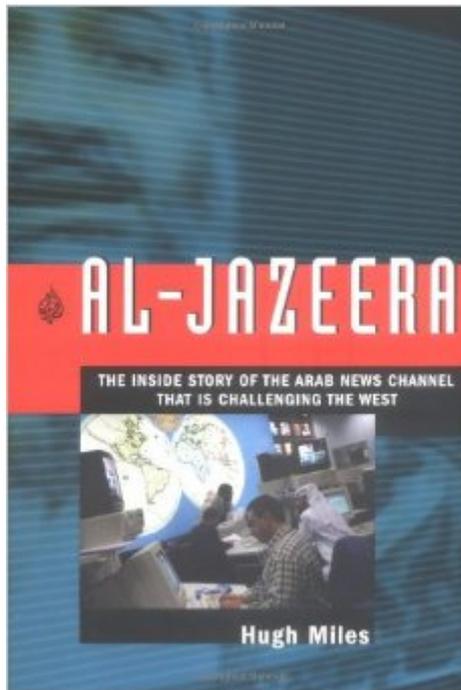


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Al Jazeera: The Inside Story Of The Arab News Channel That Is Challenging The West



Synopsis

With more than fifty million viewers, Al Jazeera is one of the most widely watched news channels in the world. And it's also one of the most controversial. Set up by the maverick Emir of Qatar, Al Jazeera ("the island") quickly became a household name after September 11 by delivering some of the biggest scoops in television history, including a notorious string of taped speeches from Osama bin Laden. Lambasted as a mouthpiece for Al Qaeda, little is actually known about Al Jazeera and its operations. Its journalists have been accused of spying for everyone from Mossad to Saddam Hussein, sometimes simultaneously, and a star Al Jazeera reporter has been accused of being an active member and recruiter for a Spanish-based Al Qaeda cell. Al Jazeera now has plans to launch an English version of its controversial satellite news channel in the first half of 2005. This time it is aimed not just toward Arabs and Muslims, but Americans as well. Journalist Hugh Miles speculates on the potentially dramatic effects of the network's new station on the Western world while uncovering the true story behind one of the most influential media outlets.

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Customer Reviews

A TV channel that offends EVERYBODY must be doing something right. Since its quiet appearance in 1996, Al-Jazeera has continuously added viewers. It wasn't long before TVs in Europe and North America were tuning in to the one station that seemed to speak with a plausible Arab voice. What immediately distinguished this from other Arabic news and discussion programmes was its willingness to broadcast everybody's views. Although funded by the Emir of Qatar, Al-Jazeera was

not a voice of its host government. It kept its news strictly factual and offered air time to voices dissenting from government policies. Anything going on in the Arab world was discussed. Consequently, many contrasting views were aired, some of which criticised various governments in the region. But opinions and news were, and are, kept separate. Discovering the phenomenon of Al-Jazeera had been discussed but had never been given an overview, Hugh Miles set out to rectify that lack. This son of a diplomat had solid credentials for researching the history of the new news channel. Fluent in Arabic, Miles was able to talk to station management, reporters and viewers in various places. His summation is an excellent example of investigative reporting, well presented. By the time Miles began his project, the subject had already undergone both amazing growth and intemperate vilification. He explains how Arab governments find Al-Jazeera a fomenter of sedition and rebellion. Some see it as a tool of the Israeli government seeking to destabilise Arab rulers, while others are certain it's an arm of the CIA. Americans, especially the Bush regime, view it as a mouthpiece for terrorist societies and probably anti-Israel.

Having been born in Qatar where my father worked for 25 years I am astonished by the emergence of Al-Jazeera and Hugh Miles' account of it. I do not feel that he is a cheer leader for Al Jazeera but objective. CNN's success is not through its quality of news, personnel, or perspective, but due to its ability to market itself and garner huge advertisers into its fold and to make strategic business alliances. Al-jazeera's success is the opposite. It is financially disastrous, yet its news is trusted by more viewers in the middle east than any other news organization. Miles correctly points out that almost every country in the region has had its dirty laundry examined by Al-jazeera and in return has put pressure on Hamid Al -Thani to close down the organization or modify it. As has the US and Britain. Both nations have tried to dismiss Al-Jazeera as a mouth piece for Bin Laden. But I would argue that without Al Jazeera the other side of the coin would never see the light of day. CNN dutifully acts as a Washington steno-grapher and the BBC in its quest for ratings has also dumbed its news down and been very conservative, yet to its credit it has challenged the government on the legitimacy of the war and became embroiled in a battle with the government over its "sexing" up of the weapons of mass destruction. But both organizations have been left looking like "also ran's" by Al Jazeera which has shown the realities of war, the impact upon the civilians and the propaganda and misconduct propagated by the allies. So powerful was their news that the Bush administration arrogantly decided that the truth had to be obliterated and for the second time an Al-Jazeera bureau was struck by a US missile and a journalist was murdered.

For those fortunate enough to have seen Jehane Noujaim's fascinating 2004 documentary, "Control Room", Saudi-born British journalist Hugh Miles provides an intriguing if sometimes biased complement that delves deeper into the history of the renowned Arab news channel and its rise to global prominence. Launched just a decade ago in late 1996, the station has never turned a profit and continues to be subsidized by the Qatari government. Yet, the author shows that many Arabs seem indifferent to this fact and do not view al-Jazeera as a biased news source for the current regime. In fact, Miles shows how the station displays more objectivity than many of its American counterparts such as the Fox News Network. Miles shares this perspective with vigor throughout the book and describes an organization that elicits opposing viewpoints to their coverage. There is a great deal of credence to Miles' opinion as he shows how the station went to great lengths to cultivate intractable relationships with the Taliban and the Bin Laden organizations. This strategy turned out to be invaluable after 9/11 when al-Jazeera was the only one able to provide taped communiqués from Bin Laden and conduct a clandestine interview with two planners of the 9/11 attacks in Karachi in 2002. Miles also shows how critical al-Jazeera's role was in reporting the start of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000 and the U.S. response to 9/11 with the Afghani invasion where the station has the only bureau in Kabul. After initially expressing condemnation, the Western media giants have begrudgingly embraced the intelligence uncovered by al-Jazeera in central Iraq where embedded journalists have otherwise faced escalating degrees of risk.

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