

NPR Middle East Coverage January - March 2009

NPR's coverage of the Middle East during this quarter was dominated, as it should have been, by the final three weeks of Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza strip. The network gave this brief but bloody war exceptionally fine coverage even though its reporters could only witness directly the Israeli side of the story. As soon as the war ended, Eric Westervelt went into Gaza and produced some of NPR's best coverage in the region in many years. His pieces and interviews gave listeners gripping accounts of the physical devastation and the human toll after nearly a month of the Israeli military's air and ground attacks.

For the most part, NPR's coverage of the region continued to meet high journalistic standards. Even with the logistical difficulties, coverage of the Gaza war generally was as accurate, balanced, and complete as possible. Reporters and shows managed to gain some access to Gaza during the war by telephoning residents there. Freelance producer Ahmed Abu Hamda also provided tape of victims at hospitals and other locations. These interviews gave listeners a partial picture of what was happening on the ground.

One persistent problem was a failure, particularly by the daily news shows, to give sources for Palestinian casualty figures – tolls of the dead and wounded too often were presented as simple facts without any attribution.

Accuracy

NPR aired the following corrections concerning stories covered by this quarter's review:

- On **February 3**, *All Things Considered (ATC)* aired a correction in a Deborah Amos piece of the translation, from the Turkish, of a boy chanting. Amos had quoted the boy as saying "Gaza is burning," when in fact he was saying "Help for Gaza."
- On **March 11**, *ATC* aired a correction of Mary Louise Kelly's piece, the previous day, about Charles Freeman's resignation as chairman of the National Intelligence

Council. Kelly had said Freeman's appointment had been opposed by "all seven members" of the Senate Intelligence Committee; as the correction noted, the piece should have said "all seven Republican members" of that committee.

Overall, NPR's Middle East reporting continues to be remarkably accurate. I did find the following concerns:

– The intro to a Mike Shuster piece for *Morning Edition (ME)* on **January 7**, wrapping up the day's news, said "dozens of people were killed" in Israel's shelling of UN-run schools in Gaza. Two schools were attacked that day; one attack reportedly killed three people and the other killed at least 30 people (the best estimate available on that day). Technically this did amount to "dozens" of deaths, but that term is much too broad and imprecise; it would have been better to say "more than thirty" or "an estimated three dozen or more" people were killed.

– In his otherwise excellent pieces on **January 20**, reporting on the aftermath of the Gaza war, Westervelt quoted UN officials as saying that "at least 50,000 homes" (ME) and "some 50,000 homes" (ATC) were damaged or destroyed in the Israeli attacks. There were no comparable figures in UN statements or other news reports at the time. The Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics estimated on January 19 that about 4,100 Gaza homes were destroyed and 17,000 were damaged. [Note: NPR subsequently, on April 28, posted corrections on its website noting that 4,100 homes had been destroyed and about 17,000 were damaged in Gaza during the war].

– Eleanor's Beardsley's **January 26** piece for *Morning Edition* on violence between Jews and Muslims in Paris incorrectly reported that female Muslim students had been attacked by a Jewish gang. [Note: NPR subsequently, on April 17, posted a correction noting the students were boys – not girls.]

Voices

I counted the number of times Israelis and Arabs (including Palestinians and Lebanese) appeared in the items I reviewed, both on tape and in quotes. Overall, 78

Israelis and 91 Arabs (including Palestinians) appeared on tape; some were multiple appearances by individuals. Of the Arabs, 70 were Palestinians; the rest were other nationalities (many of them Egyptian); again, some of these were multiple appearances by individuals.

In addition, 83 items that aired during this period quoted Israelis and 65 items quoted Arabs (including Palestinians); some individuals were quoted multiple times. By "quotes" I mean all statements, not on tape, attributed either to named individuals or to groups, such as "analysts" or "Palestinians."

