hearts and minds of Iraqi Shiites before the United States did. Washington’s Al Hurra contested for the same purpose. Turkey’s TRT has been trying to reflect the moderate pro-Arab stance

21 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, pp. 60 – 62.
that Ankara’s government holds under the rule of the Justice and Development Party. It is reaching to Sunni Arabs throughout the Middle East without opposing Saudi interests or distorting Riyadh’s strategic perceptions of its regional role.\textsuperscript{22} The Turkish channel is not taking part in satellite wars and is thus representing the strategy carried on by its respective government towards regional issues. If Iranian “revolutionary” behavior is mirrored through the often aggressive stance of Al Alam, the Turkish “calm diplomacy” can be read between the lines of TRT’s editorial policies.

As for Egypt, the absence of a serious Pan-Arab media project has deprived Cairo from engaging in this inescapable media battle. Egyptian authorities tried to balance this deficiency through direct and indirect interventions. This explains why Al Alam T.V. was banned from broadcasting on Nile Sat (owned by Egypt) in 2009,\textsuperscript{23} and why Egyptian local TV channels waged fierce attacks on Al Jazeera whenever the latter reports heavy criticism for Egypt’s domestic or foreign policies.

Not only did Egypt play a role within its national jurisdictions to reduce the efficiency of its opponents, but it also managed to promote and sponsor the adoption of the Arab Satellite Television Charter in a meeting joining the Egyptian Minister of Information to his Arab counterparts in Cairo in 2008. The Charter, legitimizing further censorship over media content was signed by all ministers except for the Qatari one, whereas the Lebanese minister expressed Beirut’s reservations. It addressed Arab authorities’ demand that they

\textsuperscript{22} “Turkya Taghzu Fada‘e Al Arab bi Qanat TRT 7” [Turkey Invades the Arab Space with TRT7]. \textit{Al-Quds Al-Arabi}, April 3, 2010.

\textsuperscript{23} “Ra‘ees Nile Sat: Qanat Al Alam Khalafat Al Ta‘akod” [Head of Nile Sat: Al-Alam Breached the Agreement]. \textit{Asharq Alawsat}, November 6, 2009.
penalize satellite broadcasters who “attack leaders, harm national reputations or air socially unacceptable content.” The charter’s resort to broad headlines and lack of details rendered it a potentially powerful tool. Yet the absence of enforcement mechanisms led many observers to believe that it constitutes merely a symbolic gesture with no material powers.

The absence of enforcement mechanisms on the Pan Arab level has led many scholars to highlight the ability of news networks to reflect foreign policies of their respective states. Fandy contends that news networks are employed as tools of conflict in proxy wars fought between regional actors. In this sense, regime security seems to be an integral drive for media monopoly. Consequently, Fandi notes, the politics-media formula is a tool for “authoritarian systems needing some space to breathe if they are to survive”, whereby “Arab media serves as a non-territorial lung for all these autocracies and semi-autocracies”.  

2.6- Between Professional Guidelines and Political Agendas

Politicizing news often leads to tilting the balance in favor of manipulation at the expense of professionalism. News manipulation can take different forms. It may vary within acceptable margins of professional relativity, or exceed those margins to mere exploitation of media content. This is due to the fact that objective journalistic guidelines

25 Khalil and Kraidy, Arab Television Industries, p. 144.
26 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, pp. 64 – 70.
27 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, p. 141.
cannot present solutions for each and every case in detail, though they can structure the area of maneuver. In this sense, reordering a bulletin according to a certain perception of news importance may be acceptable, but eliminating a major event from the whole bulletin run-order would hardly stand as being professional.

In an interview published in 2007, former head of BBC’s Arabic service Muhsen El Sokkari states that the newly launched Arabic speaking channel would be presenting the Arab audience with different news content. The different angle from which the network perceives events allows for this differentiation. El Sukkari insists that “the plurality of views and perspectives offered is far more than anything that can be seen in the Middle East”. The complete neutrality of presenters while conducting dialogues or managing debates constitutes an important criterion in sustaining professional credibility. It is also a mere reflection of the fact that BBC “does not have a political message”, El Sukkari asserts.28

The neutrality advocated by the head of BBC’s Arabic service was lacking in most Arabic speaking satellite media channels. Al Jazeera’s slogan “the opinion and the other opinion” seems to aim at reconciling between journalistic criteria and hidden political objectives. To some critics, the prominent channel may complicate the task of Qatari diplomats due to the margin of freedom it reveals, yet it serves Qatar’s long run diplomatic interests.29

28 Lawrence Pintak, “BBC Arabic TV”, Arab Media and Society, Issue 1 (Spring 2007).
Al Jazeera’s sympathy with Hezbollah during the 33 day war on Lebanon in 2006 could be read in between the lines of its coverage. The network implicitly portrayed the end of the war as a victory achieved by Hezbollah. This was evident through the live shows broadcasted from Beirut emphasizing the achievements attained by the Lebanese resistance. On the other hand, Al Arabiya’s bias was clearly an expression of the other end of the argument. The Saudi channel aimed at emphasizing the degree of destruction caused by the war, with no regard what so ever to the actual achievements attained by Hezbollah’s military machine. Mirroring Saudi suspicion of armed resistance movements in the region, Al Arabiya intended to convey the following message: The war was a defeat when seen from the Lebanese side of the battlefield.  

Al Jazeera’s partial preference for Hezbollah demonstrates that a certain compromise is being made between professional standards and politicization. This balanced compromise was almost absent in America’s Al Hurra, which was more straight-forward in revealing its editorial policies. After the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the channel’s editorial policy was radically opposed to Syria. On one of its talk shows, a Lebanese parliamentarian was urging Arab regimes not to hold Syria responsible for the assassination without concrete proof. The anchor replied – on the air – with, “Please don’t give me the crocodile tears now”.  

Such biased attitudes at Al Hurra were criticized by media scholars and observers. Some, such as international editor at United Press International Claude Salhani, were

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30 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, pp. 63.

31 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, pp. 113.
critical of the whole programming schedule of the network, where “they are programming cooking shows and documentaries on monkeys during the fighting in Fallujah in Iraq and Rafah in Gaza”.  

Others like former ambassador William Rough, believed that the channel “veered too far in the advocacy direction”, and asserted that when a new director sought to increase its journalistic autonomy in 2007, he was fired “for giving too much air time to Hassan Nasrallah”.

Despite major setbacks, some emphasize the development witnessed by the media industry, where the main networks seem to have overcome the conventional media coverage and “provided new-style journalism that aims at fostering more critical capacities among viewers”. Either way, what is certain is that politicizing news content pertains first and foremost to institutional objectives rather than individual defects and personal capacities. The message conveyed to the public through the news, is a result of the interplay between overlapping and opposing interests within the sponsoring state. The final form of news content is delivered to the recipient who has the freedom to accept it as it is, or to subject it to critical review.

Basing on the mentioned, one can hardly distinguish between the desire to insure state interests and that to maintain regime survival. It might be true that foreign channels such as Al Hurra, BBC Arabic, and Russia Today are clearly involved in propagating state policies, since their regimes are by no means under threat from the Arab World. In such

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32 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, pp. 113.
cases, state security and foreign policy are the objects of concern. However, regional actors perceive things from another perspective, since the stability of their regimes itself is at stake in what is surely the most turbulent region in the world. They used satellite media which in turn employed social media as a tool for conflict and shaping the Arab public sphere.

2.7- New Social Media and the Public Sphere

The internet is widely thought of as an “autonomous technology that serves to bolster democratic political practices based on the principle of public participation”. In addition to this contribution to the field of politics, the internet also presents an added value to the world of media. While official censorship imposes restrictions limiting the free space of Arab new media and its production, cyberspace communication presents a complementary tool for news gathering and “opens spaces for alternative news and views”. In other words, these virtual spaces not only present means for communication between their users, but also serve as additional mechanisms for gathering information and introducing diverse angles and approaches for controversial issues. Thus, one could assume that they overlap with both fields; media and politics.

A number of internet tools for political activism exist. Blogs are given credit for “liberating journalists from political and economic restraints of global media organizations”

35 Musa Shteiwi, Arab Media in the Information Age, p. 130.
36 Ahmad Julfar, Arab Media in the Information Age, p. 190.
and keeping “the Internet’s first promise – to give publishing power to whoever wants it”. Their interactive attributes distinguishes them from static websites. Their media and politics related roles range from their usage as a free space for publishing news, covering events, and posting critical overviews of politically related issues and figures.

Youtube has established a parallel world of news reporting; in which each citizen can contribute to documenting events by simply uploading taped videos on the cyber network. Footage filmed by mobile phones and uploaded on the internet could then be broadcasted on satellite television. In a sense, every individual holding a phone becomes a potential cameraman. The outcome is the emergence of “citizen journalists” or “grassroots journalists”. This has certainly presented an added value to mainstream media since it resolved the problem of geographic proximity in the case of sudden crises, security considerations in danger zones, and political pressures banning or restraining the work of field reporters.

Facebook represents a virtual community where activists are given space to coordinate their efforts through groups and other sorts of electronic pages, as well as rally support for causes, organize events, and even launch social and political movements. It also provides alternative grounds for a vital public discourse, unrestrained by conventional censorship or concrete limitations. Facebook maximizes the efficiency of lobbies and support groups. It is the main tool on the internet that could be used for coordination and cooperation purposes.

