

## **Movie Script Qatar: “Current Gulf Crisis – Role of Al Jazeera”**

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### **What has happened so far?**

Beginning of June 2017 several Arabic countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain have announced that they are breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar. Saudi Arabia threatened to close borders, severing land, sea and air contact with the Gulf state.

### **Why did they do it?**

Al Jazeera was praised for its in-depth coverage of the Arab spring, which commenced in 2010 but ever since Saudi Arabia raised the allegations that Qatar is supporting various terrorist and sectarian groups that aim at destabilizing the region such as the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaida, Islamic State and groups supported by Iran.

### **What is the background to the conflict?**

Tensions between Qatar and their Gulf Arab neighbors have grown in recent years as part of a fight over regional predominance. Qatar has allegedly supported Islamist movements in the Middle East during the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 and pursued the improvement of relations with Tehran, Saudi Arabia’s arch-enemy and rival.

### **What is Qatar’s position?**

The statement of the Qatari foreign ministry towards the action of the Gulf Cooperation Council nations states that Qatar has been subjected to a campaign of lies which aims at undermining Qatar’s position in the Arab World.

### **What are the consequences?**

Qatar has been isolated by its Arab neighbors, with land, sea and air routes closed off. Saudi Arabia and the UAE blocked the website of Qatar and all Qatari media including Al Jazeera. As a part of the 13-point ultimatum Saudi Arabia has demanded Qatar to close down its famous broadcaster.

Al Jazeera is a major global news organization, with 80 bureaus around the world. The original Al Jazeera channel's willingness to broadcast dissenting views, for example on call-in shows, created controversies among the Gulf States. The station gained worldwide attention following the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan, when its local office was the only channel to live-cover the war. Al Jazeera itself is not able to finance their own business by advertisement revenue therefore the state had to intervene and subsidize the broadcaster.

Although the media is owned by the government of Qatar, Al Jazeera officials state that they are editorially independent from the government of Qatar. However, this assertion is disputed, and many have accused Al Jazeera of being a propaganda outlet for the Qatari government.

No other TV station has received fury and spurred controversy like Al Jazeera. Since its inception on August 1996, it has received both admiration and criticism and also cultivated foes and friends all over the world.

As studies confirm, local news about Qatar are absent from the station. The exclusion of local news from the station’s news reporting seems to be a deliberate policy that aims to emphasize the broad Arab and Muslim world as the target audience of the station. This same fact, however, also justifies the critiques of many observers to the station saying that its avoidance of reporting locally on Qatar is due to not wanting to offend the Qatari authorities.

The dilemma of Al Jazeera lies in the contradiction between modernity and traditionalism which overwhelms the station.

**This leads us to the research question: To which extent is Al Jazeera instrumentalized regarding political and economic relations?**

*Interview with Dr. Mahmoud M. Galander:*

**How do you position Al Jazeera as a news outlet within the Arab world?**

Al Jazeera belongs to a school, which basically focuses on providing a liberal oriented kind of news and information, opinion and other opinion and these basically contradict with the realities in the region, in which most of the TV stations, most of the media belong to the government and therefore they subscribe more to what we call more authoritative type of media. So this is the cracks of the issue and this is why Al Jazeera has been targeted by most of those countries.

**Which role does Al Jazeera play regarding the political context?**

The history of Al Jazeera is full of those restrictions, an immensity of governments and even to the extent that several governments severed relations with Qatar because of Al Jazeera, because of the fact that Al Jazeera is providing news from a perspective that does not suit the area.

**Would you consider Al Jazeera as a representative of Qatari news or as a representative of general Arabic interests?**

Most of the countries in the area, especially those who entered into this crisis lately considered it as a political propaganda, while Al Jazeera sees itself as a news organization, that is international and therefore provides news as such. It is not a Qatari news organization. And this basically ends up making this kind of contradictions between the other news organizations in the area and Al Jazeera's news.

**To which extent and in which way can Al Jazeera be considered as a public diplomacy tool?**

It has been considered a public diplomacy tool by others, whereas Al Jazeera itself does not see itself that way. In the area, in the Arab region, you could see that most of the media are used for public diplomacy, for political purposes rather than anything else.

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*Interview with Rawaa Augé:*

**Have you noticed changes in reporting due to political circumstances?**

In the past three years, after the first reconciliation between Qatar and the GCC countries, we were avoiding to report on internal issues in Saudi Arabia and economic issues in Saudi Arabia. We were avoiding to report on Emirate's interference in Libya and in Yemen. I think we were doing that because we thought we were doing a good thing for the country that is hosting Al Jazeera, that is offering us all the support to do all the free reporting we want to do around the world. And I guess we felt that this type of concession that we are making is worth it to keep reporting on other areas because we didn't want any more trouble for Al Jazeera. Qatar had to shut down Al Jazeera Egypt for the first reconciliation because they didn't want to be reporting on Egypt anymore. But we cannot be an Arabic channel and not report on Egypt at all and that's what they want. They don't want us to say anything about Egypt.

**Do you feel free in your reporting?**

I was expecting real censorship and I discovered none. Really none. I never had anyone interfering with the questions that I would be asking my guests. I went to report from Africa and from Lebanon, I never had any interference in this terms. Of course there are editorial standards like which terms, how do we qualify this group or not.

**How do you evaluate the reporting of local Qatari media?**

It's not as free maybe as European newspaper but it's not completely zero coverage as other people think it is.

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**Role of Al Jazeera: Conclusion**

The role of Al Jazeera within the current crisis in the Gulf states remains disputable and controversial. While the neighboring states hold on to the accusation that Qatar instrumentalizes Al Jazeera for political purposes and demand the closure of the broadcaster, the Al Jazeera Media Network published an official statement on their website calling this demand “nothing short than a siege against the journalistic profession” and an attempt “to silence the freedom of expression in the region and to suppress people’s right to information and the right to be heard”.

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