Overall, one can conclude from these figures that NPR's presentation of Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints was reasonably balanced during the period. As noted below, NPR reporters and shows did attempt to present the voices of those most affected by the Gaza war – the Palestinians in Gaza and the Israelis living in border areas subject to rocket fire from Gaza. A strong case can be made that NPR was justified in devoting the bulk of its coverage to Palestinian civilians, who indisputably suffered more from the war than did Israeli civilians. I believe the general balance of viewpoints presented to listeners was appropriate.

I also counted the appearances on tape, or in quotes, of individual Israeli and Palestinian officials and opinion leaders. If there is an overall trend to be seen in these figures, it is that top Israeli political figures appeared on air much more often than did top Palestinian figures. The reason is clear: Israeli leaders were accessible during the Gaza war and the subsequent election campaign, while most officials of the Hamas group that runs Gaza were in hiding. The senior leaders of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank were of little consequence during the war.

Following is a summary of leaders with multiple appearances during this quarter (no Lebanese leaders appeared more than once):

Israelis:

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: On tape in 2 items; quoted in 12 items

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni: On tape in 5 items; quoted in 5 items

Likud party leader Binyamin Netanyahu: On tape in 2 items; quoted in 7 items

Politician Avigdor Lieberman: Quoted in 8 items

President Shimon Peres: On tape in 4 items; quoted in 2 items

Spokesman Mark Regev: On tape in 4 items; quoted in 1 item

Historian/army spokesman Michael Oren: On tape in 5 items
Defense Minister Ehud Barak: Quoted in 4 items
Army spokeswoman Avital Leibovich: On tape in 4 items
Army spokesman Elie Isaacson: On tape in 3 items
Shas party leader Rabbi Yossif: Quoted in 3 items
IDF commander Gabi Ashkenazi: Quoted in 2 items
Professor Gerald Steinberg: On tape in 2 items
Professor Efraim Inbar: On tape in 2 items
Ambassador/politician Danny Ayalon: On tape in 2 items
Other Israelis on tape: 37

Palestinians

President Mahmoud Abbas: On tape in 1 item; quoted in 4 items
 Hamas leader Khalid Meshaal: On tape in 3 items; quoted in 2 items
Journalist Ahmed Abu Hamda: On tape in 4 items
 Hamas spokesman Osama Hamdan: On tape in 3 items
 Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad: On tape in 1 item; quoted in 2 items
 PA Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad: Quoted in 2 items
 PA negotiator Saeb Erekat: On tape in 1 item; quoted in 1 item
 Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan: On tape in 2 items
 Other Palestinians on tape: 56

Range of Voices.

One consistent theme in my reports over the years has been that NPR only rarely affords its listeners the opportunity to hear from hardliners and extremists, on both sides. These are the people who often drive events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The news shows, in particular, tend to interview only a narrow range of moderates who say reassuring things about peace and reconciliation. However, NPR has a journalistic obligation to expose listeners to views of those who do not support peace and reconciliation. It's impossible to understand the situation in the region without hearing the extreme rhetoric on both sides.

Israel and Egypt's refusal to allow Western reporters into Gaza during the war made it difficult for NPR to provide listeners a clear picture of what was happening to the people of Gaza. NPR tried to make up for the lack of access by interviewing its Gaza producer, Ahmed Abu Hamda, and using tape he gathered at hospitals and other locations. He appeared directly on air four times.

In addition, NPR reporters and shows telephoned Gazans to get their stories.

Examples included:

- *Day to Day* on **January 1** interviewed Jason Shawa, a printing press owner in Gaza City;
- a Westervelt piece for *ATC* on **January 1** included tape from a Jabalya refugee camp resident;
- *ATC* on **January 1** interviewed Eyad Sarajj, described as a psychiatrist and human rights activist in Gaza City (this was a particularly powerful interview because Sarajj described how even those Gazans who opposed Hamas were united in their sense of victimization at the hands of Israel, and that Israel's attacks "can only encourage more military and more extremist attitude");
- *ME* on **January 2** interviewed Dr. Abdel Aziz Thabet, head of a Gaza mental health program;
- *WESAT* on **January 3** interviewed Sami Abdalshafi, described as a Gaza business consultant and contributor to *The Guardian*;
- and weekend *All Things Considered* on **January 3** interviewed Muhammad Shariff, executive director of the Society for Deaf Children in Gaza City;