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37 Ahmad Julfar, Arab Media in the Information Age, pp. 187, 188.
Finally, Twitter is a form of micro blogging which is useful for establishing a network of high pace circulation. It signifies the ability to circulate thoughts and breaking news between activists at a fast rate, thus vitalizing their dynamics and allowing speedy outcomes. Twitter provides the best means to trace the news of other individuals and follow up with their opinions regarding current affairs. It has proven to be especially efficient for activists in times of dramatic developments requiring quick reactions and the ability to spread fast news. Fast circulation of news is the main attribute of Twitter. It was not surprising that in 2011, tweets mentioning an earthquake in Virginia were faster than the earthquake itself.\(^{39}\) This constituted a perfect advertising promotion for Twitter\(^{40}\), one that no doubt accentuates the mentioned attribute. In that same year, Twitter has contributed to different kinds of “earthquakes”, ones that have shaken the social and political platforms of Arab communities.

All these aspects led some commentators to describe the latest Arab uprisings as a “war between tanks and Twitter”, where the “propagandist state TV slugged it out with tweeters, bloggers and Facebook friends on a virtual battlefield”.\(^{41}\) They also gave activists high confidence in the outcomes of their cyberspace dynamism. Following the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Wael Ghonim, the creator of the first Facebook page credited for enticing the popular upheaval in Egypt, replied to CNN’s Wolf Blitzer concerning his expectations after the downfall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt by


\(^{40}\) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UFsJhYBxzY&feature=player_embedded August 26, 2011 (accessed Aug 29, 2011)

simply saying: “Ask Facebook”.\textsuperscript{42} Statements and slogans praising social networking were often raised in demonstrations and mentioned by activists, analysts and politicians. Regardless of the validity of such optimism, it is doubtless that cyberspace communication has become an integral part of the media-politics formula.

New social media has reserved a place in the worlds of media, public discourse and politics. Its influence stretched to all fields that media is involved in. Many observers have underscored how the instantaneous nature of social media, “unlimited by publication deadlines and broadcast news slots, explain in part the speed at which these revolutions have unraveled”.\textsuperscript{43} These assumptions lead to another field of debate relating to the structural transformations of the Arab public sphere. The latter may be defined in terms of “active arguments before an audience about issues of shared concern”.\textsuperscript{44} It has been argued that such transformations could not have been reached without the rise of ICT (information and communication technologies). ICT have been credited for their contribution to democracy and participatory politics; both being manifestations of the new Arab Public sphere.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, the link between ICT (social media being one of its expressions) and democratizing trends is almost undisputable.

\textsuperscript{42} “Google Exec Wael Ghonim in Egypt Says Long Live the Revolution 2.0”, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, February 11, 2011.

\textsuperscript{43} Peter Beaumont, “The Truth About Twitter, Facebook and the Uprisings in the Arab World”, \textit{The Guardian}, February 25, 2011.

\textsuperscript{44} Marc Lynch, \textit{Voices of the New Arab Public, Iraq, Al Jazeera, And Middle East Politics Today} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) p.30.

\textsuperscript{45} Mohammed Ibahrine, \textit{New Media and New Islamism – New Media’s Impact on the Political Culture in the Islamic World} (VDM Verlag, 2007) p. 30.
The discourse evolving through the internet has revolutionized politics and enhanced its dynamic character. It has found its base in the process of “informationalization” brought about by the ICT.\textsuperscript{46} Information was no more restricted to state actors and their media apparatuses. Instead, it became a product of popular efforts or even individual ones. Thus, the digital revolution has established solid grounds for the development of unconventional public debates. The public sphere was reformulating in accordance to these new intruding factors. New media was not far from this shift in collective perceptions and conceptual paradigms neither was the realm of politics and the world of political action.

The appeal for democratic change in the Arab World evolved in this context. It was growing rapidly along with the intensified broadcasting of televised images from the states in concern and with the expanding usage of social media by political activists. Satellite TV channels and social media outlets (both as tools and manifestations of the globalized era) have played a major role in accentuating calls for democratic change on the Arab stage and in pushing forth the process of this transformation. Both were involved in the debates surfacing public discourse during the process of transformation in Tunisia and Egypt. Later on, when the tide of peaceful change seemed to be reaching a dead end in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, the discourse intensified even more between millions of individuals reflecting antagonistic social forces. The blurry lines separating media and politics became once again a substance for debate. New variables seemed to be constituting the entangled

formula of democratization, public discourse, social mobility, and political transformation; one which by no means could disregard the role of media tools and technologies.

2.8- Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the evolving patterns of new media in the Arab World. In the following chapters, we intend to unravel the interconnectedness characterizing the relationship between new media and regional politics, by explaining how each factor affects the other and making use of the Libyan crisis as a case study. We will be exploring the extent of influence practiced by media outlets, and the “tools” and “techniques” used to maximize this impact. Yet before we highlight that area, we will be comparing between the coverage of two news networks with the widest audience in the Arab World: Al Jazeera Al Arabiya. Basing on our comparative analysis, we will be illustrating how each has been reflecting the foreign policy of its sponsoring state and its approach towards the sweeping change redesigning regional geopolitics.
CHAPTER 3
MEDIA DISCOURSE AS A REFLECTION OF FOREIGN POLICIES: AL JAZEERA VS. AL ARABIA

3.1- Introduction

The previous chapter sketched a map of the main satellite channels occupying media space in the Arab World. A brief genealogy of Arab new media was presented in order to offer “the possibility of thinking through new media’s relationship to the past”. It furthermore explained how satellite channels act mainly as conduits for inter-state tension and rivalry. This chapter examines media’s coverage of the recent popular uprisings sweeping across the Arab World. It undertakes a comparative analysis between Qatar’s Al Jazeera and KSA’s Al Arabia. The chapter confirms the assumption that each has been reflecting the foreign policy of its respective sponsoring state towards the most devastating Arab developments in decades.

During the popular uprisings, media outlets were not reacting to foreseen events. They were rather acting in response to surprisingly vibrant dynamics, with unexpected momentum, high expansion potentials, and shocking outcomes. The unprecedented events framing news coverage unveiled the foreign policies of media-sponsoring states more clearly, since satellite networks had to generate quick reactions on a daily basis. Media strategies and editorial policies were thus being molded during the progression of

revolutionary dynamics, and when opposing social forces (siding with regimes or against them) seemed to be heading towards a clash, media outlets had thinner margins for maneuvering. Maintaining a distance from radical developments became more of a journalistic utopia. “Objectivity” remained the slogan adopted by competing networks, yet it was merely a cover for constructivist engagements with the uprisings, aiming to play a role in shaping their trajectories. The following sections unpack how satellite media managed to perform this task.

3.2- Dynamism vs. Preserving the Status Quo

The previous chapter illustrates how Saudi media outlets (including Al Arabiya) tend to encourage preserving the status quo when possible. This strongly adheres to the Saudi regime idea of survival, whereby any “revolutionary” regional action can threaten to delegitimize the monarchic regime holding close ties with the United States. Qatars have a different strategic approach. They are preoccupied with balancing regional powers by maintaining an open diplomacy strategy and enhancing media power. Thus, countering the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran’s Islamic credentials requires airing Islamist figures affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood like Sheikh Yousef Al Qaradawi. Maintaining media leverage is achieved through what some call “McArabism”, which is defined as “a new kind of instant nationalism” in which “transnational television channels create a more

48 Fandy, (UN)Civil War of Words, p. 48.
harmonious Arab public opinion on crucial regional and Pan Arab issues”. Articulating a common identity and shared positions on Arab and Islamic issues intensifies this Pan Arab trend. Al Jazeera acts on boosting such collective sentiments and interacts with their manifestations, thus gaining additional leverage and more ability to influence Arab public opinion.

The rapid success of Al Jazeera gave back multiple gains to Qatar. It portrayed it as a progressive emirate compared to both monarchic and republican regimes, with an ability to interact with public opinion throughout the Arab World. This tendency gave Doha a substantial margin of influence and heightened its ability to shape perceptions and orient them towards political issues of concern to the emirate. Qatar gained leverage that enhanced its ability to harass other regional actors in times of conflict, and elevated its capabilities against neighboring Saudi Arabia and other states with regional hegemonic tendencies.

To many observers, Al Jazeera “seeks to be provocative in a region where news reporting is often limited to directives from government information ministries.” It aims to “make sense of an emerging transnational public opinion critical of states and not reducible to their interests”. Its dynamic character reflects that of Doha. It appears to be always on the offensive; taking initiatives rather than avoiding them, and vitally engaging with developments instead of reacting to their outcomes.

49 Rinnawi, Instant Nationalism, pp. 5 – 23.
50 Iskandar and El-Nawary, Al Jazeera, pp. 28, 29.
51 Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public, p.29.
Al Arabia is usually more on the “defensive”. KSA’s cautious character when it comes to social mobility explains the network’s stance. Its conservative policy restrains its actions and prevents it from involving itself with risky adventures. Of the very few offensives launched by the Saudi regime since its birth, was the sponsorship and recruitment of Jihadists to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The result was the creation of a dynamic fundamentalist network which later on presented itself as a legitimate replacement for the kingdom’s regime. Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda is certainly a nightmare that the Saudis wish to avoid recreating. Any revolutionary spirit in the region, whether it is of a fundamentalist nature or not, threatens the stability of monarchic rule.

The Saudi kingdom finds difficulty in facing regional tides of change due to several factors. The first relates to the shaky social grounds supporting its governing authorities whereby wealth and power are mainly centered in the hands of the royal family. The second factor is linked to the number of citizens that vastly outnumbers those of Qatar (more than 20 million as opposed to Qatar’s 200 000 forming a small community that could be easily managed). A third factor stems from the weak allure of its Wahabi rhetoric, a weakness that the Qataris have tried to overcome by adopting a more moderate version of Islam and by sponsoring intellectuals of high profile such as Sheikh Yousef Al Qaradawi who addresses tens of millions of Arabs on the weekly religious show broadcasted on Al Jazeera under the name Asharia’a Wal Hayat. Popular figures such as Al Qaradawi were hosted regularly during the latest upheavals. They constituted part of Al Jazeera’s strategy to extend its leverage and deepen its interplay with the events on the ground. Al Jazeera’s reliance on transnational organic intellectuals to positively affect the course of the uprisings has
reflected Qatar’s vital foreign policy towards regional issues. This interactive approach was missing in the case of Al Arabia.

