



Al Jazeera Editorial Board

Committee Overview

Al Jazeera Media Network is an independent news organization funded in part by the Qatari government. It has expanded over the years to include 70 bureaus across the world in several languages and tackling every aspect of international news. It has been commended for its comprehensive video coverage of conflicts across the middle east and has received a slew of international awards, including a Webby award, responsible media of the year award, and scoop of the year Walkley award. However, the network has not been without criticism, with many saying that even though the network is nominally independent, it still takes a pro-Qatar bias in some of its reporting. Regardless, Al Jazeera has become the most prominent network for many arab news readers and readers worldwide and has successfully fought the “west to the rest” format where previously many arab citizens’ only access to media was from the BBC or other European and American media outlets. As part of this board, you will play a pivotal role in expanding Al Jazeera’s reach and legitimacy, spreading good news across multiple mediums and platforms.

State of the World

The current state of the world is one of turmoil and constant upheaval. The crisis in Ukraine has spiraled into a full-scale energy crisis that affects countries around the globe. China and the US continue their soft-power escalation of tensions and climate change continues to bring unprecedented challenges to the international community. Members of the Al Jazeera board interested in fulfilling their due diligence on broader topics facing the United Nations should refer to their State of the World brief for material related to the overarching themes and conflicts.

Topic A: Protecting Al-Jazeera's independence and breadth of coverage in light of the situation in Iran

Executive Summary

Since its inception, Al Jazeera has carried itself as a professional and independent news network, expanding across the globe under the view that presenting all opinions in a fair and realistic manner was the way to achieve prestige and credibility. However, due to the funding and support received by the Qatari government, this independence is at risk. Government pressure has grown as the situation in Iran tumbles into greater instability. As Qatar and Iran grow closer, and as Iran seeks to control the narrative of the ongoing protests, the pressure continues to grow on the Al Jazeera board. The reaction to such pressure will determine the way Al Jazeera operates in the future and will determine not only the company's independence, but also the trustworthiness and depth of its coverage.

Historical Background

Qatar has always hewed a closer relationship with Iran than many of its neighbors. Iran was one of the first countries to recognize Qatar's independence¹. In 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE led an economic blockade of Qatar that sought to reduce diplomatic relations with Iran and to close Al Jazeera, among other demands. They claimed that Qatar's close relationship with Iran had funded terrorist activity in the region. In that respect, the blockade backfired on the Saudi-led coalition. Iran responded to the blockade by airlifting food and other supplies to the beleaguered Qataris, only deepening the relationship between the two countries.

In September 2022, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini was arrested by the Irani Guidance Patrol for violating Iran's mandatory Hijab law. She would be taken to a re-education center, where she received a fatal head injury. Since then, Iran has been engulfed in a protest movement that has expanded to include every region of the country, threatening the stability of Ayatollah Khamenei's current regime.

The protests formed in response to what protesters see as Mahsa Amini's death at the hands of the Guidance Patrol, or morality officers, but protesters have used the social movement as a way to air many demands. These demands range from abolishing the morality police, loosening the strict Hijab laws, providing economic opportunity, fighting soaring prices and corruption, and even calling for "death to Khamenei."

Current Situation

Providing accurate reporting of the Iran protest situation has become much more complex over the past few months. Globally, Iran has ranked the third-worst country for press freedom according to Reporters without Borders. The close ties between the Ayatollah Khamenei

¹ [Qatar-Iran Relations](#)

administration and the Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani administration has not extended to a friendly attitude towards Al-Jazeera journalists. Quite the opposite, even before the protests created a backlash of press freedoms, Iran has always preferred to funnel attention and preferential treatment to their own state news outlet: the Islamic Republic News (IRNA). Now the situation is even more fraught. Al Jazeera journalists are being denied press credentials, detained and asked questions while trying to cover protests, and even threatened and harassed by both state and private actors. At least 46 members of the press have been arrested since the protests started, with at least 6 of those comprising Al Jazeera staff. Two of those journalists arrested have been charged with espionage by the Iranian government, a crime that has severe punishments up to execution².

To make things even more complicated, Al Jazeera has faced some pressure from the highest levels of the Qatari administration to push the pro-Iranian government view of the protest movement, from prioritizing footage of destruction caused by the protests to publishing and prioritizing quotes from Iranian government officials, every article has undergone persistent and troubling oversight. Al Jazeera is still nominally independent, and our unique financial structure means that we are dependent on grants and news revenue rather than direct state funds. This means that we will continue to listen to our internal editorial board rather than government voices, but it does not make us immune to soft pressure. This group will have to decide how to continue publishing the most in-depth, accurate, and independent news viewpoint in the middle east while avoiding enmity and hostility from the movers and shakers within the administration.

