


Aljazeera: reporters or rabble rousers?

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It's not often that you meet a journalist who is asked to solve the clash of civilisations. But that's the kind of expectations that Yosri Fouda and [Aljazeera](#) have raised after ten years broadcasting from the Middle East to the world.

Aljazeera news channel's chief investigative correspondent was our speaker last night in the first of this year's [The News We Deserve?](#) lecture series. The former BBC journalist told a packed hall that in his ten years at Aljazeera he has never been more free to say what he wants. And for Mr Fouda that includes putting out DVDs of Osama Bin Laden and interviews with the masterminds behind the 9/11 attacks on America.

Fouda said that simply by putting on its varied diet of news and open debate, Aljazeera had created a revolution in Middle Eastern society. It's many imitators, he claimed, are proof that a free media is possible in a region with almost no democratic governments. Fouda accepts that Aljazeera has had to make compromises. So, for example, he admitted that he is highly unlikely to launch one of his investigations in to the Royal Family of Qatar who underwrite Aljazeera. But he thinks that's a small price to pay for the wider impact they have had in stirring up debate among an audience that reaches from Bedouin tribes to Saudi millionaires.

But the BBC's veteran foreign correspondent William Horsley felt that Fouda was being disingenuous. He pointed out at last night's debate that it wasn't enough to say that 'we simply report the facts'. When the [Danish cartoon story](#) was raging through the Muslim world he said that Aljazeera didn't do enough to explain the context for the satire and so helped stir up righteous Islamic anger. And as Yosri Fouda himself said, "when you are watching a programme, you should not just look to see what is in the programme, you should look to see what is missing."

It is one thing to report facts, but what really matters when you look at any broadcaster, be it the BBC or Fox News, it's often what they don't say and the voices they exclude.

But what is certain is that you are more likely to get an accurate reflection of complex realities when you have a plurality of editorial voices. With the launch of Aljazeera's English language international channel pending, it seems that we will hear much more from Fouda and his colleagues in the global news market.

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