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Small States in World Politics

Qatar: A Small State with a Loud Voice

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Introduction

In the contemporary international system political fault lines have expanded from the classic military and economic domains to new, less tangible domains such as mass media, social media, cyberspace and other information and communication technologies in general. Many powerful states have understood the importance of a strong international media network as a tool of soft power.

Examples of such international media networks are the Russian Russia Today, the French France24, the Saudi Al Arabiya, the American CNN and Voice of America, the German Deutsche Welle, the British BBC and the Chinese China Global TV Network. However, there is one influential media network that has millions of viewers worldwide, and that is not founded by a large powerful state like the other media networks mentioned. This media network is the Qatari Al Jazeera, a media network that is famous for its coverage of the conflicts in the Middle East, its interviews with controversial groups and persons such as Osama Bin Laden, its coverage of the Arab Spring (2010-2012) and its negative reputation among Middle Eastern autocrats (Wolfsfeld, 2011; pp. 38-39).

This research will examine the reasons behind Qatar's ability to set up a powerful media network like Al Jazeera. Furthermore, this research will look at the aims of Qatar, when it established Al Jazeera and whether it has successfully achieved those goals. As the above-mentioned examples show, studying the use of media in order to achieve goals in the international arena has become more crucial than ever before. This is especially true in the context of the Middle East, where many powerful states such as the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing to win the hearts and minds of local populations.

The fact that Qatar as a small state is able to compete in such a highly competitive environment is remarkable to say the least. As previous research by scholars such as Ingebritsen (2006) has shown, small states are capable of influencing events far beyond their borders. Where previous shows the influence of small states through norm-entrepreneurship and cooperation in international organisations (Ingebritsen, 2006), this research examining alternative methods used by small states to increase their influence in

international politics. More specifically this research will focus on the use of media as a tool to influence international politics. By researching alternative methods that can enable a small state to obtain power, it is possible to provide a new, perhaps more positive perspective on the opportunities of small states.

This will be a qualitative research, more specifically a case study of Qatar's Al Jazeera news network. In the content analysis the behaviour of Qatar and Al Jazeera during three different periods will be examined. The first period is the period that Al Jazeera was founded (1995-2001), as examining this period will provide an answer to the political context and motives behind Al Jazeera's creation. The second period will be the Arab Spring (2010-2012), as this period will be crucial in understanding how Al Jazeera is used to influence international events. The third period that will be examined is the Gulf Crisis (2017-2019), an examination of this period provides an insight in the long term effectiveness of Al Jazeera's behaviour and how the news network is able to deal with external threats.

Theoretical framework

From the realist perspective, the smallness of a state has been equal to weakness. Small states are seen as subject to the will of powerful states (Mohammadzadeh, 2017; pp. 21-24), as reflected in the famous words of Thucydides: “The strong do what they will, while the weak suffer what they must” (Crane, 1998; pp. 61-66). According to this view on small states, these states only have limited options. One option is to form an alliance with a powerful state in order to survive within its sphere of protection; this is known as ‘bandwagoning’. The other option for a small state is ‘balancing’; this means that a small state forms an alliance with other states in order to form a counterbalancing power against a threatening powerful state (Walt, 1987; p. 17). Due to these limited options, realists view the actions of small states as a response to the actions of powerful states, rather than aimed at actively shaping and influencing international events (Browning, 2006; pp. 671-672). This view on small states completely disregards other forms of influence that small states can exercise on international events, for example through the use of soft power.

The liberalist view on small states accepts the ability of small states to influence outcomes through international institutions. Liberalists also accept the notion that power is not merely limited to military capabilities, but that other factors such as geography, economy, domestic politics etcetera, should be taken into account (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006). These other forms of power that are not based on military power, are known as soft power (Nye, 1990). An example of Nye’s soft power would be the use of economic or diplomatic measures to achieve an objective in international politics, instead of using military power.

Constructivists take the idea that small states could influence and shape international events one step further. Constructivists argue that the position of a small state within the international system is merely a reflection of its (self-) perception; therefore it is possible for small states to change their position by changing their image (Browning, 2006; pp. 673-674). This idea makes it possible to look at the positive aspects of smallness, rather than only focussing on weaknesses. One such positive attribute of smallness is the ability to adapt

quickly to circumstances in the international arena. Small states are able to do so due to the close cooperation between the national institution, while large states struggle to adapt due to complex domestic processes and a multitude of domestic actors (Kazenstein, 1985).

Another positive attribute of smallness is that it is perceived as non-threatening. Therefore, a small state has the ability to take certain actions, promote certain ideas and to get involved in certain disputes without raising the suspicion of having a hidden agenda (Browning, 2006; p. 674; Chong, 2010; p. 385). The ability to use these two positive aspects of smallness in order to achieve great goals on the international level has been showcased by Browning (2006) in his research on the identity of Finland and by Ingebritsen (2006) in her research on the role of Scandinavian countries as norm entrepreneurs. Ingebritsen (2006) shows in her research that Scandinavian countries are able to act as norm entrepreneurs due to their non-threatening neutral position in international politics. Browning (2006), shows in his study how Finland gained different positions in the region merely by changing how it was perceived. Where it was first perceived by other states as a weak and small country, due to the promotion of a different image Finland eventually became a powerful player in the region. Physically not much had changed, there was no rapid population growth, the territory and wealth did not change drastically, however still Finland managed to leave the image of a small state behind and instead started to be perceived as an equal to the surrounding states in the region. One such strategy of actively changing the image of one's state, has become known as 'nation branding' (Anholt, 2011). Nation branding is a very broad concept, as it includes many forms of branding and motivations behind the branding. Often states engaging in nation branding want to create an image that they are very good in a certain industry in order to attract foreign companies, or by portraying the image of safety and a unique destination they tend to attract tourists (Dinnie, 2008). However, nation branding is not always economically driven, such was the case with Russia. In the early 2000s Russia was focussed on creating the image of a powerful, modern democracy and moving away from its image during the Soviet Union. The creation of the international Russia Today news network was one of the strategies to change Russia's image internationally (Dinnie, 2008; pp. 107-111).

However where it started as a tool to promote Russia, the news outlet soon became a tool in spreading pro-Russian ideas that clashed with the narratives of European and American news outlets and supporting Russian proxies in Ukraine (Richter, 2017; pp. 10-23, 36-37).

