



Al Jazeera, the pan-Arab news network financed by Qatar, named a member of the Qatari royal family on Tuesday to replace its top news director after disclosures from the group WikiLeaks indicating that the news director had modified the network's coverage of the Iraq war in response to pressure from the United States.

Al Jazeera is under intense scrutiny in the Middle East over its varying coverage of the Arab Spring revolts. Although the network is nominally independent - and its degree of autonomy was itself a revolution in the context of the region's state-controlled news media when it began in 1996 - many people contend that its coverage of the region still reflects the views of its Qatari owners.

Al Jazeera played an early and influential role in covering - some would say encouraging - the unrest in Tunisia and Egypt last winter. It was even more aggressive in its focus on the regime of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi and the struggles of what it called "freedom fighters" in Libya, where Qatar came to play a major role in supporting the rebellion.

But some people now cite what they see as a double standard in the network's sensational coverage of the unrest in Syria on the one hand, and its relatively negligible coverage of the strife in Bahrain, Qatar's Persian Gulf neighbor.

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