3.3- Al Jazeera: Creating Transnational Organic Intellectuals

The previous section mentioned how Al Jazeera used credible or popular Arab figures as means to increase the level of interaction with the Arab public sphere. This sphere was taking the form of a transnational space partly due to domestic repressions and partly to the presence of political sponsors “able to take advantage of the new media opportunities to invoke a shared identity”. Al Jazeera proved to be a successful tool to achieve this goal. However, the Qatari network could not only rely on technological facilities and editorial policies that frame the wording of news in order to fully engage with the vibrant activity of the Arab public sphere. It also needed influential figures capable of playing the role of think tanks or “theorists” of the uprisings on the one hand, and catalysts and “agents” for mass mobilization on the other. This task was achieved by Arab intellectuals that were given the chance to thoroughly analyze political developments, give advice to activists, and boost their morale by presenting positive analysis of the outcomes of events or even accentuate the religious and moral righteousness of the struggle.

The Qatari network was actually creating transnational “organic intellectuals”. By hosting Arab figures to comment on televised images of the uprisings, it was offering its guests access to interact with the discourse on the ground and play a role in directing the

52 Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p.29.
course of its evolution. Al Jazeera has thus upgraded the status of its aired figures from merely being intellectuals to also being organic and transnational. They were organic in the sense that they made use of new media technology to connect with social forces and shape their dynamics; and they were transnational in the sense that their persuasive leverage stretched beyond national boundaries and invested in the increasing permeability of Arab communities and their vital interplay through media outlets and cyberspace communication. Transnational organic intellectuals were thus “experts in legitimating”\(^{53}\) and catalyzing the revolts. They have made full use of media facilities in order to communicate with millions of spectators around the Arab World and inspire their movement.

Azmi Bshara and Sheikh Yousef Al Qardawi were the two main experts performing this task. Bshara, the prominent Palestinian academic and politician regularly hosted at Al Jazeera to comment on Arab uprisings, overtly defined his role as that of an “organic intellectual”\(^{54}\). By referring to Gramsci’s conception of an intellectual, Bshara - Ex-Knesset member and an Arab Nationalist of a leftist background - was accentuating the importance of effective interaction with the masses drawing the course of events. Sheikh Yousef Al Qardawi played a complementary role, whereby his sphere of influence stretched deep into various Sunni Islamist factions. Al Qardawi’s impact, especially witnessed through the Egyptian uprising as we shall later see - was so powerful that Efraim


Halevy, the former director of the Israeli intelligence agency Mosaad, advised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to initiate a dialogue with the Islamic cleric for peace purposes in the region. In a sense, this constituted an astounding acknowledgment of the leverage practiced by such figures. However, this influence was mainly sensed from the Egyptian uprising onwards. In the case of Tunisia, the striking development of events was so surprising that no state, regime, or satellite network had the chance to fully prepare itself to deal with it.

3.4- Al Arabia: Extensive Coverage and Veiled Politicization

Al Jazeera’s reliance on analysis and extensive engagement with events is not replicated in Al Arabia’s coverage. The Saudi network claims that its policy is based on providing the audience with information rather than overemphasizing the analytical dimensions of the issues in concern. It gives special importance to leaks and scoops as part of the competitive profile it wishes to present. According to its Egyptian anchor Mahmoud Warwari, Al Arabia aims to “deliver news to the audience rather than be provocative”. This coincides with the abovementioned interpretation of the general stance

55 Tarek Hmaid. “Israel Tufawid Al Qaradawi!” [Israel to Negotiate with Qaradawi!] Asharq Alawsat, February 26, 2011.


framing its policy, in which it avoids taking initiatives that go beyond news reporting and presenting information.

However, this does not mean that Al Arabia refrains from playing the same game of politicizing news. It simply based its approach on different grounds. In a sense, Al Arabia aims to formulate public opinion through more conventional methods of news creation. The network presents wide coverage and aims to capture the attention of Arab spectators through exclusive footage and interviews. In this context, politicization occurs when news material is aired after manipulating the proportions of its components. For instance, focusing on the insecurities that result from popular uprisings in some states (governed by KSA’s allies) comes at the expense of news showing state suppression of demonstrating masses. This was evident especially in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt. Manipulation in this case is a result of the network’s overemphasis on certain aspects of the event, and of magnifying particular dimensions of the issue while trying to “hide” others. At some points, even elimination is used as a means to undermine specific news. The process of elimination does not imply lying or fabricating false material. Yet it entails disregarding certain parts of the picture, thus drawing imprecise implications in the minds of viewers.

The selectivity practiced by Al Arabia in structuring its bulletins and choosing its broadcasting material does not undermine its position as a major source of information for many Arab spectators. The Saudi channel maintains its place in the core of journalistic competition as a network capable of presenting rare footage, significant news, and exclusive interviews with high-ranking officials. It is important to note that Al Arabia’s relatively easy access to conduct interviews with key sources and political leaders in the
Arab World is partly due to the fact that it represents the main media outlet reflecting KSA’s foreign policy. Saudi Arabia is the richest state in the Arab World, with a central political and religious role. Its material wealth and Islamic tutelage derived from the presence of the holiest place for Muslims on its soil and its established regional leverage are acknowledged throughout the Arab World. This influence drives most Arab states to bear its stance towards critical issues into consideration. Thus, when Al Arabia hosts an official during times of conflict, the interview itself may reflect a Saudi desire to communicate with the network’s guest. This can also be perceived as an opportunity for the official himself to send signals or indirect messages to Saudi authorities relating to bilateral relations, common concerns, or controversial policies. Al Arabia does not abstain from engaging with media discourse. It simply does that with less direct involvement if one were to compare it to Al Jazeera. If the power held by the latter as a media force in the Middle East is “asymmetrical to Qatar’s actual leverage in the international arena”, then this is certainly not the case for Al Arabia. The Saudi network partly derives its influence from KSA’s central place in the Middle East. In the following two sections, the coverage of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt is examined in order to present empirical evidence of these arguments.

3.5- Tunisia: The First Test

In Tunisia, the popular uprising was instigated by purely domestic factors. Unemployment, political alienation, and corruption were all symptoms of local dimensions.

58 Iskandar and El-Nawary, Al Jazeera, p. 32.
Satellite media had no role in triggering the outbreak of mass protests. Later on, as the events evolved dramatically, competition between TV networks became a driving factor for intensive coverage. Media power was gradually gaining more significance as regional players engaged directly or indirectly in this new game of regime survival. The daily flux of events - regularly televised and politicized – deepened the interplay between media industry and political developments. At a certain point, it seemed impossible to disentangle both levels of activity.

The Tunisian regime was toppled by a popular revolution that was not preceded by previous signs of upheaval. Local authorities were used to dealing with civil unrest with decisive security measures. The fact that they kept close censorship on media outlets (local and foreign) resulted in the knowledge vacuum they need in order to sustain a total blackout. However, the Tunisian regime did not expect that calls for change would be transmitted through virtual reality. It was not ready to cope with alternative media, namely with the digital mass media of the 21st century. Demonstrating masses were using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other forms of cyberspace communication in order to preserve the vitality of their movement. The Tunisian authorities unsuccessfully tried every possible way to thwart the flow of online videos. Internet and power outages were applied in various towns,59 yet the fever moved from one city to another, and the Tunisian President Zeinelabedeen Ben Ali was unable to prevent the contagious mass demonstrations from reaching the capital and besieging his own presidential palace.

The Tunisian revolt required means of communications in order to insure survival. The internet provided these means. It has been the vehicle used by practitioners and activists to “foster interchanges that are both alternative in their non-commercial and open-access format and activist in their practice”. Television networks did not have enough access to the Tunisian stage because of previously imposed censorship. They made use of the videos uploaded by activists on the internet (mainly Youtube) in order to overcome this deficiency. Social media here served as both; a catalyst employed by activists for the expansion of mass demonstrations, and a breakthrough achieved by news networks, thus carrying them into the scene. According to Marc Lynch, social media and satellite television were “collectively transforming a complex and potent evolving media space”. Without the former, he asserted, “amazing images of Tunisian protestors might never have escaped the blanket repression of the Ben Ali regime”.

The continuous broadcast of videos uploaded on the internet (especially by Al Jazeera) resulted in a further spread of activist news and intensified media effect. In a sense, social media served as the ammunition for news networks, and the latter were the machine guns that gave the Tunisian event a wider range of audience. New factions within Tunisia were able to follow up with the flood of information (particularly those that were not much familiar with the internet). The “media siege” isolating Tunisia from the rest of the Arab World dramatically crumbled and the long sustained status quo disintegrated after massive raids carried out by media outlets.