Where Ingebritsen (2006) mainly looks at using soft power (Nye, 1990) in international organisations and international regimes, Chong (2010; 385) also includes the use of media technologies as tools of soft power. In his article he states that soft power in general can have the same effects as hard power and might also be considered as dangerous by adversary states. This idea is supported by Nye (2004; p. 54) as he states that the rapid development of media technologies changes traditional power structures of governments and creates a system in which information distribution can reach much further into society than the official government's agenda. He goes further by describing power relations in international politics as a three-dimensional chessboard with soft power and information as the third board underneath economic and military power (Nye, 2004; p. 51). This idea is supported by the example of Russia Today, that a state can influence international outcomes by using an international media platform (Richter, 2017). When looking at the biggest international news outlets such as Russia Today, BBC, CNN, Al Arabiya and TRT, they are all either based in or partially owned by powerful states such as Russia and Saudi Arabia. However, one of the biggest international news outlets is the world famous Al Jazeera network. The difference between Al Jazeera and these other news outlets is that it is not owned by a globally or regionally powerful state. Instead Al Jazeera is owned by Qatar, one of the smallest countries in their region. This raises the question: what were Qatar's goals when establishing Al Jazeera and to what extent has Qatar been successful in achieving those goals? In order to answer the above mentioned questions it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter by answering the following sub-questions: how is a small state like Qatar able to establish a powerful international media network like Al Jazeera and what are the limits of such a media network?

Expectations

This research is aimed at understanding the factors behind Qatar's motivation to create a powerful media network like Al Jazeera. The main point of interest is the small size of Qatar in comparison to the other states like Russia and Saudi Arabia, which have powerful international media networks such as Russia Today and Al Arabiya. From the literature on the use of international media by powerful states, it is clear that media is often used to influence the public opinion in other states. Therefore one expectation regarding Qatar's motives behind the creation of Al Jazeera is; that Qatar has created Al Jazeera as an instrument to influence the public opinion outside of Qatar in favour of its interests. Another expectation regarding Qatar's motives is that Qatar as a small state wants to re-brand itself and change the perception of other states regarding its own capabilities en position in the region.

Furthermore, based on the fact that Al Jazeera still exists after almost 24 years since its creation and the fact that it has millions of viewers worldwide, the expected answer to how successful Qatar has been in achieving its goals with Al Jazeera is; that Qatar, at least to a certain extent, has been successful in achieving its goals. A fourth expectation is that Qatar has been able to create a powerful news network like Al Jazeera due to the fact that its has an exceptional high GDP in comparison to its to territory and population. This high GDP allows Qatar to invest great amounts of money in Al Jazeera, amounts that would be unaffordable for most other states of its size. The final expectation is that the power of Al Jazeera and indirectly that of Qatar will be limited, based on the realist literature. The reasoning behind this expectation is that Al Jazeera as a tool to gain influence in the region will not be sufficient to overcome classic limitations of small states such as the lack of security due to small size.

Conceptualisation & Operationalization

In order to answer the research question, it is necessary to determine the different characteristics of the concepts that form the foundation of this research. The first concept is that of the 'small state'. Within this research a state

is considered to be an entity that meets the criteria of the Montevideo Convention (Montevideo). Therefore a state should have a territory, government, permanent population and the ability to interact with other states. In order to avoid any discussions regarding recognition, only member states of the United Nations will be considered as states within the context of this research. Membership of the United Nations will be considered as sufficient evidence of a state's recognition by the international community.

Where international law provides clear characteristics for states, the answer to the question of which states can be considered small is relative to the context. Generally a state is classified as small based on the size of its population, territory, GDP and/or military power. The most common threshold for classifying a state as small, is a population of below the 1,5 million. The standard of a population below 1,5 million is also used by the World Bank (World Bank). However, due to the comparative nature of this research, smallness measured by abstract numbers is less relevant than smallness measured from a relative perspective. As Al Jazeera and Qatar will be examined as an exceptional case in the context of other powerful media networks that are financed by large states, it will suffice that Qatar is much smaller than the other states with powerful media networks and that Qatar is much smaller than its regional neighbours such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. For this reason this study classifies a state as small not based on concrete number, but based on relative smallness in comparison to regional competitors.

Another concept that is mentioned in the main research question is 'powerful'. The power of a media network can best be measured by its reach, as an increased reach of a media network also increases its potential to influence a larger amount of people. Whether a media network such as Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya are considered powerful can therefore be measured by the amount of countries in which it is available, the amount of viewers and the amount of followers on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube.

The exact goals of Qatar will be measured by analysing Qatar's actions regarding Al Jazeera within the context of the three different time periods that will be analysed. In order to determine how successful Qatar has been in achieving its goals, the short-term and long-term consequences of Qatar's actions will be analysed. The degree of success will then be determined by assessing the negative and positive effects of the outcomes for Qatar.

Research Design & Case Selection

In this research the main focus will be on finding underplaying factors that can enable a small state to compete with large states through the use of media. Due to the Layered structure of the research question and the sub-questions, it is clear that the questions are aimed at obtaining a deeper understanding of the Al Jazeera/Qatar case. This research will be a single case study (Hague & Harrop, 2013; pp. 361-363), but it will be consisting of three different time periods that will be analysed. These three different time periods will be the foundation of Al Jazeera (1995-2001), the Arab Spring (2010-2012) and the Gulf Crisis (2017-2019).

The small state that is selected for this research is the state of Qatar. Despite its size, Qatar has one of the most powerful international media networks (Al Jazeera), while all the other powerful media networks such as CNN, Russia Today and Al Arabiya have been created by large powerful states. Therefore Qatar can be considered a deviant case, as it's media network Al Jazeera is competing in a field where generally only powerful states are able to compete. With its 2,6 million inhabitants and 300.000 nationals, Qatar is one of the least populated states in the world (World Fact Book). Qatar has been selected instead of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the following reasons; the first reason is that the UAE has a population three times the size of Qatar's population and it is considered an average sized state in the region, in contrast to Qatar which is a relative small state. The second reason why the UAE and Sky News Arabia are not selected for this research is that Sky New Arabia only exists since 2012, which means that there is less data to collect in comparison to Al Jazeera, which exists for almost 24 years. The final reason is that Sky News Arabia is far less popular than Al Jazeera.

The specific time periods that will be examined in this research are the foundation of Al Jazeera (1995-2001), the Arab Spring (2010-2012) and the Gulf Crisis (2017-2019). This makes it possible to create three moments within the history of Al Jazeera and Qatar, that can be approached like separate cases due to the completely different circumstances. However at the same time all three time

periods are linked and their analysis is necessary for a thorough understanding of the relation between Qatar's interests and Al Jazeera. The first period provides an insight in the circumstances that created led to Al Jazeera's creation. The second period provides an insight in a period that Al Jazeera's popularity was at an all time high and allowed the news outlet to influence international events. The final time period is one in which Al Jazeera and Qatar are directly under attack, which in turn provides insight in how resilient Qatar and Al Jazeera are.