Reporters and shows also interviewed several Israelis living within rocket range of Gaza. Among them:

- *ATC* on **January 1** interviewed Sigal Ariely, a resident of Ashkelon;
- *Weekend Edition Saturday (WESAT)* on **January 3** interviewed Shlomi Kodesh, deputy director of a medical center in Beersheba;
- *Tell Me More* on **January 5** interviewed Vivian Silver, described as co-executive director of the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and development. She lives on a kibbutz along the Gaza border;
- and Anne Garrels profiled a family in a kibbutz in the Negev desert near the Gaza border for *ATC* on **January 16**;

Identification of Voices.

NPR reporters and shows are improving their identification of voices heard on air, but there still is room for improvement:

– *Weekend Edition Sunday (WESUN)* on **January 4** interviewed Hanan Ashrawi and identified her as a "member of the Palestinian Third Way party and a long-time Palestinian negotiator." I doubt many listeners have any idea what the Third Way party is. Moreover, Ashrawi has not been a Palestinian negotiator for many years, at least in any formal sense. It would have been better to identify her as a leading Palestinian moderate who broke with the Fatah party years ago.

– NPR did not always give a very complete identification for Ahmed Abu Hamda. In some cases he was described as a Gaza-based producer for NPR and other news organizations. In other cases, for example in a Westervelt piece for *ATC* on **January 4**, his NPR association was not mentioned at all; he was presented as just another Gazan.

– *Talk of the Nation (TOTN)* on **January 6** identified Stephen Walt as a Harvard professor and author of "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy." This was a correct but inadequate identification. He's an academic who has become very controversial during the last couple years because of his (and his co-author's) argument that the Israeli lobby has excessive influence in U.S. politics and policy-making. A listener who carefully followed the resulting conversation on *TOTN* might have discerned Walt's views, but his background should have been stated more clearly up front.

– *TOTN* on **February 9** interviewed Steve Clemons, identifying him as a "political commentator," director of American strategy at the New American Foundation, and blogger for the *Washington Note*. None of this identification explained for listeners why they should pay attention to Clemons' highly opinionated comments about the Middle East or U.S. interests in the region.

– Westervelt's piece for *ATC* on **February 17**, describing the Israeli election results and profiling the controversial politician (and now foreign minister) Avigdor Lieberman, used tape from Mitchell Barak, who was identified as an "Israeli analyst and pollster." Listeners need more information about Barak, particularly because he has the same last name as the leader of the Labor party (who was not mentioned in the piece) and, of course, his name is similar to the first name of the new U.S. president.

– Both "analysts" Peter Kenyon quoted in his **February 25** piece for *ATC*, on Palestinian unity talks, should have been identified more completely. Emad Gad was identified with Cairo's Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Center. Mustafa al-Ani was identified with the Gulf Research Centro in Dubai. Few NPR listeners can be expected to have any knowledge of either institution, the analysts, or what their institutions support.

– Westervelt's **March 27** piece for *ATC* on the formation of the new Israeli government included tape from Javier Solana, the head of foreign policy for the European Union. It gave listeners only the vaguest identification of him as "policy chief" (this came after the sentence: "Diplomats, especially in Europe, have warned.....")

Fairness and Balance

Using the same standard of previous reports, I made a subjective assessment of the "dominant focus" of each piece, interview, or 2-way. The dominant focus does not mean that the piece takes sides; it's merely an indication of the primary subject matter.

Of the 161 total items in this survey:

- 24 had a dominant focus on Israel;
- 23 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians;
- 39 focused about equally on those two sides ("Israel-Palestinian")
- 32 focused on U.S. diplomatic or political considerations in the region ("US-Region");
- 6 focused on U.S. domestic issues related in some fashion to the Middle East;
- 6 focused on Egypt's dealings with the Palestinians, notably Hamas;
- 4 focused on European matters related to the Middle East;
- 2 focused on Arab nations;
- 2 focused on Egypt;
- and the rest focused on other regional matters.

