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Adam Quinn appears on Al Jazeera's Inside Story

Posted on Tuesday 24th November 2009

As a lot of people may know, Al Jazeera has something of a rocky reputation across the Atlantic, stemming from its Arabic language version's occasionally anti-American tone. But the English version, at least, is a more moderate operation, and a very useful addition of the family of English-language news channels, which has expanded quite a bit in recent years.

"This was the second time that I have appeared on Al Jazeera's Inside Story, and it has been interesting and well worthwhile on both occasions.

The goal of the show is to communicate with a general audience, so naturally the desire of the programme-makers is that all guests be as concise as possible and avoid using wilfully obscure vocabulary. I try to keep my work the right side of plain English in any case, so I can give them what they're looking for without feeling that I'm being unduly simplistic. It can be a bit of a test to think on your feet and come up with a coherent answer of the right length every time: although a researcher discusses the topic with you by phone before you head to the studio, there is no pre-warning as to the questions, so improvisational ability is one of the key tests.

The atmosphere of filming is mildly surreal, in that you can't see the presenter or other guests at all; all you have to go one is an earpiece feeding you the others voices, and a camera lens into which to stare. The first you see of anything else comes when you watch the show as it broadcasts a few hours later. This makes for a suspenseful intervening period between filming and viewing as you wait to find out if what you actually said and the way it came across is as you remember (or hope) it to have been.

As most people know, Al Jazeera has something of a rocky reputation across the Atlantic, stemming from its Arabic language version's occasionally anti-American tone. But the English version, at least, is a more moderate operation, and a very useful addition of the family of English-language news channels, which has expanded quite a bit in recent years. It by and large reflects a non-Western and also sometimes a developing-world perspective on events that doesn't always get aired a great deal in other outlets. In the case of Inside Story, one can take a serious and extended look at a foreign affairs topic in a way that not all 24-hour news cater for. It would be going too far to say that the Al Jazeera way is superior to the established Western outlets, but by combining them one can get a somewhat more balanced output than if one relied only on the BBC, Sky or CNN.

While the skills involved in being a university-based scholar and a TV talking head are different, we academics do have a high level of knowledge to hand on topics of importance, which if properly distilled can make a contribution to broader public understanding. I tend to think, therefore, that all other things being equal we ought to accept chances to put our analysis in the public domain if and when opportunity presents. Certainly with regard to Al Jazeera my approach is that if they keep inviting me, I'll keep saying "yes"."

Adam Quinns first appearance on this show, from the summer (Youtube) (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0MsbzPKr9E)

More information about **Adam Quinn (/staff/profiles/government-society/quinn-adam.aspx)**

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