Research Methodology

The main setup of this research will be qualitative, due to the fact that its specific aim is to gain a deeper understanding of Qatar's motives behind the creation of a media network like Al Jazeera. For this reason a research design that aims at a more thorough understanding of the subject is more desired. Due to the chronological element between the creation of Al Jazeera, the Arab Spring and the Gulf Crisis, process-tracing (Collier, 2011) will be used to determine causal effects of these elements and the behaviour of Qatar and Al Jazeera within the context of these time periods. The main method of data collection will be content analysis, in which reports, news articles, academic literature, commentaries, books and an interview with an expert from the Clingendael Institute will be triangulated. In order to avoid biased information about Al Jazeera's, the choice has been made to minimize the analysis of content from Al Jazeera's Arab competitors such as Al Arabiya and Sky News Arabia, when answering questions regarding Al Jazeera's motives. Furthermore, the interview with the expert from the Clingendael Institute will be semi-structured and aimed at finding an answer to the abovementioned research question and the sub-questions. The decision to conduct a semi-structured interview is based on the idea that this will allow the interviewer to continue questioning in a certain direction if answers need more explanation. These interviews will then in turn be used to triangulate with the findings from external sources that came forward during the content analysis. This will ensure higher reliability of the findings, due to the use of triangulation between the different types of sources.

Content analysis

The Foundation of Al Jazeera (1995-2001)

Since Qatar's independence in 1971 it had been a small emirate in the shadow of Saudi Arabia. Qatar's foreign policy was aligned to that of Saudi Arabia, as this form of bandwagoning was the best alternative to ensure Qatar's survival as a small state. Saudi Arabia was the most logic candidate to bandwagon with, due to its proximity to Qatar, its far reaching religious, economic and political power, its powerful allies such as the U.S. and its cultural, religious and ethnic similarities with Qatar. However, this harmonious relation between both states came to an abrupt end in 1995. In this year the young ambitious Qatari prince Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani seized power through a bloodless coup against his father; Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani (Cockburn, 1995). Several sources confirm that the new Emir wanted to change the slow-moving traditional policies of Qatar, and wanted to move towards a more modern and independent Qatar (Ayub, 2013; p. 3; Attachment, answer to q. 1). Saudi Arabia was opposed to the new policies of Qatar and according to a Stratfor aided two coup attempts against the Qatari Emir in the early 2000s (Stratfor, 2002), this in turn encouraged the Emir to continue its efforts to break away from Saudi influence.

One of the Emir's first steps towards a more modern Qatar was the creation of the Al Jazeera news network in 1996. Al Jazeera was the first Arab news network that was created in the image of other Western news networks such as CNN and BBC. Perhaps not very surprising as Al Jazeera was a continuation of BBC Arabic. This branch of the BBC was a cooperation between the BBC and Saudi Arabia. Due to a dispute about content that was not in line with Saudi Arabia's interests, the cooperation stopped and Qatar seized the opportunity to buy its publishing rights and hire its very experienced, western-educated and highly skilled journalists.

Studies from before the Arab Spring and the Gulf Crisis show that Al Jazeera is the most independent Arab news outlet, one with a reporting quality that equals other Western news outlets. These studies also show that Al-Jazeera acts

independently from its sponsor Qatar (Bahry, 2001; Lynch, 2006; Al-Nsairat, 2010; Al Jenaibi, 2010). However, more recent studies have found results that refute the findings of previous studies, by showing a clear connection between Qatari interests and Al-Jazeera's output and thereby exposing a certain pro-Qatari bias in Al-Jazeera's reporting (Samuel-Azran, 2013; Nasr, 2014). A study of Al Jazeera showed that the media outlet was very critical when it came to a wide variety of subjects, persons and events. However the main conclusion of the study was that Al Jazeera never criticized its own sponsor, Qatar (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003). Another studies shows that Al Jazeera Arabic is following the exact narrative as the Qatari Emir when it came to the turbulent relationship between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. However, this same study also showed that the English version of Al Jazeera remained relatively neutral in comparison to its Arabic counterpart (Samuel-Azran, 2013).

One thing is clear; the Qatari government has been the biggest sponsor of Al Jazeera since its establishment in 1996. Despite this fact, Qatar has always denied the accusation of having any influence on the content of Al Jazeera. The Qatari Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani provided Al Jazeera with 137 million US dollars in funding during the foundation of the news network. He repeatedly emphasized Al Jazeera's independence and classified the funding as a loan, not a grant. A 2003 report to the U.S. Congress about Al Jazeera shows that the Qatari Emir has repeatedly said that Al Jazeera would move towards total privatization by the year 2001 (Sharp, 2003). However this same report also shows that; Al Jazeera failed to cover its expenses by its incomes from other investments and advertisement. By 2001 only 35 to 40 percent of Al Jazeera's costs were covered by its incomes. Therefore the Emir of Qatar extended the initial loan of 137 million US dollar indefinitely (Sharp, 2003). The Emir even went a step further and according to *Forbes Magazine* (Helman, 2009), between 2001 and 2009 the Emir spend more than 1 billion US dollars on the English version of Al Jazeera. Besides that he spend amore than a 100 million US dollar per year on the Arabic branch of Al Jazeera to make up for its structural revenue deficit (Helman, 2009).

This raises the question; how is a small state with just 300.000 nationals and 2,6 million inhabitants capable of spending such great amounts of money on a news network? The answer is rather straightforward: Qatar is exceptionally rich in comparison to most other small states. The exception lays in the fact that Qatar has large amounts of fossil fuels, providing a large amount of income that has to be shared by a relative small amount of inhabitants. Qatar with its 2,6 million inhabitants had a GDP of 201 billion US dollars in 2019. In comparison, Qatar's GDP is more than double than that of Armenia, Albania, Jamaica and Lithuania combined, while each of these states have a similar amount of inhabitants as Qatar (Worldometer & Tradingeconomics). Due to their low GDP in comparison to that of Qatar, these similar sized states could not maintain such an expensive news network without it having visible negative effects on their state treasury.

This raises the question; why would Qatar invest such a great amount of money for more than two decades in a news network that is not profitable from a financial perspective, neither in the short term nor in the long term. This question can be answered by examining Al Jazeera's behaviour during the Arab Spring, as this was the moment that Al Jazeera truly showed its value and potential as an Qatari asset in international politics.

The Arab Spring (2010-2012)

In December 2010 the people of Tunisia took to the streets, chanting: "*Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam*" (The people want to bring down the regime). Within a two year period the chant could be heard on the streets of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and many other Middle Eastern states. This uprising, commonly know as the Arab Spring, was the result of decades of economic difficulties, political grievances, corruption and demographic changes. Most regimes in the Middle East had not expected that small local protests in Tunisia could have started a chain of events that would eventually shape the next decade of the Middle East's political reality. As most Middle Eastern regimes were still trying to make sense of the situation, it seemed as if this was the moment Qatar had

waited for. Qatar saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity to reshape the regional power structures in favour of its own ambitions (Schanzer, 2017).