Given the region's news events during the quarter, these totals reflect reasonably balanced coverage. The plurality of items labeled as "Israel-Palestinian" generally represents coverage of the Gaza war, particularly reporter pieces and interviews that provided accounts from both sides. Most of the Israel-focused items dealt with events in Israel during the war (such as reaction from residents near Gaza) or the election. Nearly all Palestinian-focused items concerned events in Gaza during and immediately after the war. NPR listeners heard very little from the West Bank during this period. Items listed as "US-Region" generally dealt with the Obama administration's initiatives, including the appointment of former Senator Mitchell (as US envoy) and Secretary of State Clinton's trip to the region.

Pairings:

One of the most effective ways to give listeners a balanced report on the Israeli-Palestinian (or any other) issue is to pair views from both sides. NPR has done this successfully on many occasions, and could have done it more often during the Gaza war had there been greater access to Gaza. The following pairings early in January helped listeners understand the human consequences of the fighting: *ATC* aired back-to-back interviews on **January 1** (noted above) with an Israeli in Ashkelon and a Palestinian in Gaza City; *WESAT* on **January 3** (noted above) aired back-to-back interviews with a Gaza business consultant and a doctor in Beersheba; *Tell Me More* aired a joint interview on **January 5** with Israeli and Palestinian peace activists; and *Morning Edition* on **January 7-8** paired two of the most prominent Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals: Amos Oz and Sari Nusseibeh.

The Gaza War

All wars are difficult to cover. Each poses unique logistical challenges for any news organization. For NPR and all other Western news organizations, the main problem in covering the Gaza war was the lack of direct access to Gaza, where most of the action took place. Both Israel and Egypt closed their borders and prevented Western journalists from entering Gaza until after the fighting was over. In Israel's case, the government

maintained the border closure even after the Foreign Press Association (of which NPR is a member) successfully appealed to the High Court, which said journalists should be allowed into Gaza. As a result, NPR reporters, like their colleagues, had to rely on al Jazeera reports (which had a full staff in Gaza), Palestinian news agencies, a handful of stringers, telephone interviews with Gaza contacts, statements by UN and other humanitarian aid officials, and, of course, reports from the Israeli military. None of these sources individually, or even in combination, gave a very reliable view into events on the ground. This was particularly true in the case of disputed events such as Israel's attacks on several UN facilities.

Given the constraints, NPR offered its listeners about as complete and accurate a report on the Gaza war as was possible. It would have been better if it were continually made clear to listeners that NPR could not get access to Gaza. NPR deployed four of its most senior and experienced foreign correspondents to the story full-time (Garrels, Kenyon, Westervelt, and Shuster) and used its stringer in Gaza (Hamda) as a direct source of information. As noted above (under "Voices"), the shows also interviewed Israelis and Palestinians who were directly affected by the fighting and other observers, including al Jazeera correspondent Ayman Mohyedin.

As soon as the fighting stopped, Westervelt entered Gaza (through Rafah). He did five reports with first-hand accounts of the destruction wrought during three weeks of bombing and ground action. These reports were graphic and offered a good idea of the human toll of war – not just the immense physical destruction. In particular, in a two-way on January 19 Westervelt gave listeners, who heard *Morning Edition*'s first feed, a superb overview of what he had seen. He then immediately turned around and filed an equally fine piece focusing on a woman whose house had been destroyed; later in the day, Westervelt filed a similar piece for *ATC*. This was excellent deadline reporting under what surely were extremely difficult conditions. Unfortunately, this reporting probably got lost in all the excitement over Barack Obama's inauguration.

Following are comments on several specific aspects of NPR's war coverage:

Palestinian deaths.

Casualty counts proved to be one of the most controversial aspects of the Gaza conflict – in this case casualty counts on the Palestinian side. (There were few Israeli casualties and no real dispute about them.) With no direct access to the scene at the time of the fighting, journalists were forced to get casualty figures from medical personnel at Gaza hospitals, UN officials, representatives of Palestinian human rights organizations, and the Israeli military. With the possible exception of the UN, each source had an agenda that cast some doubt on the figures it provided. Many Israelis also claimed that the UN had a pro-Palestinian agenda.