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If we were to relate this scene to the editorial policies of news networks, we could understand why Al Arabiya refrained from being as forward as Al Jazeera in its televised broadcast. Two main reasons come to mind: The first relates to the conservative policy usually undertaken by the Saudis in favor of preserving the status quo, and the second to KSA’s explicit support for the Tunisian president which was later on crowned by receiving him as a guest after his escape from Tunis. Accordingly, one would understand why Al Arabia was being defensive with news relating to the presidential family. Such was the attitude towards early information about the arrest of Bin Ali’s relatives.62 One would also comprehend why the channel gave more attention to the riots and chaos resulting from mass demonstrations rather than the suppression of protestors by security forces. The network and its website would thus follow up with news relating to “riots, break-ins, and burning of public institutes, banks, and trade companies that have been entirely destroyed”.63 It also undermined activist news posted on social networks and give more attention to the Tunisian TV and official news agencies, thus describing the events in their earliest days as “clashes between citizens”.64 This approach was especially noticed during the first days of the uprisings, when the regime’s fate was still unpredictable. The sensitivity towards Al Arabia was revealed a few weeks later, when hundreds of Tunisian


63 “Ishtibakat fi Kalb Al Asima Al Tunisiya wa Ahyai’ha wa Mazid min Al Katla wal Jarha” [Clashes in the Middle of the Tunisian Capital and Additional Deaths and Injuries]. Al Arabia Website. (accessed August 30, 2011). http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/01/12/133232.html

protestors besieged the channel’s team on the border between Tunisia and Libya after the eruption of the Libyan uprising, and demanded an official apology from the network’s administration regarding its “insincere coverage”.65

At the other end of the scene, one could claim that the enthusiasm revealed by Al Jazeera from the very first days of the Tunisian uprising was due to its general stance regarding political developments in the Arab World. The more it engages in transmitting televised images to recipients, the greater leverage it acquires in formulating public opinion. This usually differs from one case to another. More extensive engagement is noticed when events harm regimes outside the scope of alliance or mutual understandings, and more reservation is detected when the case relates to actors that the Qataris wish to refrain from aggravating (the popular upheaval in Bahrainis an example of that as we shall see later). Either way, when things seem to be moving in the direction of change, the Qatari channel usually takes the initiative and holds a seat with other active forces formulating this change.

Contrary to Al Arabia’s coverage of the Tunisian uprising, Al Jazeera relied heavily on videos uploaded by local activists on social networks. Activist media became the channel’s only resort after banning its field reporters from working on the ground; and within a short time, Al Jazeera turned into “the big voice in a multimedia landscape of Arab dissent that encompasses bloggers and online social networks”, and thus, according to the

Los Angeles Times, its “rapid-paced, visceral coverage of the Tunisian upheaval has reverted viewers across the Middle East”.

Al Jazeera’s coverage provoked Tunisian authorities and caused them to target the channel with intensive attacks. Heavy criticism and accusations were carried out by journalists and politicians on behalf of the regime. The head of the Tunisian parliament described the channel as an “enemy” of Tunisia, while the parliament accused it of promoting violence and destabilizing the country. Even the parliament “opposition” (which was artificial to a far extent) joined the campaign and charged the network of “conspiring” against the country. However, this did not stop Al Jazeera. On the contrary; it added to its confidence in the choices it made, and later on, drove it to further affirm the positive evaluation of its stance and highly estimate its outcomes. This evaluation was revealed in an interview conducted with Azmi Bshara by the prominent anchor Yusri Fouda on a local Egyptian television, after the collapse of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes, in which Bshara argued that the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were “unlike any other in the history of revolutions”. Bshara went as far as asserting that the number of people

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66 Jeffrey Fleishman, “For the Arab World, the Revolution will be Televised, on Al Jazeera”, Los Angeles Times, January, 19, 2011.


contributing to both was “more than the average participants in any other revolution, including the Iranian revolution itself”.69

3.6- Egypt: Affirming the Domino Effect

Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Tunisian uprising revealed Qatar’s desire to vitally engage with the daily flux of events. On the other hand, Al Arabia presented a more conservative coverage due to the restrictions stipulated by KSA’s foreign policy. In both cases, the extent of engagement was linked to the political decision issued by the network’s sponsoring state. Such a decision would either push for wide coverage and thus play a role in the evolution of events, or simply refrain from doing so, hence indirectly serving the regime’s interest in preserving the status quo. This background assumption seemed to replicate itself in the case of Egypt with one exception: The unavoidable task of providing the audience with wide coverage, even by those wishing to preserve the status quo.

According to Al Jazeera’s former senior presenter, Ghassan Bin Jiddo, most networks meant to avoid the “mistake” they made in Tunisia, where with the exception of Al Jazeera, minimal coverage was presented. In Egypt, media players had to choose between preserving a line of communication with the targeted regime or “buying a one way ticket” to an open media war. Bin Jiddo asserts that Al Jazeera was determined to play a central role in toppling Mubarak’s regime. In the case of Al Arabia, he believes that the

Saudi network tried to create an acute balance in its coverage, reconciling between the concrete developments on the ground and its editorial policies reflecting KSA’s position regarding the issue. This would explain why Egyptian officials were frequently hosted by the Saudi network to advocate their regime’s image and posture. He adds that the political decision is translated on the journalistic level through various means; from around the clock reporting of events, to special emphasis on humanitarian dimensions and biased distribution of time for aired politicians and analysts. To him, Al Arabia maintained a coverage reflecting a sense of denial. Its approach portrayed the “Egyptian regime as potent until the very last moment”.

At the beginning of the uprising, Al Arabia’s stance was obvious. The fall of Mubarak’s regime implied strategic harm to Saudi Arabia’s regional policy, since the former is a major ally in the Middle Eastern “moderate states” axis. On the fifth day of the demonstrations, the channel was desperately trying to conceal the extent of escalation driven forth by activists. Anchors insisted on saying that protestors were demanding “a reform of the regime” then aired the actual footage which clearly shows slogans asserting the demand to “topple the regime”. Al Arabia followed a route similar to its previous one in Tunisia, only with more extensive coverage. It focused on the negative impact of the demonstrations especially when it came to “food shortage” and lack of security. It highlighted “riots and instability”, airing cries for help from civilians complaining of the instability caused by demonstrations. On certain occasions, it reported a “decrease in the

70 Personal interview conducted by the writer with Al Jazeera’s resigned senior presenter Ghassan Bin Jiddo in 26 July, 2011.

number of protestors” in compliance with the official curfew, and broadcasted footage taken from the Egyptian national TV of allegedly arrested rioters, with part of the footage showing guns, ammunition, and other sorts of weaponry supposedly used by insurgents.\(^72\) Al Arabia’s approach to the uprising drove one of its senior anchors, the Egyptian Hafez Al Mirazi, to announce an “indirect” resignation on air. He ended his show which was following up with Egypt’s events from Cairo by saying: “In the next episode we will be talking about the impact of all this on the situation in Saudi Arabia. If this were to happen, then Al Arabia is an independent channel. If not, then I thank you and say farewell”.\(^73\) As one would suspect, this was the last time in which Al Mirazi got the chance to address the channel’s audience.

Al Arabia’s coverage began to adapt with Egyptian developments during their evolution, before finally leaving the “sinking ship” in its last moments. Nevertheless, it continued to express sympathy with the regime. Even some of its employees coincided with this stance. When Mubarak stepped down, the channel’s presenter reading the news showed obvious distress.\(^74\) Later on, Al Arabia aired an exclusive audio message from Mubarak to the Egyptian people, in which he denied all allegations and accusations pertaining to himself, his family, and his regime.\(^75\)

\(^72\) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qZAqxrJ0p4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qZAqxrJ0p4), March 8, 2011 (accessed August 30, 2011).

\(^73\) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WTZs414j4g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WTZs414j4g), February 12, 2011 (accessed August 10, 2011)

\(^74\) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0mzpE79giI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0mzpE79giI), February 11, 2011 (accessed September 3, 2011)

Al Jazeera’s coverage was diametrically opposite to that of Al Arabia. It was to a far extent provocative, and in the opposite direction. Its policy described previously by Bin Jiddo was even noticed by foreign media in the early days of the uprising. On January 27, 12 days after the breakout of protests, the *New York Times* published a report affirming the belief that Al Jazeera was determined to play a role similar to that established in Tunisia. The course of events asserted this assessment. Within less than a week from the first mass demonstration, the Egyptian situation evolved dramatically. Facebook groups calling for protests included hundreds of thousands of members. Local authorities worked on controlling the flow of information, and acted to disturb the means of communication and coordination between activists. More than twenty million internet users were denied access to online information for several days. Al Jazeera was promoting and using material displayed on social media outlets whenever possible. The channel’s license was soon revoked, and on the 27th of January, the Egyptian satellite transmission company Nilesat cut off the network’s signal, totally disregarding the contractual agreement between both. A few days later, Al Jazeera’s offices in the country were shut down. Six of its field reporters were arrested, yet the network continued to broadcast images it attained from local activists and to conduct interviews with political opposition figures, protestors, and eye witnesses though satellite phones and land lines after mobile communication was shut down. It aired videos uploaded on the internet showing brutal attacks by security forces on civilian

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protestors. Among those were recordings of police vehicles intentionally running over demonstrators, and others showing unarmed protestors being shot in cold blood.

Egyptian official press and television came up with paradoxical and irrational explanations of the ongoing events, “blaming Qatar, Hamas, Iran, the United States, and Israel at the same time of aiming to destabilize Egypt”. A girl was shown on Egypt’s national television with face obscured “confessing” she was a foreign agent trained by Americans and Israelis in Qatar. Official media outlets were extremely offensive in their attacks on demonstrators, accusing them of treason and relating them to foreign agendas. On many occasions, they warned of the “horrific consequences” of the revolution. In reaction to that, media presenters, writers, and commentators resigned from their jobs and joined the protests. A famous presenter declared that she left the studio minutes before airing, refusing to read a bulletin that reduces the number of protestors “to less than five thousand troublemakers who were on a looting and killing spree”. She could not “bring herself to read that lie on air”, she asserted.

Egypt’s official media was simply incapable of dealing with the challenge. Its approach was the same as that held by other official media outlets in the Arab World; giving itself “the status of the guardian of thought and attitudes”, and basing its convictions

79 Mohammad Abdel Rahman, “Al-Mihwar Channel: All These Lies”, Al-Akhbar, February 8, 2011.
80 Hugh Miles, The Al Jazeera Effect, Foreign Policy, February 8, 2011.
on the “naive idea that the people are not mature enough to understand life and unable to identify either their goals or priorities”. They were no match for a vibrant channel like Al Jazeera. According to Foreign Policy, Al Jazeera’s giant screen broadcasting news throughout the uprisings to hundreds of thousands of Egyptians in Tahrir Square in the middle of Cairo “underscored the new reality facing Arab regimes: They no longer control the message”.