While social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter have been credited with enabling the Arab spring to take place, the effect of these social media networks is often overestimated. In contrast, the effect of Al Jazeera on the Arab Spring has been underestimated. In 2010 Facebook and Twitter were not as commonly used in the Middle East as they are today. In many states where the protests took place, smart phones and internet were only available to a limited group of people from the middle-upper class. Libya and Yemen for example, have some of the lowest internet coverage in the world, however both states had some of the biggest protests that escalated into full-blown civil wars. Another issue with identifying social media as the main contributor to the Arab Spring is that a large amount of people from the lower class are illiterate and therefore not capable of using such platforms (Brown, Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). Meanwhile literacy, access to internet and high-tech phones are not needed to receive and understand the message of Al Jazeera. Furthermore, an article from the Brookings Institute states that since Al Jazeera is available through satellite, it could reach almost every corner of the Middle East and therefore regimes were struggling to find effective ways to block it (Telhami, 2013). Now the masses were able to see the crimes and corruption of their governments, as Al Jazeera provided them content that had always been blocked by the state owned television channels (Ismael & Ismael, 2013; p. 234). During the revolution in Libya for example, the only non-state owned news sources available for the Libyan population were Al Jazeera and Al Arabia (Owais, 2011; p. 13).

During the Arab Spring Al Jazeera was very supportive of the protests (Steinberg, 2012; Attachment, answer to q. 7), something that angered many of Qatar's Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, as the protest also threatened their autocratic regimes. At first it seems odd that Al Jazeera was supporting such a pro-democracy movement, while Qatar's government is an autocratic regime. However, Qatar seemed not to be concerned but acted pragmatic by taking the opportunity to change the political landscape

in the Middle East in its own favour. This was made possible due to Al Jazeera's reputation as a reliable and professional news outlet and Qatar's official policy to deny everything that suggests its influence over Al Jazeera. These two factors combined resulted in Al Jazeera's image as an independent and impartial news network. At the same time this image meant that Qatar could not be held accountable directly for Al Jazeera's critical content, even if this content undermined Qatar's allies. However, by looking at the parallel direction of Al Jazeera's content and Qatar's interests it is clear that the dichotomy between Qatar's and Al Jazeera is merely artificial.

The first obvious sign that Al Jazeera functioned as a tool to achieve Qatar's objectives, was its selective criticism and coverage during the Arab Spring. Al Jazeera extensively criticized governments that were also considered undesirable by Qatar. Simultaneously Al Jazeera also encouraged protesters in these states by increasing its content on corruption scandals and human right violations that were linked to these governments. Meanwhile Wiki-leaks cables claimed that Al Jazeera deliberately remained silent about the protests and killing of civilians in the then Qatari allied state of Bahrain (Booth, 2010). As the Arab Spring continued, it was time for the next step in Qatar's foreign policy. According to an article by Defence for Democracies that was published in Newsweek; the first step was the removal of the undesired regimes; the second step was installing regimes that were either dependant on or friendly to Qatar (Schanzer, 2017).

According to a 2011 article in the New York Times; one such group supported by Al Jazeera, and indirectly by Qatar, is the Muslim Brotherhood. An exiled spiritual leader named Al Qaradawi was allowed to stay in Qatar and Al Jazeera provided airtime that allowed him to convey his message and incite his followers to rise against the regime of Mu'ammar al-Gadaffi (Mekay, 2011). Interestingly this same article also notes that all the messages that Al Qaradawi was allowed to convey through Al Jazeera were the ones that were in line with Qatar's foreign policies. A report by Reuters shows that besides the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Al Jazeera also promoted a more positive image of Al Nusra in Syria and

warlords in Libya that were linked to Al Qaida (Perry & Al Khaledi, 2017). Al Jazeera's support for these groups mainly came in the form of re-branding and providing an outlet for their messages. An article from independent explains that re-branding these terrorist groups as moderate was necessary in order to remove them from US terror lists, which would in turn allow Qatar to directly fund them (Fisk, 2016). When asked about these terrorist groups' bad records, the Qatari Emir responded that he believed these groups to be political activist, which would eventually transition in peaceful democratic groups once the conflicts in Libya and Syria would be over (Freer, 2018). Re-branding also aimed at changing people's perception of these terrorist groups, in order to obtain more support and legitimacy for these groups. While Al Nusra and the Libyan warlords remained in the contest for power in the civil wars that followed the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood did succeed in obtaining power as one of their members, as Mohammed Morsi, was elected president of Egypt (Al Qassemi, 2012).

One important question remains unanswered; what are the limits of Qatar's approach of using Al Jazeera as an instrument to influence international outcomes. The answer can be found in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the current Gulf Crisis that started in 2017. During the Gulf Crisis, Qatar was forced to come to the foreground and therefore it could not hide behind the neutral image of Al Jazeera as it had done in the past two decades.

The Gulf Crisis (2017-2019)

In June 2017 rivalries between Qatar and the other members of the GCC reached a boiling point. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the UAE isolated Qatar by imposing an unprecedented embargo. Qatar was isolated by land, as Saudi Arabia closed Qatar's only land border. Meanwhile all the above-mentioned GCC members closed their airspace and imposed a sea blockade on Qatar (Verrasto & Alterman, 2017). According to a 2017 commentary by researchers at the CSIS; these actions mainly damaged Qatar's economy, as Qatar Airlines struggled to reach its customers, income from the export of fossil fuels declined and the price

of imported goods increased. On top of the already harsh measures against Qatar, the above-mentioned GCC member also expelled all Qatari nationals from their territory, regardless of whether they had family, property or businesses in these states (Verrasto & Alterman, 2017).

A report from Clingendael Institute states that the initial reasoning behind the extreme measures was that by applying enough pressure on the Qatari citizens, they would eventually rise up against Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani or that other Qatari officials would commit an internal coup (Meester et al., 2018; pp. 28-29). The negative impact on Qatar's economy, would also negatively impact Qatar's ability to influence events outside its borders. As time passed, the GCC members became aware that the measures did not have the desired effect as Qatar started to cooperate more closely with Turkey and Iran. In a desperate attempt to return to the power structure of before the 1995 coup, one in which Qatar had no independent foreign policy; the GCC member announced a list of demands.