NPR and other international news organizations routinely reported the latest numbers: so many killed, so many wounded. And it was inevitable that both sides would use these statistics for political reasons. The Palestinians wanted to emphasize the death and destruction to show, from their perspective, just how egregious Israel's actions in Gaza had been. Israel, of course, wanted to minimize these elements, in particular the number of Palestinians civilians killed and injured.

After the war, various Palestinian groups gave differing "final" counts of the dead and wounded, all with similar totals. One of the most authoritative may have been a casualty list released March 19 by the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. That group said there were 1,417 deaths, including 926 civilians. Of the civilians, the center said 116 were women and 313 were minors under 18. The center also said it had counted 236 "combatants" (in other words, Hamas fighters) and 255 members of the Hamas security forces who had died.

These counts, accompanied by names of those who died, were generally in line with figures given throughout the war by medical officials in Gaza. The Israeli government immediately attacked the report, saying it vastly under-counted the number of fighters and exaggerated the number of civilians.

The Israeli Defense Forces released its own final count of Palestinian casualties on March 26. It said the military had identified 1,166 Palestinians killed during the war. Of those, 709 were "Hamas terror operatives," a term the military did not define but which apparently included Hamas policemen as well as fighters engaged in actual combat. The military listed only 295 "uninvolved Palestinians" – apparently meaning children, women, and men who were not fighters. The military said it also had the names

of 162 dead men "that have not yet been attributed to any organization." However, the Army did not release any names for these lists, thus making it impossible for outsiders to make a detailed comparison of the differing accounts.

Attributing Casualty Counts.

Because of the controversy surrounding Palestinian casualties – and as a matter of good journalistic practice – NPR routinely should have given attributions when reporting any casualty counts. Unfortunately, this did not happen consistently. In too many cases, show intros or reporter pieces simply gave a casualty number (or range) as a flat-out, unsourced fact rather than as a report from one side or another. This is never good journalism, as we now know the casualty figures differ widely.

Israeli Atrocities.

In a **March 26** piece for *Morning Edition* Westervelt reported on several allegations that the Israeli army used excessive force during the war. Westervelt's piece centered around two reports in the Israeli news media: A March 21 report by Israel's Channel 10 quoting an Israeli officer, in briefing his soldiers, as expressing little or no regard for the lives of Palestinian civilians; and reports in *Haaretz* and *Maariv* on March 19-20 quoting Israeli soldiers as citing accounts of unprovoked killings of civilians. Westervelt's piece also quoted Yehuda Shaul, director of a leftist veterans group, Breaking the Silence, who said he had interviewed soldiers who told similar stories of abuses of civilians during the war. In addition, the piece dealt with allegations that the army's chief rabbi and his aides had encouraged soldiers to show no quarter when dealing with Palestinians. Finally, the story cited Human Rights Watch allegations that the Israeli army improperly used white phosphorous as an illuminating device, injuring innocent civilians when the phosphorous descended to the ground.

Other U.S. news organizations had carried similar reports in the days before this piece aired. The most prominent were stories in *The New York Times* on March 20 and 21, the first of which appeared on page one.

Although I am glad that NPR brought this story to its listeners' attention, I do have concerns about this particular piece:

– The piece relied heavily on Shaul’s accounts without telling listeners that he is an active, vocal campaigner *against* Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. Shaul is far from an unbiased source. While the information Shaul collected might well be true, he had an agenda in making this type of information public. Listeners should have been told more about him and his agenda.

– The central element of the Israeli atrocities allegations came from a February 13 meeting of Israeli veterans of the Gaza war held at the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military preparatory course at Oranim Academic College in Tivon. *Haaretz*, and later *Maariv*, published stories on March 19-20 based on that transcript. Israeli soldiers told several stories, including accounts of the unprovoked shootings of an elderly Palestinian woman and of a woman and child. Westervelt cited both incidents but did not make clear (as additional Israeli media reporting had found prior to March 26) that the soldiers recounting these incidents had not witnessed the events and had only heard about them.