Al Jazeera used all possible means to catalyze popular dynamics in Egypt. The main promotion pertaining to its coverage of the Egyptian revolution was given the title “The People Triumph”, with a well known patriotic song performed by the late Egyptian legendary soloist Um Kulthoum in the background. It used archival material to draw analogies serving specific political implications. For instance, on 6/2/2011, the channel recurrently aired a small part of an old interview with Egyptian President Husni Mubarak, in which the latter advises former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to leave office for the sake of “preserving Iraqi blood”. The network also aired emotional scenes of social dimensions, as part of its “constructivist” approach towards the events. Its live broadcast of a wedding joining an enthusiastic couple in the midst of protestors simply added a touch of human intimacy to the grand political scene. Its constant use of provoking expressions like “human chains to prevent tanks from moving in Tahrir Square”, created a sense of

82 Abdullah Al-Olayan, Arab Media in the Information Age, p. 586.
86 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7jjEjEZAn4, February 6, 2011 (accessed September 2, 2011)
social solidarity. So did the airing of calls for defiance by young rebels facing tough circumstances in the square, like that of the charismatic Nawwara Najm, who broke into tears while hysterically crying: “I thank Al Jazeera and the Tunisian people! We broke loose from all chains! We let go of all the fear!” Nawwara’s sincere cries were included in Al Jazeera’s first promo of its coverage of the uprising. Later on, the channel’s prominent anchors joined the stage and cast aside much of their professional restrictions. In the last days of the uprising, Jamal Rayyan was presenting a commentary similar to that of Abdel Nasser’s famous Sawt Al Arab back in the 1960s. His voice was asserting with an enthusiastic tone: “We are witnessing an Egyptian pilgrimage towards freedoms that have been sought for over 30 years. Today, we are perhaps witnessing the most sincere expression of the will of the Umma”.

In parallel, Al Jazeera’s “organic intellectuals” were performing an outstanding task in cultivating mass perceptions and inspiring the popular movement. According to the Egyptian paper Al-Ahram Weekly, Azmi Bshara was an “ideologue of sorts during the uprising” where he “followed the revolution minute by minute from the Qatari capital Doha with his think tank – the Arab Center for Research and Political Study – is based” (also sponsored by Qatar). Sheikh Youssef Al Qaradawi in turn, went as far as performing an on-air supplication asking for “the victory of the revolutionists and downfall of the regime” after being invited to do so by Al Jazeera’s anchor Ali Dafiri, “in response to the many

88 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7gUo77TEfg, February 4, 2011 (accessed September 2, 2011)
89 Amira Howeidy, Al-Ahram Weekly, “Amira Howeidy Listens to Azmi Bshara, the Arab’s World Leading Political Analyst, Talk About the Egyptian Revolution in Cairo”, June 22, 2011.
wishes expressed by Arab spectators calling the channel for that sake”. It was an outstanding “professional mistake” when Al Jazeera’s other anchor Iman Bannoura “confirmed” the supplication’s content by saying “Amin”.90 Days later, after the fall of the Mubarak regime, Al Qaradawi delivered a speech before hundreds of thousands at Tahrir Square celebrating the outcome of the revolution. Concurrently, the channel was also airing pro-regime demonstrations in Bahrain.91 The domino effect hypothesis was gaining credibility. However, the fall of Mubarak’s regime opened a new chapter in the grand picture. It was the moment after which the controversy relating to media coverage was shifting to another area, where the question pertaining to double standards became legitimate, and where geopolitical considerations intruded in shaping media rhetoric.

### 3.7- Conclusion

This chapter unpacked how the coverage of Al Jazeera and Al Arabia mirrored the foreign policies of Qatar and Saudi Arabia respectively. It also showed how each reflected the specificities of the two states as well as their structural and variable weaknesses and strengths during the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The events in Egypt did not signal the end of the domino effect, yet they certainly presented the last of peaceful revolutions and quick regime collapses. In other countries, developments moved on a different trajectory and satellite media acted in a different context. Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria are far from homogenous in their social structure. Instead, they are countries facing possible

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fragmentation with devastating regional aftershocks. Pessimists went as far as describing developments in these states as “a way to the abyss”.\textsuperscript{92} New circumstances evolved carrying new media a further step in its engagement. The latter took part in redesigning regional geopolitics and was bearing the consequences of geopolitical realities in turn. The next chapter examines these assumptions, taking Libya as a case example. It links the aforementioned analysis to theories of International Relations and presents an interpretation based on constructivist as well as realist approaches. It also presents idiosyncratic, state, and system levels of analysis in order to encompass all factors shaping the discourse under study.

CHAPTER 4
NEW MEDIA AND REDESIGNING GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES

4.1- Introduction

This chapter examines how new media is playing a role in redesigning geopolitical realities after stretching its influence from local environments of Arab States to the regional milieu. Following the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes, concerns were echoed suggesting that the fundamental and fast paced change in the Arab World was leading to uncontrolled regional aftershocks. The sweeping tide of change moved to Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen before finally exploding in Syria. In these states, the uprisings evolved in parallel routes and added new factors to the media-politics formula. The first factor relates to the heterogeneous composition of those countries with regard to their social structure: Syria has a Sunni majority and many minority sects to which the ruling class belongs, Bahrain of a Shiite majority governed by a Sunni royal family, Yemen of Sunnis and Zaidies with a complex tribal social composition, and where Libya is characterized by East-West sensitivities and deeply rooted tribalism. The communities in Tunisia and Egypt are far more homogenous. Almost all Tunisians are Arab Sunnis, whereas Egypt’s Christian minority was not related to the ruling class and had little interest in preserving the regime. The second element of distinction relates to the fact that all four states were governed by
family-regimes whose members were in direct control and command of the army. This was not the case in Tunisia and Egypt, where armed forces kept a distance from political authorities when the events reached their climax, thus allowing both uprisings to overthrow the two regimes with minimum casualties. The third element is a time factor, in the sense that the regimes were not taken by the same amount of surprise as the preceding ones, and therefore had the chance to use all the strategic cards they hold in their battle with opposing social forces.

The impact of these factors on media and politics will be illustrated in the following sections. Al Jazeera will constitute the focal point of our research and analysis since it proved to be the most powerful formulator of public opinion during the Arab uprisings. How this relation could be linked to IR theory will also be of main concern in our presentation of the Libyan case study.

4.2- When Geopolitics Intervenes

It has been said that “the battle of hearts and minds in the Middle East is being fought not on the streets of Cairo, Tunis, Manama or Sana’a, but on the newscasts and talk shows of Al Jazeera”. It has also been argued that dominant media players (particularly Al Jazeera) were acting in accordance with the foreign policies of their respective

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sponsoring states (Qatar in Al Jazeera’s case). Notwithstanding, the ability of Al Jazeera in particular to reconcile between journalistic standards and veiled political agendas maintained the network’s credibility among spectators. However, when the tide of change reached Bahrain, Qatar’s doorstep, then struck in a state supposedly holding strong ties with Doha (Syria), new predicaments presented themselves to Qatari foreign policy, and consequently Al Jazeera. In the case of Bahrain, the network kept a distance from the uprising and indirectly raised suspicion concerning its “sectarian” drives. While in the case of Syria, it reproduced an aggressive stance towards the regime after days of hesitation, in what seemed to reflect Qatar’s preferred commitment to support Islamic factions (the Muslim Brotherhood in particular) on the expense of Ba’ath rule. Qatari foreign policy reflected by Al Jazeera was no more just on the offensive. It rather had to couple its initiative role and vital engagement with the uprisings with a defensive strategy similar to that of Al Arabia. Such was its stance towards developments in Bahrain.

In the case of Yemen, Al Jazeera’s task was relatively easy. The channel maintained the same pro-revolution coverage it presented during the previous uprisings of Tunisia and Egypt. Its engaging approach severely influenced Yemeni public opinion. In an interview with the author, Abdel Malik Mansour, former diplomat, minister and advisor of Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh, the ex-Yemeni official said he decided to resign from his post as the representative of Yemen in the Arab League in reaction to live images he saw on Al Jazeera. On Friday March 18, 2011, 53 civilians were killed and several hundreds were injured after being shot by pro-regime militants wearing civil uniforms. The televised

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94 Interview with Bin Jiddo in 26 July, 2011.
images of the incident, he asserted, were crucial in shaping his decision and that of other Yemeni officials, to support the uprising.95

Al Jazeera accelerated the course of events in Yemen. It articulated Qatar’s stance and reflected its public diplomacy strategy which once again collided with that of Saudi Arabia. Mansour explained how Saleh was considered to be “the Kingdom’s man in Yemen”. Saudi support expressed for Saleh allowed him to cling to power for the longest time possible, and prevented a quick collapse of his regime. The opposing foreign policies of Qatar and KSA were once again mirrored by the coverage of Al Jazeera and Al Arabia. However, the latter was increasingly expanding the space of its coverage. It was determined not to lose the race against its Qatari competitor, or at least, to limit its role in shaping the Arab public sphere.