The main demands were; that Qatar should cut off any ties with Iran, remove Turkish forces from its territory, adhere to previous demands and agreements set by Saudi Arabia, stop supporting 'terrorist' organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the dismantlement of the Al Jazeera news network (Verrasto & Alterman, 2017). The fact that Al Jazeera has made it to a list of 13 demands that includes Iran, the Turkish military and the Muslim Brotherhood, shows that Al Jazeera is considered a serious threat to the GCC members. This only confirms the power of Al Jazeera as a tool to influence events in the region and that its image has developed in the past two decades from a rather harmless news network to a serious tool of international politics. The fact that it is also considered as such is in stark contrast with its former image. In a report from 2003 to the US Congress about Al Jazeera, the news network was considered moderate and no threat to US foreign policy in the Middle East. The same report did consider other Arab media as a threat, despite the fact that Al Jazeera was the most critical news network when it came to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan (Sharp, 2003; p. 12). In the almost two decades that have passed the image of a

neutral and harmless Al Jazeera has clearly changed due to Al Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring, the anti-Qatar propaganda from Saudi and Egyptian news platforms and Al Jazeera's increasingly biased reporting when it comes to Iran and Turkey (Safira, 2013; Attachment, answer to q. 4).

It seems that Qatar's strategy since the 1995 coup has been one of remaining a neutral image when it comes to conflicts in the region. This was made possible by Qatar's neutral non-threatening image, which in turn was made possible through the use of nation-branding, active mediation and the use of Al Jazeera. However with an increase in regional polarization between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Qatar's aggressive policy during the Arab Spring, this image of a harmless small state was completely scattered. Before Qatar was able to use Al Jazeera in order to criticize the US military operations in the Middle East, and meanwhile remain friendly relations with the US by hosting the biggest US military base in the region (Telhami, 2017; Al Ansari, 2017). However in the current Gulf Crisis any duality between Qatar and Al Jazeera is completely disregarded, both are seen as pursuing one single agenda and therefore both are targeted by Qatar's rivals. The fact that both are targeted within the same context, also forces Qatar and Al Jazeera to defend each other, which could in turn damages their image as independent and neutral entities (Attachment, answer to q. 5).

The immediate effect of Al Jazeera's influence in the region was clear when looking at the Arab Spring. However, it remains a question whether Qatar was able to use Al Jazeera in order to obtain long-term gains. For now the future looks bleak, as Qatar has become more isolated due to the GCC blockade and its image as a neutral non-aggressive state damaged due to desperate actions to gain support from Iran (Bryant, 2014; Hiltermann, 2017; Attachment, answer to q. 4). Furthermore, nothing remains of Qatar's gains during the Arab Spring. Soon after the Muslim Brotherhood gained power in Egypt, Saudi Arabia funded the Egyptian military in their successful attempt to retake the power (Hearst, 2013). Meanwhile the warlords in Libya and Al Nusra in Syria have not gained any significant positions of power after almost a decade of fighting. Even though

long-term success of Al Jazeera is unclear, the network has shown remarkable achievements from a journalistic perspective and political perspective.

However, it seems that currently Qatar is mainly preoccupied with its own survival, as Al Jazeera has turned a blind eye to the human rights abuses by Iran and Turkey, while at the same time it has been praising controversial Iranian figures. Therefore it is safe to say that even in this situation, Al Jazeera remains Qatar's most valuable assets in international politics (Khatib, 2013; pp. 426-427), as it allows Qatar to improve relations with Iran and Turkey. One key asset that might prevent Qatar from completely being reliable on Turkey and Iran is the fact that the largest US airbase is situated in Qatar and therefore any direct attacks by GCC members will be prevented by the U.S. in the short-term (Al Ansari, 2017).

Conclusion

From the analysis it is clear that Qatar created Al Jazeera as part of a broader attempt to gain more independence from Saudi Arabia. In the first decade since its creation, Al Jazeera served as a platform for the Qatari government to express their thought about international events without being held accountable. The main purpose of Al Jazeera was mainly nation branding, as it sought to reshape the perception other states had on Qatar. In that sense it was very similar to how Russia Today started as a platform, aimed at re-branding the states image. Qatar had been successful in achieving this goal, as Al Jazeera became the most popular Arab news outlet, reaching millions of viewers in the region leaving its regional competitors far behind.

As expected, to a certain extent Al Jazeera was also used by Qatar as an instrument to influence international outcomes in its own favour. This became clear during the Arab Spring, when Al Jazeera used the opportunity to support regimes that were in favour of Qatar. By supporting those regimes, Qatar hoped to increase its influence in the region by creating new allies. This attempt was successful in the first years of the Arab Spring, as regime after regime fell and new pro-Qatari regimes, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt gained power. However, the effects of this success did not last long. Syria, Yemen and Libya turned into warzones in which the groups supported by Qatar failed to gain any significant power. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia supported the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Egypt and thereby reversed the biggest gain the Qatari's had made during the Arab Spring.

Qatar's main assets was its enormous wealth, as this enabled Qatar to finance its nation branding efforts such as Al Jazeera and to finance pro-Qatari groups in states such as Syria and Libya. However, Qatar remains a small state and therefore its capabilities remain limited when compared with a powerful country like Saudi Arabia. This was made clear when Saudi Arabia financed a coup against the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and thereby proved that Qatar was no match in a head to head confrontation. This shows that despite Qatar's attempts

to shape the region through the use of soft power, the lack of hard power backing it up mean that it was not able to preserve its gains.

Based on the constructivist literature it could have been expected that Qatar would be able to change its position within the region by altering perspectives through the use of Al Jazeera as a tool of nation branding. This constructivist perspective provides a satisfying explanation for the role of Qatar between the coup in 1995 and the Gulf Crisis in 2017. However, when looking at the broader picture, the realist view on small states provides a more convincing explanation for Qatar's current situation. Qatar started as a small state bandwagoning with the more powerful Saudi Arabia, and after a twenty-year period of experimenting with nation branding, it was forced in to the sphere of influence of other powerful states such as Turkey and Iran, something also visible in Al Jazeera's support for these states. Whether Qatar is completely bandwagoning with these powerful states, or whether it is merely an act of balancing against Saudi Arabia and the other GCC members, remains to be seen. One thing is clear; realism provides a more satisfying explanation for Qatar's security choices and the fact that it failed to secure the gains of nation branding and Al Jazeera due to a lack of hard power in comparison to its larger rivals.

These findings are relevant to the broader study of alternative mechanisms through which small states can influence international politics. Furthermore the findings of this research provide clear image of the potentials and limits for small states using news media platforms as a tool of soft power. Besides the theoretical relevance of these findings, the findings are also relevant in practice. Especially for small Gulf states such as Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE and Oman, as these might also decide at one point to gain more independence from Saudi Arabia. The UAE has its own international news outlet, Sky News Arabia, since 2012. For future research regarding the UAE's use of its Sky News Arabia, the findings of this research can be used as a starting point. And finally, I would encourage future researchers to research the role of Al Jazeera after the current Gulf Crisis (2017-2019), as it is unclear how Qatar and Al Jazeera will come out of this power struggle.

