

UNRAVELLING MEDIA SCANDAL: Al Jazeera exodus: Channel losing staff over ‘bias’

By [Global Research](#)

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Key staff from Al Jazeera’s Beirut Bureau have resigned citing “bias” in the channel’s stance on the conflict in Syria.

Bureau Managing Director Hassan Shaaban reportedly quit last week, after his correspondent and producer had walked out in protest.

A source told the Lebanese paper Al Akhbar that Al Jazeera’s Beirut correspondent Ali Hashem had quit over the channel’s stance on covering events in Syria. “... *his position [which] changed after the station refused to show photos he had taken of armed fighters clashing with the Syrian Army in Wadi Khaled. Instead [Al Jazeera] lambasted him as a shabeeh [implying a regime loyalist],*” a source told Lebanese press.

Ali Hashem was also infuriated by Al Jazeera’s refusal to cover a crackdown by the King of Bahrain while twisting its Syria angle. “*[In Bahrain], we were seeing pictures of a people being butchered by the ‘Gulf’s oppression machine’, and for Al Jazeera, silence was the name of the game,*” he said.

The Beirut bureau’s producer also quit claiming Al Jazeera had totally ignored Syria’s constitutional reform referendum, which saw a 57% turnout with 90% voting for change.

Ghassan Ben Jeddo, who had been the head of the Beirut Bureau before resigning almost a year ago, said that Al Jazeera was biased in covering the Arab Spring, especially in Syria and Bahrain.

“I do believe that Al Jazeera and other channels were not balanced in dealing with the events,” he said. *“For instance, with respect to the events in Syria and Bahrain, we started to invite guests from America who only criticize the regime in Syria and support the regime in Bahrain and persons who justify NATO intervention. This is unacceptable.”*

Journalist and author Afshin Rattansi, who worked for Al Jazeera, told RT that, “*sadly*”, the channel had become one-sided voice for the Qatari government’s stance against Bashar al-Assad, having begun as the region’s revolutionary broadcaster.

“It is very disturbing to hear how Al Jazeera is now becoming this regional player for foreign policy in a way that some would arguably say the BBC and others have been for decades,” he said. *“If Al Jazeera Arabic is going to take a war-like stance after [the] Qatari government, this would be very ill.”*

“There is the courage of these journalists, however, in saying ‘Look, this is not the way we should be covering this. There are elements of Al-Qaeda in there,’” Rattansi concluded. “The way Al Jazeera Arabic has covered the story of Syria is completely one-sided.”

Journalists and anti-war activist Don Debar, who has also had Al Jazeera experience, confirmed that the station has been heavily guided by the Qatari government in its policies.

“That has been ongoing since last April of 2011,” Debar told RT. “The head of the bureau in Beirut quit, many other people quit because of the biased coverage and outright hand of the government in dictating editorial policy over Libya, and now Syria.”

‘There’s a chill, they’re controlling things more at Al Jazeera’

Former Al Jazeera English-language blogger Ted Rall recounted his own story of quitting the job. He said his blogs and columns were being rejected on a regular basis.

“For a long time I ascribed it to incompetence on their part because they weren’t very good at getting back very quickly, but over time I came to learn through various people there that the politics of the channel were changing,” he told RT. What he found out was that leftist and progressive voices such as his were not welcome anymore and that he no longer needed to submit anything.

Rall noted that this change in policy only took place recently.

“After September 11, Al Jazeera became a channel that could be counted upon for openness and transparency, certainly compared to most corporate broadcast media in the West, particularly related to the Middle East and Central Asia and South Asia but that has really changed in the last year or so,” he said *“There’s a chill, they’re controlling things more.”*

When Rall first went to work at Al Jazeera, he says he was surprised that it was actually owned by the Qatari government. He compared their past hands-off policy to that of Rupert Murdoch when he owned the Village Voice of New York City. But now, the *“Qataris have decided to shape the picture of the news a little more than they used to.”*

While he rejected the notion of objectivity, Rall did note that the media could try to present a more balanced view.

“What you really want to see is a broad marketplace of ideas, where lots of different ideas and stories are being told,” he summed up.

When it was first set up, Al Jazeera English was intended to be a softer version of its Arabic counterpart. Since then, the situation has changed drastically, Middle East analyst Tariq Ali told RT. *“The channel I think, was largely set up to please the west and its coverage showed that very clearly. There were few critical programs, compared to Arabic Al Jazeera, but it seems now both are working in tandem.”*

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