As previously mentioned, Al Jazeera’s coverage in Syria was cold at first. The confusion evident in the network’s editorial policy seems due to the undecided standpoint of Qatar towards Syrian developments. According to Bin Jiddo, Al Jazeera’s administration was waiting for such a decision to be issued. When the Qataris decided to “launch an offensive”, escalation was noticed in the network’s coverage. Thuraya satellite phones were distributed to Syrian activists and extensive reliance on eye witnesses was noticed. Bin Jiddo claims that some of them were opposition figures or protesters not even present in locations where demonstrations or security measures were taking place. The “eye-witness strategy” employed by Al Jazeera triggered controversy. Critics of the network cited

95 Personal interview conducted with Abdel Malik Mansour conducted in Cairo in June, 2011.
specific examples discrediting this policy, some of which they were able to investigate. One example is that of Raja’ Nasser, a Syrian opposition figure who used to go on air in the name of Talal Khalidi. On Friday May 27, Nasser was describing the demonstrations in Hama – one of the turbulent cities in Syria - as an eye witness, while in fact speaking from the Bristol Hotel in Beirut where he was attending a conference. When asked by one of his colleagues about the drives behind his act, he replied by saying: “this is a revolutionary tactic”. 96 Al Jazeera defended its stance by asserting that it was doing the best it could to provide the necessary coverage and maintain precision at the same time. Syrian authorities were blamed for prohibiting foreign reporters from pursuing news, and were accused of deliberately aiming to disrupt the presentation of the real picture for Arab and Syrian public opinion.

Al Arabiya’s coverage of both the Syrian and Bahraini uprisings was in accordance with its political orientation. It was provocative in the Syrian case, accusing Iran and Hizbollah with direct involvement, and was regime-defensive in the case of Bahrain. The developments in Syria signified a golden opportunity for the Saudies to break Iran’s main ally in the Arab World. To Riyadh, this was its moment to act against Syria. Media war was the main tool of battle. Al Arabia magnified all critiques and accusations pertaining to Iran and its Lebanese ally. Former Syrian parliamentarian Ma’moun El Homsi sent Al Arabia videos in which he accused Hizbollah of sending “merceneries to save the Assad

96 This information was provided by several journalists who attended the conference.
family.97 When Hizbollah released a statement denying the allegations, its response would be marginally referred to during one of the network’s bulletins.

Bahrain was another intersecting point between Qatar and KSA. In the small emirate, Facebook activists published thousands of pictures relating to the bloody suppression of protestors in Lu’lua Square, while Al Jazeera aired images of the “calm streets of Manama”.98 Shiite mosques were attacked and several of their religious symbols were abused. The sectarian rift was increasing, and this presented an excuse for hesitant coverage. During the early days of the uprising, Al Jazeera broadcasted part of Al Qaradawi’s Khutba, saying the reason why he did not express support for the protests in Bahrain was due to their “sectarian drives”.99 Al Jazeera was criticized for not balancing his opinion by airing another one that denies or responds to such accusations.

In the case of Bahrain, Qatari political and security concerns shaped the channel’s editorial policies since both monarchies are part of the GCC. Even before protests reached Manama, some commentators noted that Doha’s enthusiasm will not undermine geopolitical considerations. Hugh Miles argued that the issue is one “of proximity and power” and that “despite the channel’s exceptional job in covering the turmoil in Tunisia and Egypt, the complex relationship with Saudi Arabia is a reminder that even for Al

97 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1omllesNcQY (accessed September 2, 2011)


Jazeera, in the Persian Gulf free press has its limits”. Surprisingly, what was not aired on Al Jazeera about Bahrain was said in a documentary broadcasted on the network’s English speaking channel (Al Jazeera English). The film introduced the dilemma as follows: “Bahrain, an island kingdom in the Arabian gulf, where the Shiite Muslim majority are ruled by a family from the Sunni minority, where people fighting for democratic rights broke the barriers of fear only to find themselves alone and crushed. This is their story and Al Jazeera is their witness. The only TV journalist who remained to follow their journey of hope to the carnage that followed. This is the Arab revolution that was abandoned by the Arabs”. The film was supposed to be aired again, yet Al Jazeera refrained from doing so.

If what happened in Bahrain was a real Arab revolution, then it was definitely abandoned by many, the US included. Geopolitics intervened to slow down Al Jazeera’s enthusiasm for change. The complexity of the situation in the small emirate was due to its sensitive location in the Gulf; bordering both Saudi and Iranian conflicting interests. Its sectarian composition did not help either. However, if Bahrain presents a case where geopolitics intervened to shape media discourse, then Libya was one where geopolitics dragged in regional and international involvement. It was also a case where the media effect was simply an introduction for hard power alternatives. Several reasons contributed to these outcomes as we shall see. Some could be linked to the idiosyncratic regime of Moamar Gaddafí, while others could be related to domestic factors and international interests.

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100 Hugh Miles, Foreign Policy, The Al Jazeera Effect, February 9, 2011.
4.3- Libya: From Soft to Hard Power

The significance of the Libyan case derives from the fact that it expressed several dualities; civil protest and armed rivalry, local involvement and foreign intervention, in addition to the employment of soft and hard power. The Libyan uprising took the form of peaceful demonstrations in the beginning. Former Libyan Minister of Youth and Sports Ibrahim Koweider informed this author that he warned Libyan officials in advance of signs of upheaval. He said Libyan authorities thought they could contain any uprising with preemptive steps like conducting meetings with local citizens to discuss their financial demands. “I told them those are not the activists you are looking for”, he said. “The uprising will be triggered by youngsters using means you have never dealt with before”. Obviously, Libyan authorities did not take such warnings seriously. Starting the 17th of February 2011, the situation escalated dramatically, and media outlets joined the open battle field.

The response of Libyan “Leader” Moamar Gaddafi to international pressures and domestic disturbances was different from that of his counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt. The high level of violence in reaction to the upheaval in Libya far exceeded that in the other two states, thus introducing a protracted armed insurrection and international military intervention. The way both scenarios ended certainly did not encourage Gaddafi to walk the same path Mubarak and Bin Ali did. However, his approach was not dictated by the failure

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102 Personal Interview with Libyan Former Minister of Youth and Sports Ibrahim Koweider conducted in Egypt in June 2011.
of previous reactions to popular revolts in the neighboring countries. Idiosyncratic, domestic, as well as international factors played a role in shaping this outcome.

On the idiosyncratic level, Gaddafi’s dogmatic approach to politics explains his absolute rigidity towards all initiatives and calls for compromise. His radical perception of public affairs and complete certainty of the righteousness of his political project drove him to fight the battle of preserving his regime with all possible means. Jerrold Post, founder of the Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior at the CIA, emphasized that personal characteristics are probably the most important aspect in decision making when it comes to a leader holding unrestrained power such as Gaddafi. He explained that the Libyan leader has a “borderline personality” whereby he “swings from intense anger to euphoria”, and “when under stress he can dip below the border and his perceptions can be distorted and his judgment faulty”.103 This might explain why he dealt with political developments with an exaggerated sense of denial. Gaddafi’s inflexibility could also be traced to his radical conceptions of the world cited in the “Green Book” and his other “ideological” contributions. According to the late Saudi minister Ghazi Kosseibi who had the chance to meet Gaddafi and negotiate him on various occasions, the latter never knew the meaning of neutrality. Kosseibi notes that Gaddafi almost acknowledges only “two forms of international relations; either instant unity or armed rivalry”.104


Gaddafi’s personal characteristics provided media outlets with additional material to employ in their attacks. Azmi Bshara commented on Gaddafi’s first speech in which he described rebels as rats and himself as “glory” and “history”, by saying: “It would have been funny had it not been sad”. He added sarcastically that “usually, such cases need the intervention of a psychiatrist in order to extract signs of mental illness. In Gaddafi’s case, he is articulating these signs overtly”. Al Jazeera even hosted a psychoanalyst to analyze Gaddafi’s personality, in which the network’s presenter Khadija Bin Genna gave a long list of attributes to his character including the way he dresses, his hair style, his weird stances, and his terminologies, before asking if being “crazy” drops penal liability. The psychiatrist answered by asserting his belief that Gaddafi’s constant mentioning of “hallucinogenic pills used by rebels” in his speeches constitutes a projection of his own condition and circumstances on others. It was no wonder that two months after the eruption of the uprising, Simon Tisdall wrote in The Guardian that the “war on Gaddafi is personal, and he is unlikely to retreat”.

On the domestic level, Gaddafi made use of Libya’s complex network of tribal alliances to fight the rebels. These loyalties have been the backbone of his regime for over forty years, and have helped him sustain his authority despite economic sanctions and several attempts to oust him from power. Gaddafi also played on regional sensitivities, enticing fears in the West of the country from alleged separatist inclinations in the East. He

107 Simon Tisdall, “Libya Conflict: War on Gaddafi is Personal – and He is Unlikely to Retreat” The Guardian, March 20, 2011.
also made use of the rebel’s adoption of the old Libyan flag (flag of independence) in order to propagate claims about their ambitions to restore the monarchic regime of independence.\textsuperscript{108} This is where fears of civil war and possible disintegration were exaggerated. It is where geopolitics could have been redrawn on different bases than those governing the past. It is also what drove media outlets supporting the rebels (Al Jazeera in particular) to underscore the wide support of the revolution in Western Libya, in order to deprive Gaddafi of the East-West escalating card.

At the international level, Gaddafi’s allies (mainly Russia and China) were clearly against of his removal. Their stance was evident during the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing the imposition of a no-fly zone and other measures against Gaddafi’s forces. Russia’s Ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, blamed Western states supporting the resolution for any possible “humanitarian consequences”, while State Duma vice speaker Vladimir Zhirinovsky said the resolution “did not bode well for the prospects of peace in the region”.\textsuperscript{109} Conflicting interests on the international level bought Gaddafi more time. Yet they encouraged Qatar, the main media state sponsor involved, to change its strategy towards the issue, as soft power alone proved to be insufficient to topple the regime.