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Attachment (1/1):

Transcript of the interview with Rena Netjes:

Rena Netjes is currently researcher at Clingendael institute, researching the North East of Syria. She is an Arabist and former Egypt and Libya correspondent.

Question 1: Waarom heeft Qatar Al Jazeera opgericht?

Answer to question 1: Saoedi-Arabië domineert al decennialang de Golf region en behandelt kleine Golfstaten zoals Qatar als een soort provincie van Saoedi-Arabië. Qatar wilde zich losworstelen van de invloed van Saoedi-Arabië en heeft daarbij Al Jazeera opgericht, want Al Jazeera gaf de kleine staat Qatar een eigen stem. Dit was erg revolutionair voor die tijd aangezien de andere grote Arabische mediazenders uit bijvoorbeeld Egypte en Saoedi-Arabië een verlengstuk waren van de regimes van die staten. Al Jazeera was veel meer vrij en kritisch in vergelijking tot de andere Arabische nieuwszenders. Dit stoorde de Saoedi's en Emarati's enorm. Ze (Qatar) wilden zichzelf heel erg op de kaart zetten doormiddel van Al Jazeera. Qatar is maar een heel klein landje en ze kunnen niet zichzelf op de kaart zetten door bijvoorbeeld een groot landbouwproject te beginnen of iets dergelijks, dus was een media platform een ideaal alternatief. Dit (het zichzelf op de kaart zetten) is ze ook erg goed gelukt met Al Jazeera, vooral in de eerste jaren. In de afgelopen jaren is er wel steeds meer kritiek op Al Jazeera.

Question 2: Zijn de doel die Qatar had met de oprichting van Al Jazeera ook bereikt?

Answer to question 2: Er is de laatste tijd natuurlijk wel verandering in gekomen. Ik heb jaren lang Al Arabiya, Sky News Arabia en Al Jazeera gevolgd. Mijn eigen preferentie ging uit naar Al Arabiya maar ik volgde alle drie de zenders. Maar het Saoedi Al Arabiya en het Emirati Sky News Arabia zijn in de afgelopen jaren en vooral na dat MBS aan de macht kwam in Saoedi-Arabië

veranderd in Saoedi en Emirati propagandakanalen, die echt vrijwel alleen maar propaganda maken. Al Jazeera is ook pro-Qatar, maar ze hebben wel veel meer vrijheid en zijn veel meer objectief dan de andere twee. Ik ken persoonlijk journalisten van Sky News, Al Arabiya en Al Jazeera en ik zie dat de journalisten van Al Jazeera heel professioneel zijn en ook veel kennis hebben van het werk dat ze doen. Ik denk dat Al Jazeera en sommige andere Arabische zenders op veel punten veel professioneler en kritischer zijn dan bijvoorbeeld Nederlandse media, ook doen ze veel meer hun best. Die vraag komt vast nog wel maar de laatste tijden is Al Jazeera wel geswitched, na die blokkade (de 2017 Golf Crisis) is Al Jazeera veel positiever en minder kritisch richting Turkije en Iraan, terwijl dit eerst niet zo was. Maar als je die bias weet en die er uitfiltert, dan kun je wel zien dat Al Jazeera, op deze twee landen na, heel kritisch is als het gaat om de schending van mensenrechten in het Midden-Oosten. Al Jazeera doet als enige verslag van de situatie in veel van deze Midden-Oosterse landen terwijl Al Arabiya en Sky News Arabia dit niet doen. Dus als je echt wilt weten wat er aan de hand is in die landen dan is Al Jazeera meestal de een hele goede plek om te kijken. Je hebt bijvoorbeeld ook hele goede Arabische nieuwszenders zo als bijvoorbeeld Suriya Tv, maar die zijn voornamelijk gefocust op Syrië, terwijl Al Jazeera elke dag weer van veel verschillende landen nieuws naar buiten brengt waardoor het ook kijkers uit veel verschillende delen van de regio en van de wereld trekt. Want Al Jazeera pakt de ene avond de situatie in Egypte, dan weer Syrië en dan weer Marokko, waardoor je een veel completer beeld krijgt van de Arabische wereld.

Question 3: Is er een onderscheid tussen Al Jazeera en de andere internationale Arabische nieuwszenders zoals Al Arabiya en Sky News Arabia? Zo ja, wat onderscheid Al Jazeera van de rest?

Answer to Question 3: Het Arabische media landschap is de afgelopen jaren erg veranderd. Hier in Istanbul heb je ook veel nieuwe oppositie stations, als je kijkt naar Syrië. Oriënt uit Dubai was er al sinds 2008 en die hebben nu ook een studio in Istanbul, maar ze zitten nog wel grotendeels in Dubai, het is wel opvallend dat dat kan. Suriya Tv bestaat pas sinds een paar jaar en je hebt ook een aantal

Egyptische oppositie partijen die hier zijn gevestigd, één van een Moslimbroeder, eentje zit er tussen in en nog een grote liberale zender genaamd Al Sharq Tv, van Ayman Nour. Ook zijn er een paar Libische zenders en een paar Iraakse zenders, allemaal gevluchte oppositie die in Istanbul zitten. Tussen Al Jazeera en de twee grootste concurrenten; het Emirati Sky News Arabia en het Saoedische Al Arabiya, die alle drie tientallen miljoenen views hebben in het Midden-Oosten is het verschil met de laatste twee dat ze de afgelopen jaren echt door het ijs zijn gezakt. Al Arabiya heeft nu al een paar jaar twee keer per dag een uur lang een programma waar in ze alleen maar aan het benoemen zijn wat er allemaal verschrikkelijk is aan Sjiïeten. Dus alles wat slecht is aan Sjiïeten wordt bij elkaar geharkt. Je kunt tegen Iran zijn, maar in dergelijke programma's wordt er een beeld gecreëerd alsof Iran verschrikkelijk is terwijl Saoedi-Arabië altijd helemaal goed is, het is compleet uit balans. Alles wat Sjiïtisch is wordt in dergelijke programma's als slecht gezien en het enige dat ze doen is haten op de Sjiïeten. Een ander voorbeeld is dat ze bij Al Arabiya de slogan van "de mensen willen het regime neerhalen", "*Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam*", de slogan van de Arabische Lente, die hebben ze bij Al Arabiya veranderd. Je hoort eerst "the people want" in het Arabisch en vervolgens hebben ze het zo gemonteerd alsof de mensen op het Egyptische Tahrir Plein iets roepen dat het Saoedische regime past. Dit sort onprofessionele, bijna kinderachtige acties, zorgen er voor dat Al Arabiya en Sky News Arabia bijna niet meer serieus te nemen zijn.