Key Terms:

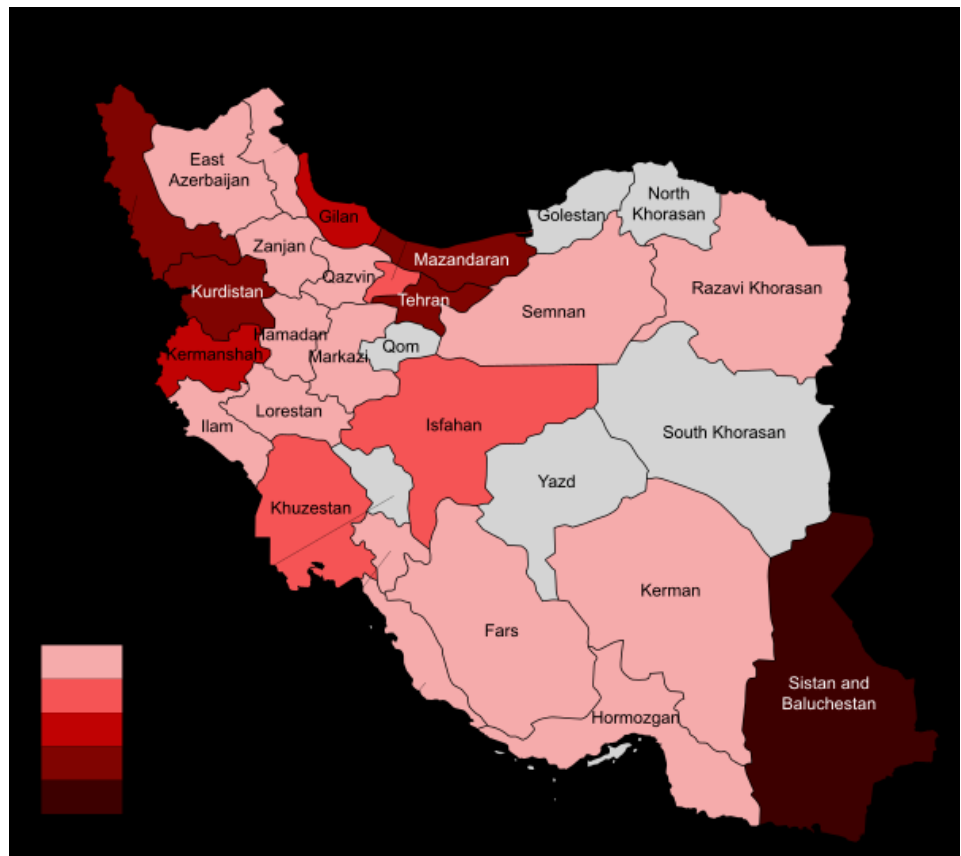
- Al Jazeera
- State-Owned Media Organizations
- Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)
- Ayatollah Khamenei
- Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani
- Editorial Independence
- 2017 Qatar Economic Blockade

Additional Resources:

- Iran says more than 200 killed in country's continuing unrest
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/3/iran-says-over-200-killed-in-countrys-ongoing-unrest>
- Iran rejects UN investigation into protests
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/28/iran-rejects-un-investigation-into-protests>

² [Weary of crackdown, Iran's regime takes on citizen journalists - ABC News](#)

- US slaps sanctions on Iranian media members
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/16/us-slaps-sanctions-on-iranian-media-members>
- Not Afraid Anymore - Iran protests enter fourth week -
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/8/not-afraid-anymore-clashes-as-iran-protests-enter-fourth-week>
- Qatar's crackdown on critic of Iran regime in the spotlight - analysis
<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-723633>



³ [Iran Human Rights](#)

Topic B: Charting the future of Al-Jazeera's International Efforts

Executive Summary

Al Jazeera has grown by leaps and bounds. At our inception, we were laser-focused on providing the best possible news for our audience in the Middle East. Yet, even though we've grown to become a successful news broadcaster with an international presence and high standards of professionalism, a slew of problems have developed alongside our path to deliver captivating content to the world which informs, inspires and entertains through our talented, creative and spirited people.

If Al Jazeera is to thrive in the evolving media landscape — marked by new business models, modern platforms, a more dangerous world and a fickle audience — a fresh roadmap that takes all threats and opportunities into account must be charted. Ensuring the continued success of Al Jazeera will allow us to present the opinion and the other opinion for years to come.