The Libyan crisis unleashed fierce competition for dominating Arab and Libyan public opinion. Despite that, Gaddafi’s regime was slow in reacting to media campaigns


\textsuperscript{109} Russia Today TV. “Russia warns of full scale military action following security council vote on Libya”, 18 March http://rt.com/politics/libya-russia-security-council-un/
and failed massively in countering its rivals with similarly efficient media tactics. It was driven by the same mentality that governed its performance throughout previous decades. Libya’s official media leaned on an outdated propaganda machine. It shared similar characteristics with other public televisions in the Arab World. The Libyan National Television launched intensive campaigns during the first weeks of the revolution claiming that thousands of protestors were touring the streets of Benghazi (first city in the East to fall in the hands of rebels) declaring their loyalty to Gaddafi, and that the leaders of armed “vandals and gangs” began fleeing to neighboring Egypt. Such claims had little chance to influence public opinion, especially in a satellite era where the abundant influx of information complicates the task of news manipulation.

Opposing media outlets used the same efficient techniques implemented during previous uprisings: around the clock coverage, extensive use of footage extracted from social networks, hosting of opposition and dissident political figures, open air for critiques from Libyan citizens, and over-dramatized emphasis on humanitarian conditions. Al Jazeera also employed “national organic intellectuals”, in this case Libyan figures, as revolutionary catalysts capable of playing a role parallel to that of the aforementioned transnational intellectuals. One could notice how Libyan commentators regularly hosted on Al Jazeera became key figures representing the rebels. Of those was Mahmoud Shammam, the Libyan media expert and politician in exile and previous member of Al Jazeera’s administrative board. Shammam, who later became in charge of media relations in the

National Transitional Council (NTC), which accused power after the fall of Gaddafi, was given all the necessary financial, technical, and logistic facilities by Qatari authorities to launch the first Libyan satellite network supporting rebels during the uprising under the name “Libya Al-Ahrar”.

Another figure was Sleiman Dogha, the young Libyan journalist who used to head the media corporation owned by Seif Al-Islam (Gaddafi’s son) in London by the name of Al-Ghad. Dogha was viewed to be a young figure representing the new Libyan generation that triggered the uprising and shaped its early discourse. Dogha also became part of the NTC.

A third intellectual was Sheikh Ali Al-Sallabi, the Muslim cleric in exile hosted by the Qatari since the late nineties and a member of the Global Union for Muslim Ulama (clerics) headed by Sheikh Youssef Al-Qaradawi. Al-Sallabi was one of the “religious dynamos” of the Libyan uprising. He, along with the others, constituted Qatar’s “reserve army” in the face of Gaddafi’s weak propaganda machine. They were also a sign that Qatar’s leverage was transforming from merely constructivist influence to actual political power.

111 This information was provided to the writer by staff members from Libya Al-Ahrar satellite network during a field trip to Libya.


While Al Jazeera was driven by the same motives that framed its previous involvements in Tunisia and Egypt, Al Arabia acted on the base of Saudi Arabia’s all time rivalry with the Libyan regime. Libya constituted a perfect space for complimentary efforts made by the two channels. Even Egypt’s governmental outlets with their redefined editorial policies (after the fall of Mubarak) revealed bias to pro-revolution sentiments. This stance was also shown by many Arab networks of news content. Gaddafi openly expressed his rage against the networks inciting local opposition against him. His speeches uncovered the extent of irritation born out of the challenge posed by new media to his authority. In a video aired by the Libyan Television during the first days of the upheaval, he described satellite outlets as “stray dogs”, urging Libyans not to believe their allegations about him fleeing abroad.  

On the one hand, Gaddafi worked to propagate the idea that media was simply a “foreign tool” used to destabilize Libya and introduce occupation, in what seemed to be a desperate measure to undermine its effect. On the other hand, he was concerned with preserving his image as a “revolutionary leader” serving the “greatness of Libya” in all his broadcasted speeches and TV interviews. He was fighting back to defend this constructed self image that was greatly shaken by media attacks.

The media battle was taken to a further extremes when opposing networks – namely Al Jazeera went as far as hosting guests calling for Gaddafi’s assassination. In a live


interview, the TV’s permanent guest Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradawi, overtly encouraged Gaddafi’s close assistants to “kill him and relieve the Libyans from his evil”. The regime soon retaliated by targeting the network’s team of correspondents in Libya. Al Jazeera’s cameraman Ali Hassan Al-Jaber, who held Qatari nationality, was killed in the ambush set near the city of Benghazi.

The media discourse also included international actors. Western media underscored the importance of winning the war of information and public opinion against Gaddaf.” The British *Independent* expressed its concern about Libyan attempts to establish a correlation between NATO’s involvement in Libya and the war on Iraq, in the minds of Arabs and Muslims. According to the paper, media wars with Tripoli had to be taken seriously in order to prevent the Libyan regime from diverting the course of Arab public opinion that was generally sympathetic with the rebels, and paralyze its ability to recruit foreign insurgents and jihadists.

On the other hand, Libya’s allies defended its stance and accused the United States of endorsing campaigns against Gaddafi’s regime in order to prepare the stage for military intervention. Deputy of the State Duma of Russia Simeon Bagdasarov warned of schemes for military intervention succeeding media escalation. Other Russian officials echoed concerns suggesting that change in the Arab World and the new balance of power resulting

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117 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW05Mf2x5VE (accessed in August 20, 2011)


from it are nothing but an orchestrated redesign of the region and its regimes. The Russian paper Izvestia quoted one of Moscow’s diplomats saying that America’s waged media war is the “electronic Hiroshima of the Middle East”\(^{121}\). Such statements were linked to previous worries from America’s propagation of “constructive chaos” scenarios in the Arab World. Only this time, brute force was not the means to achieve a new Middle Eastern order as it was during the Bush administration. New media was the tool used to introduce the reordering of geopolitical realities.

The above demonstrates the layered interaction between various factors presenting the shift from media discourse to actual war. Gaddafi’s image was being destroyed by media outlets. The “leader” was losing his leverage in the eyes of his supporters, and the barriers of fear preventing any opposition from acting were crumbling. New media was constructing new collective consciousness, where the “Leader” became part of the past and an obstacle to heading towards a better future. This impact was well noticed by the Libyan regime. During the uprising, senior reporter of the pro-rebel satellite channel Libya Al-Ahrar informed the author that security forces in Tripoli would ask children about the channels that their parents watch, and “if the answer came to be Al Jazeera or Al Arabia, then the result would be their parents’ arrest”\(^{122}\). The rebel’s morale was also affected by broadcasted news and images. Ali Al-Sallabi, the famous Libyan pilot who fought with the rebels against Gaddafi’s forces and died defending Ben Ghazi, disobeyed military command after being emotionally dragged by the scenes aired on media outlets about the

\(^{121}\) “Experts Believe the Situation in Libya is Largely Made up by Media”, *Izvestia Newspaper*, March 5, 2011.

\(^{122}\) Personal Interview with Ahmad Khalifa, senior reporter in Libya Al-Ahrar TV, in Bin Ghazi in May 2011.
uprising. His brother, Nourideen, affirms that “Ali’s decision was taken after watching horrible footage of civilians being crushed by security forces on Al Arabia”. ¹²³

Constructivist tools used to undermine Gaddafi were so powerful that they forced him to react with unrestrained power. His rhetoric and tangible policies exposed by media outlets in detail were widely unaccepted by Arab public opinion. The latter was to a far extent willing to acknowledge the need for limited military intervention, even if it were carried out by the NATO. Media discourse managed to change the nature of the struggle and reorient its course. After the fall of Gaddafi, the power vacuum in Libya drove authorities in neighboring Algeria, Sudan, and Niger to put their military forces on alert. Much concern was echoed concerning the reverberations of possible chaos in Libya on the regional environment. Even Washington articulated similar concerns pertaining to the effect of this on “global terror”.¹²⁴ The regional and international dimensions were intertwined in an unprecedented manner. Bin Jiddo argues that media coverage, especially that of Al Jazeera, was similar to that of a regional war: There was simply a decision to topple the regime. Libya constituted a laboratory with various challenges and possibilities, ranging from national disintegration to Arab political and military engagement in regime change.¹²⁵

¹²³ Personal interview with Nourideen Al-Sallabi in Ben Ghazi in May 2011.


¹²⁵ Interview with Bin Jiddo in 26 July, 2011.
4.4- In Light of the Libyan Case: What Does Qatar Want?

In a media conference organized in Abu Dhabi in 2005, the head of the board of directors at Al Jazeera, Waddah Khanfar, emphasized the network’s adherence to professional guidelines by asserting that it “will not depend on the mood of any particular individual, or be influenced by a certain party, and editorial decisions will be taken collectively to avoid any unprofessional slips”. 126 Al Jazeera’s editorial policies are certainly not shaped by individuals. However, they could not have been shaped without regard to Qatar’s foreign policy. Bin Jiddo argues that Al Jazeera’s editorial policies were reflective of a particular line of thought among Islamists, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and linked to Qatar’s regional policies in practice.

The question pertaining to Qatar’s aims and ambitions has elicited much controversy. On his blog, American scholar and politician Elliot Abrams raised the question of “what does Qatar seek beyond influence, and influence for what?” He argued that the dilemma springs from the following: “If one judges by the programming on Al Jazeera, the royal family seeks a Middle East where American influence is diminished and radical groups are more powerful, but that would be a Middle East with little room for fabulously wealthy kings, sheiks, and emirs”. 127

But perhaps there is another available answer to Elliot’s question. In the case of Libya, Al Jazeera’s national organic intellectuals became influential figures in the NTC.

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126 Waddah Khanfar, Arab Media in the Information Age, pp. 367, 368.