Question 4: Is er een verschil in retoriek tussen Al Jazeera English en Al Jazeera Arabic?

Answer to question 4: Bij Al Jazeera English zijn de scherpe kantjes er van af gehaald en is de kwaliteit iets beter. Bij Arabisch heb je soms programma's die raar zouden zijn voor een Westers publiek. Zo was er laats bijvoorbeeld een hele lofzang voor Soleimani (Qasem Soleimani, de Iraanse generaal die begin 2020 in Irak werd vermoord doormiddel van Amerikaanse drones), dit is heel raar want een groot deel van hun (Al Jazeera's) publiek komt uit Syrië en Irak en die hadden juist heel veel last van Soleimani. Het is daarom heel raar dat Al Jazeera die keuze heeft gemaakt en daar hebben ze dan ook veel kritiek op gekregen van

andere Arabische nieuwszender in deze landen. Je hebt soms van die *mishaps* in Al Jazeera Arabic die je bij Al Jazeera English nooit zou zien. Uit dit soort steun voor Iran blijkt wel dat ze Iran blijkbaar nodig hebben om te overleven tijdens deze GCC crisis. Dit komt voornamelijk omdat het een situatie van leven of dood is, Saudi-Arabië reed in 2011 ook Bahrein binnen en Qatar weet dat als ze niet beschermd worden door Turkije en Iran, dat ze dan ook binnengevallen kunnen worden door Saudi-Arabië. Ook de VS gaat mee in de retoriek van Saoedi-Arabië en Egypte, aangezien zelfs Trump zei dat Qatar de echte terroristen zijn. Dit is eigenlijk gewoon het herhalen van wat er in Saoedische en Egyptische media wordt gezegd, de Egyptische media is overigens nog erger als het aan komt op kwaliteit van journalistiek. Vergeleken met Egyptische nieuwsmedia is zelf Al Arabiya nog gematigd. In de Egyptische nieuwszenders wordt er zelfs beweerd dat de broer van Obama bij Al-Qaeda zit en dat Hillary Clinton eigenlijk een Moslimbroeder is en zo gaat het maar door. Ik hoop dat ik je vraag heb beantwoord, want ik moet eerlijk zeggen; Arabieren die discussiëren ook wel hard, veel harder dan dat we hier gewend zijn en daardoor kan het soms ook wel hard aankomen voor Westerse kijkers terwijl het onder Arabieren erg normaal is om een harde discussie te hebben zonder dat dit meteen als agressief of beledigend wordt gezien. Waar ik wel voor wil pleiten voor Al Jazeera, is dat ze wel vaak Israëliische militairen in de uitzending hebben. Dit terwijl ze wel heel erg tegen de bezetting zijn, dit laat zien dat ze ondanks hun bias wel vaak proberen om de andere partij het woord te geven. Ook hebben ze veel Christelijke correspondenten en geven ze ook aandacht aan de Christenen in de regio, dus Al Jazeera heeft zeker veel pluspunten die je niet terug ziet bij andere nieuwszenders. Ik denk dat Al Jazeera in dat opzicht zelf beter is dan de Nederlandse media, aangezien ik nog nooit dat soort interviews in Nederlandse nieuwsuitzendingen zie.

Question 5: Hoe betrouwbaar/neutraal wordt Al Jazeera gezien door haar publiek in het Midden-Oosten? En is dit veranderd in de afgelopen 20 jaar?

Answer to question 5: Al Jazeera is de laatste tijd minder neutraal geworden, vooral in vergelijking met bijvoorbeeld Syrische oppositie nieuwszenders die

wel kritiek hebben op hun eigen oppositie en op Turkije terwijl Al Jazeera bijna nooit kritiek heeft op Qatar en als het wel ooit kritiek heeft dan is het heel minimaal. Op Al Arabiya zul je nooit kritiek horen op Saoedi-Arabië, dus er zit zeker wel een gradatie tussen deze verschillende zenders. Al Jazeera is vooral sinds de blokkade (2017 Golf Crisis) steeds minder objectief. Dit was duidelijk te zien tijdens de recente protesten in Iran, toen was Al Jazeera erg stil, terwijl ze ondertussen wel andere landen bekritisieren als het aan komt op mensenrechten. Ze waren tijdens deze protesten duidelijk tegen de demonstranten die om meer mensenrechten vragen, terwijl ze deze normaal altijd steunden. Dus hier valt ook Al Jazeera door de mand. Er zijn ook een grote groep mensen in het Midden-Oosten die echt een hekel hebben aan Al Jazeera, vooral omdat dit soort *mishaps* vaak niet snel worden vergeven. Dit is voor jou vast ook wel bekend maar dit is duidelijk te zien bij de Emirati's, dat sommige mensen zo een verschrikkelijke hekel hebben aan de Moslimbroeders dat ze automatisch iedereen die hun interviewt of inhuurt als werknemer, meteen om zeep willen helpen. Terwijl als je naar Al Jazeera kijkt, dan zijn er veel Moslimbroeders, maar ook andere groepen zo als de Liberalen komen ook aan het woord, en omdat iedereen aan het woord komt is het erg scheef dat ze zo erg worden afgerekend op het feit dat ze ook Moslimbroeders een platform geven.

Question 6: Hoe verklaart u het feit dat Al Jazeera over het algemeen erg kritisch is tegenover het Amerikaanse buitenlandsbeleid in het Midden-Oosten, terwijl Qatar wel gelegenheid biedt aan de grootse Amerikaanse luchtmachtbasis in de region?

Answer to question 6: Ook hier heeft Al Jazeera een ruime benadering. Ze hebben bijvoorbeeld een programma dat vanuit Washington wordt uitgezonden en waar vrijwel alle correspondenten ook Amerikanen zijn. Ze discussiëren op het scherpst van de snede tijdens met hun gasten, maar ze blijven vaak wel heel fair. Dit soort programma's bieden de kijkers ook vaak meer informatie dan dat je via Nederlandse nieuwszenders, juist door de felle discussies krijgen kijkers beide perspectieven te horen. Ondanks dat Al Jazeera genoeg kritiek heeft op het beleid van de VS, voornamelijk de Irak oorlog, toch maakt de zender duidelijk dat

het grootste probleem de Arabische dictators zijn en niet de Amerikanen. Veel andere Arabische mediazenders laten het zo lijken dat IS bestaat door de Amerikanen Irak zijn binnengevallen, terwijl Al Jazeera laat zien dat het veel ingewikkelder is. Ze hebben wel kritiek op het beleid van de VS, maar ze laten ook duidelijk de onderliggende fouten zien in bepaalde beslissingen, de manier waar op er om wordt gegaan met de lokale bevolking en mismanagement in de nieuwe regimes die door de Amerikanen worden gesteund en dus geven ze een veel beter onderbouwde kritiek die ook zeker niet onterecht is.