Historical Background

When considering Al Jazeera's background, there are three paramount elements regarding our international presence: The network's image, its operations, and the security of our staffers.

Despite our status as a private foundation, Al Jazeera's image is closely linked to that of the Qatari government due to its financial support. During the 2017 Saudi-led coalition that set up a blockade around Qatar, one of the coalition's demands was the closure of Al Jazeera. As alarming as this is, for this bloc included not only Saudi Arabia, but also the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain, our reputation is damaged beyond the Arab World. In the same year, Israel called for our Jerusalem branch to be closed under the claims that Al Jazeera sponsored terrorism.⁴ Across the Atlantic, a slew of US lawmakers have claimed that Al Jazeera is nothing but a speakerphone for the Emir of the State of Qatar⁵. One particular lawmaker pushed to use the Federal Communications Commission to limit the reach of Al Jazeera within the US. Fortunately, this effort fizzled out, but the trend is clear. Beyond Qatar, our reputation is stained by twisted, biased perceptions.

Al Jazeera's image is not the only front in which the agency is under threat. Despite ambitions, our operations have not proven to be as effective and profitable as desired. After years of ambitious expansions, the network has shrunk some of its global operations. It has laid off hundreds of employees in recent years, downsizing to about 4,000 staffers. In addition, the network in 2016 pulled the plug on its Al Jazeera America channel less than three years after its launch, failing to compete with US cable news broadcasters.

⁴ [Q&A: Why some countries are trying to muzzle Al-Jazeera | AP News](#)

⁵ [The mask drops at Al Jazeera | Washington Examiner](#)

If Al Jazeera, then, wishes to grow and compete with the heavyweights of the news coverage world, we must first guarantee the security of our staffers. As news hotspots sprout across the world, Al Jazeera staffers have been caught in the crossfire while attempting to break the news. For example, in 2021, Sudan briefly arrested Al Jazeera bureau chief El Kabbashi while covering anti-military protests.⁶ Moreover, in 2022, Israeli forces shot and killed Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh,⁷ a Palestinian-American on-air correspondent that was shot in the head while covering an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank on May 11. Despite independent investigators, including the Associated Press⁸, indicating that the attack came from an Israeli soldier, Tel Aviv has characterized the murder as a mistake caused by Palestinian militants engaging with Israeli troops. Adding insult to the tragedy, on the very next day, an Israeli airstrike demolished a high-rise building housing the offices of the AP and Al Jazeera after issuing evacuation warnings⁹. Despite a lack of evidence, and again owed to a biased view of our reputation, the Israeli government claimed the action was justified because the building housed Hamas military infrastructure.

Current Situation

Al-Jazeera is in many ways an enviable global force of news. The whirlwind of criticism from the other middle eastern countries that started in 2017 has quieted down to a murmur of discontent, mainly from Saudi Arabia and UAE voices. The criticism leveled against us by Western lawmakers continues but has not resulted in concrete action. Competing newspapers, like IRNA and Arab News, continue to lag our readership.

All is not well however, despite our expansion and investment into other countries' media markets, viewership has stagnated and a handful of embarrassing venture failures have raised the question of if Al Jazeera can do well outside the Middle East. The far-right government in Israel has renewed the question of curtailing access for our journalists and the incident of the reporter shooting in 2020 has renewed doubts about the safety of our international correspondents. The Qatari government has pushed to have more say in our framing of major events, particularly those related to Qatar. Even though our system of relying on grants gives us some editorial independence, recent actions have chipped away at that independence and many reporters have expressed major concerns over this direction for the news agency.

Key Terms

- Al Jazeera
- State-Owned Media Organizations
- Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)
- Editorial Independence

⁶ [Al-Jazeera says Sudan releases bureau chief | AP News](#)

⁷ [UN: Israelis fired shots that killed journalist Shireen Abu Akleh | News | Al Jazeera](#)

⁸ [Review suggests Israeli fire killed reporter, no final word | AP News](#)

⁹ ['Shocking and horrifying': Israel destroys AP office in Gaza | AP News](#)

- 2017 Qatar Economic Blockade
- Federal Communications Commission
- Hamas

Additional Resources

- Al Jazeera Our Journey - <https://network.aljazeera.net/en/our-journey>
- The countries closing ranks on Al Jazeera - <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/the-countries-closing-ranks-on-al-jazeera/536061/>