Qatar extended its leverage from the public sphere into the political one. It has also been proven that the Qatari support for rebels did not limit their support for rebels to soft power. In September 6, two weeks after the fall of Gaddafi, Reuters published a report that cited rebel leaders affirming that most of their forces’ weaponry and ammunition were provided by Qatar. The agency’s reporter also said that he has seen boxes delivered to the rebels carrying the stamp “Qatar” and containing mortar artilleries and communication devices. Reuters also quoted opposition sources suggest that Qatar’s decision to militarily engage in the conflict came upon the insistence of Al Jazeera’s regularly hosted Libyan cleric Sheikh Ali Al-Sallabi, the aforementioned “organic intellectual”. In fact, military assistance was sought by the rebels from the early days of the revolution. Deputy President of the National Transitional Council, Abdel Hafiz Ghoka, asserted that they were in need of such assistance from “friendly states”. When the author interviewed him in Ben Ghazi during the uprising, he argued that this matter is of utmost importance for the sake of breaking the status quo on the ground. He also emphasized the role of Qatar (among other Gulf States) in providing the NTC with political support needed to gain international recognition.129

After the fall of Gaddafi, documents were found in a Libyan intelligence base revealing secret meetings which joined Libyan officials to former American diplomat David Welsh and Democrat Congressman Dennis Cucinich. According to the documents, Welsh told Gaddafi that “Qatar is playing cynical” and that “the media policy adopted by

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129 Personal interview with Deputy President of the NTC Abdel Hafiz Ghoka in Ben Ghazi in May 2011.
Doha concerning Tripoli aimed to shift attention from developments in Bahrain”.  

However, a thorough analysis would probably uncover more complex and far-fetched interests that the small emirate has tried to maintain. According to Lebanese analyst and columnist Sateh Nourideen, Libya “is not being reborn”. What has occurred is in fact “its first birth”. The Gaddafi era characterized by the absence of state apparatus and institutions was closer to a “sanatorium for the mentally ill” rather than a real state. In other words, Libya was a void political space waiting to be filled. In the *Weekly Standard*, Lee Smith argues that the Qataris “filled a vacuum in Libya” and that “the new regional order is taking shape round Qatar”. The gulf emirate supplied the rebels with arms, provided means for them to export oil, and offered them hundreds of millions of dollars. All this was in parallel to the “moral support” given by its “powerful public diplomacy wing” – Al Jazeera. After getting the “mission” done, Smith believes that “no one has enjoyed the fruit of the Arab Spring more than Qatar”. It is the transformation of Al Jazeera’s constructivist role into concrete Qatari geopolitical influence.

**4.5- Conclusion:**

Al Jazeera has been an efficient tool for redesigning geopolitical realities due to the immense effects it had in mobilizing masses and orienting the course of change in Arab

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states during the Arab popular uprisings. The media battle soon exceeded local implications and developed a new regional dimension. As the events took dramatic turns in Libya, Al Jazeera moved from playing a role in shaping alternative possibilities on the domestic Arab scenes, to affecting the course of regional dynamics and levels of inter-state tensions. This research question was addressed in the context of both constructivist and realist explanations. It was initially discussed in light of Al Jazeera’s constructivist approach. However, Al Jazeera’s role has largely adhered with Qatar’s public diplomacy and vital foreign policy – unrestrained by the regional status quo and aiming to balance regional powers rather than bandwagon with them. Thus, the wider context of the debate suggests that constructivism was a tool used to serve political agendas based on “realpolitik”. Al Jazeera as well as other influential media outlets such as Al Arabia, were actually drawing the road map for change in turbulent countries. Satellite networks did not only catalyze social dynamics and act as providers of information and tools for communication, but also played a role in orienting the course of change itself, in a manner that best fits the foreign policies of their sponsoring states.

The next chapter sums up the general findings and conclusions of this thesis. It further highlights the relationship between political implications of media rhetoric and theories of International Relations. It also sheds light on future prospects and possibilities in the field of new media and its relation to foreign policies of Arab States, basing on the research and analysis presented in previous chapters.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1- General Findings and Conclusions

The thesis has mapped a connection between the media industry and Arab politics. Satellite channels have been used as instruments serving strategic goals. They have influenced and been influenced by the intensely interacting forces on the regional stage. The complex discourse evolving during the Arab popular uprisings encompassed dependent and independent variables that stem from constructivist approaches and realist drives. It reflected a tight connection between domestic and inter-state dynamics in the context of clashing interests and opposing foreign policies. Intellectuals also took part in cultivating the regional discourse, and hard power replaced soft power in times when social tensions introduced bloody strife.

Popular uprisings in the Arab World triggered various questions pertaining to the impact of new media on political developments. Some debates surfacing Arab discourse tackled the issue from a reverse angle, whereby the questions raised focused on the influence of geopolitical realities on media coverage. The thesis has covered both ends of the controversy. On the one hand, it revealed how the intrusion of new media in drawing the course of political events allowed it to play a role in shaping their trajectory, in a manner that best suits the interests of media-sponsoring states. On the other hand, it
explained how the flow of protests from one state to another placed all Arab regimes in the 
circle of danger, including those playing the game of media escalation. Thus, being the 
main media outlet engaging with popular dynamics, Qatar’s Al Jazeera reassessed its 
rhetoric after mass protests reached neighboring Bahrain, yet it pushed for further 
escalation in Libya, Syria, and Yemen; after the encouraging outcomes of its engagement in Tunisia and Egypt.

5.2- Back to Theory: Constructivism vs. Realism

The free system of communication networks has fostered interchanges between activists pursuing regime change. Media outlets have served as “institutions of the public sphere”133 and were able to involve marginalized social groups in their struggle against central authorities. Furthermore, they have been able to structure the framework of conflict through their televised intellectuals and politicized rhetoric. In this context, Al Jazeera’s increasing influence has revealed the power of constructivist engagements with political developments. The discourse that media outlets have created was closely related to the power formula in the region. Initially, the term “discourse” is associated with Michel Foucault’s “Archeology of Knowledge”, in which he relates representation to relations of power. The “interactive” character of new media could be placed within this space of interrelation,134 whereby perceptions drawn by televised images serve the creation of a new

133 Rinnawi, Instant Nationalism, p. 141.
approach to the struggle for power in the Arab World. In this regard, scholars have emphasized the “democratic potential” and “creative management” of interactivity, and introduced “the long standing question of whether or not a media technology has the power to determine culture and society”.\(^{135}\) New media has invested in this formula extensively. In Tunisia and Egypt, public opinion constituted a potential force against established status quos. Its high inclinations and drives for mobility were created by political, social, and economic factors, yet they were greatly fueled by media discourse. Later on, Qatar’s constructivist policy was translated into realist actions in Libya, where force replaced soft power, and direct intervention substituted its past circuitous attempts to support the popular uprising. When constructivist tactics introduce realist action, this indicates that both approaches have been necessary to achieve the results desired by the states presenting them. Had direct intervention in Libya been not preceded by preparatory media escalation, it would not have produced the same effect.

A dilemma surfaced in Arab public discourse when the tide of peaceful change first reached a dead end in Libya, and calls for foreign military intervention became a substance for debate. The Libyan case underscored the predicament relating to the legitimacy of intervention versus calls for protecting human rights and promoting democracy. As opposed to the case of Iraq seven years in advance, Arab public opinion, shaped by media discourse, did not widely oppose the option of foreign involvement. This added a new variable to the entangled formula relating the public sphere to political interest, and constructivist approaches to realist ones.

5.3- Future Prospects: Media Maintains its Role

The drastic changes in the Arab region will be vigorously interacting for the following years to come. The Arab scene will be crystallizing along with the continuously evolving interplay between media and politics. Previously, it has been said that the “Arab public sphere affects international politics in three ways: by changing the strategic calculations of rational politicians, by shaping worldwide views, and by transforming identities.” However, what we have witnessed during the uprisings was a direct intervention of the public sphere in introducing alternative domestic governance and drawing different geopolitical possibilities (as in the cases of Libya, Yemen, and Syria). Al Jazeera’s discourse is no more just a “verbalization of Arab publics’ critiques of government.” It is rather an introductory stage to more tangible policies based on realist agendas. New media in general and Al Jazeera in particular have proved to be “one of the most important de facto Arab political parties”, and have presented themselves as a main player in the evolving Arab political space. It might be true that “credibility, audience size, and financial resources will serve as the essential criteria for the survivability of Al Jazeera”. However, present signs suggest that survivability isn’t the real question. It is rather believed that the future will further reveal media’s role in unveiling the transformative possibilities enticing social change.

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139 El-Nawawy and Iskandar. 2002. *Al Jazeera*, p. 44.
So far, new media has reserved a place in the newly designed Arab region. Accordingly, more attention will be given to this field. Some regional actors seem to have realized that their engagement with the Arab public sphere is in need of maintenance, or of additional players participating in media discourse. The establishment of new networks can be read within this context. In 2012, a number of news outlets will be launched including Al Mayadeen – headed by Ghassan Bin Jiddo and closely related to Iran and its Arab allies, Al Arab – founded by the Saudi billionaire Al Walid Bin Talal and constituting a Saudi compliment to Al Arabia, in addition to the Arabic version of Sky News. This relates to the conviction that the role of new media during Arab popular uprisings was highly transformative, and its upcoming prospects are yet to be uncovered. Arabic speaking new media has been an agent exploring alternatives and projecting them on the geopolitical landscape, and will continue to do so in the near future.
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Appendix: List of Interviews

1. Abdel Hafiz Ghoka, Deputy President of the National Transitional Council representing Libyan rebels, interviewed by author, May 2011, Ben Ghazi, Libya.
3. Ahmad Khalifa, senior reporter in Libya Al-Ahrar TV, interviewed by author, May 2011, Ben Ghazi, Libya.
5. Ibrahim Koweider, former Libyan Minister of Youth and Sports, interviewed by author, 20 June, 2011, Cairo, Egypt.
6. Nourideen Al-Sallabi, brother of the Libyan pilot Ali Al-Sallabi, whose plane was shot over Bin Ghazi by Gaddafi’s forces while defending the city, interviewed by author, May 2011, Ben Ghazi, Libya.