Question 7: Wat was de rol van Al Jazeera in de Arabische Lente en in de conflicten die hier op volgden?

Answer to question 7: Al Jazeera is zeker niet de oorzaak geweest voor de Arabische Lente, aangezien niemand had verwacht dat er op zo een grote schaal geprotesteerd zou worden en de verre gaande gevolgen die deze opstanden zouden hebben. Maar zes weken voor de opstanden in Egypte was ik daar met een college van mij en we hebben een artikel geschreven waar in we al zeiden dat het niet goed ging in Egypte door allerlei misstanden binnen de overhead en verkiezingsfraude, alleen we hadden nooit verwacht dat er uiteindelijk zulke grootschalige protesten zouden komen. Er waren wel veel indicatoren, maar niemand had dit verwacht. Dus Al Jazeera heeft het ook niet veroorzaakt maar AL Jazeera heeft het zeker wel geholpen toen de protesten eenmaal begonnen. Want bijvoorbeeld op het Tahrir Plein stonden allemaal bordjes met “heb je foto’s of video’s, stuur ze dan naar Al Jazeera” en Al Jazeera liet ook veel van die videomaterialen zien. Toen mijn NOS collega’s op 29 december 2010 naar Egypte kwamen, toen was er overal op de Egyptische regimemedia te zien dat het zou gaan om Hezbollah leden die protesteerden en niet de Egyptenaren zelf. Ondertussen kwam Al Jazeera wel met het echte nieuws. Op 25 januari 2010 wist ik dat ze gingen protesteren en ik had een Koptische actievoerde geïnterviewd en die zei we gaan proberen te protesteren, in Tunesië was het al in volle gang. Samir Omar van Al Jazeera die stond op die dag vroeg in de ochtend klaar op het Tahrir Plein en hij zei; “Ik zie hier niemand, dus er gaat waarschijnlijk niets gebeuren.”, en ik heb die dag ook mijn lunch met collega’s niet afgezegd

aangezien we er allemaal van uit gingen dat er niets zou gebeuren. Pas in de avond kwamen we er achter dat er opeens een grote groep mensen was komen opdagen. Al Jazeera wist toen dus ook niet of er iets ging gebeuren, want ze gaven ook in de ochtend aan dat er niets aan de hand was. Dit laat zien dat Al Jazeera zeker niet achter de protesten zat, zoals door sommige media wordt beweerd, aangezien zij zelf ook niet precies wisten wat er aan de hand was. Dus Al Jazeera faciliteerde de protesten door de stem van de mensen naar buiten te brengen, maar ze hebben de protesten zeker niet gestart. Terwijl Al Jazeera deze mensen een stem gaf, probeerde de regimes in Egypte, Tunesië en Libië deze stemmen te onderdrukken en de toestand zo te framen dat het zou lijken als of de mensen die in opstand kwamen een kleine groep criminelen waren. Naast dat ze mensen een stem gaven, zorgde Al Jazeera er ook voor dat de misdaden van de regimes naar buiten kwamen en dat anderen in andere landen ook de verhalen zagen waardoor ze geïnspireerd werden en zich gesteund voelden. Vooral in Egypte keken de meeste mensen naar Al Jazeera, terwijl mensen in Libië ook bijvoorbeeld naar BBC Arabic keken. Dit was ook de reden dat op een gegeven moment Al Jazeera in Egypte werd gesloten. Maar dat was geen slimme zet want toen wisten de mensen zeker dat het regime iets te verbergen had. Alles bij elkaar was Al Jazeera een verbinder, die er voor zorgde dat al die mensen uit die verschillende landen zo als Yemen, Syrië, Egypte en zo voort zich verbonden voelden en ook elkaars verhalen hoorden. Ik durf verder geen harde uitspraken te doen over de rol van Al Jazeera in de conflicten in Yemen en Libië aangezien ik toen nog erg bezig was met de toestand in Egypte en ik heb die landen niet verder onderzocht.

Question 8: Hoe verklaart u de directe aanval op Al Jazeera door de andere GCC leden tijdens de 2017 Golf Crisis? En waarom verbieden/blokkeren deze regimes Al Jazeera binnen hun staat?

Answer to question 8: Dit hebben ze gedaan juist omdat Al Jazeera de Saoedi's en Emirati's een doorn in het oog is. Al Jazeera blijft die toestand met Khashoggi herhalen, ze blijven mensenrechtenschendingen in de Emiraten aankaarten en ook blijven ze kritisch nieuws uitbrengen over de Saoedische oorlog in Yemen.

Dit soort nieuws zie je niet op de andere internationale zender als Al Arabiya en Sky News Arabia en daarom willen ze Al Jazeera sluiten, zo simpel is het. Dus ondanks alle biases en alle mishaps will ik Al Jazeera wel die credits geven, want zij zijn de enige die die dingen aankaarten. Ik weet wat er in Saoedi-Arabië en de Emiraten gaande is dankzij Al Jazeera. Zo schrik ik soms als ik hoor hoe positief sommige mensen zijn over de Emiraten, maar dit komt door dat ze alles weten te verbergen. Ik heb veel Emirati *disidents* geïnterviewd en die geven ook aan dat ze ondertussen heel veel mensenrechten schenden. Zo zien we hoe ze mensen gevangenen laten martelen in Yemen en hoe ze hun eigen dictators aan de macht willen brengen zoals nu Khalifa Haftar in Libië. Maar sinds de blokkade zien we dat Al Jazeera ook steeds meer biased is geworden, vooral omdat ze mild zijn als het om Turkije gaat en Iran. Maar dat heb je ook in Nederland, want ook in Nederland is het nieuws niet gebalanceerd want hier wordt alles wat Erdogan doet ook als slecht gezien. En het is ook erg wat de Turken doen als het gaat om journalisten oppakken en de militaire inval in Afrin, maar de Turkse acties in Idlib hebben heel veel mensenlevens gered en hebben een tweede vluchtelingen crisis voor Europa tegengehouden en daar hoor je de Nederlandse media niet over. Al Jazeera heeft veel minpunten, maar als geheel is het veel beter dan de meeste nieuwskanalen en daarom is het onterecht dat Al Jazeera de laatste tijden alleen maar negatief in het nieuws is terwijl ze ook heel veel goede punten hebben ondanks hun bias in sommige onderwerpen.