– In the days after *Haaretz* first broke the story (on March 19) about Israeli soldiers accusing colleagues of committing atrocities, subsequent stories in the Israeli news media began to cast doubt on some allegations. The *Jerusalem Post*, YNet news, and other Israeli news organizations quoted soldiers as disputing both the specific atrocity accounts and the general idea that soldiers had disregarded Palestinian lives. Westervelt's piece, however, did not mention any of these subsequent reports, which emerged before the piece was aired.

Westervelt’s piece did quote an Israeli army spokesman, Major Avital Leibovich as saying the alleged atrocities were under investigation and suggesting that the soldier’s accounts were "hearsay."

Five days after the piece aired, the army's judge-advocate general closed his investigation into misconduct allegations during the war, saying the newspaper reports were based on "hearsay" and had proven to be false. The soldiers who made the allegations had not actually witnessed or participated in the events they had described, the judge-advocate general said. Several human rights groups protested the ending of the investigation and suggested it was a whitewash.

Westervelt reported the closing of the investigation in a news spot that aired on March 30.

Whatever one thinks of the original claims or the IDF investigation, I believe *Morning Edition* should have aired a full story about the closing of the investigation. The news peg was more than sufficient to justify a follow-up. Moreover, good journalistic practice dictates that official action in response to allegations of serious wrongdoing should be reported with prominence similar to the original allegations – even if, or possibly especially if, the investigation was hasty or incomplete. For example, if a newspaper puts the arrest of someone on the front page it should give comparable coverage when that person is convicted, acquitted, or somehow exonerated. At the very least, NPR should post a note, alongside the March 26 transcript on the website, reporting the IDF's closing of the case and reaction to it.

Attacks on UN facilities.

Of all the confusing aspects of the Gaza war, perhaps none was more confusing to listeners than Israel's repeated attacks on United Nations schools and other facilities in Gaza. The main reason for the confusion, of course, was that reporters and other independent observers could not see the events for themselves or interview eyewitnesses. The confusion was heightened by the conflicting claims of participants.

The single most controversial of these incidents was the shelling of a UN school for girls in the Jabalya refugee camp. In the early days of Israel's ground invasion, several hundred people took refuge in the school to avoid the fighting. In the afternoon of January 6, according to the Israelis, Palestinians on the school grounds launched mortar rounds toward nearby Israeli forces. Israeli forces responded with tank fire.

The first report on an NPR show came in an intro to an unrelated Kenyon piece for *Day to Day* on **January 6**: "Earlier today, Israeli tank shells killed more than 34 Palestinians who sought refuge at a United Nations school in northern Gaza." This information should have been attributed.

Later in the day, Westervelt filed a more detailed account for *ATC*. It included information from witnesses, tape from UN refugee agency administrator John Ging, and an Israeli Defense Forces statement saying Hamas militants had been firing mortars from the school. The UN denied the last claim. Shuster followed up on the story with more information in his wrap-up for *Morning Edition* the next day, **January 7**. That piece also quoted the Israeli military and had an impassioned plea from Ging for international action

to protect Gazans, who he said were "dying in their hundreds." *ATC* reviewed the school attack in an interview with Ging on **January 8**. Afterwards, however, this particular story pretty much disappeared from NPR's coverage and there has been no follow-up coverage of a subsequent investigation by the UN and responses from the Israeli government.

Delivering Aid to Gaza.

During the war, NPR reporters and shows tried to keep listeners informed about the humanitarian situation in Gaza – including Israel's restrictions on deliveries of food, medicine, and other supplies from Israel. Egypt also blocked most aid deliveries into Gaza, something NPR did not mention often enough because Egypt shared responsibility, with Israel, for the lack of aid to the people of Gaza. Starting on January 7, Israel observed a three-hour cease-fire to allow trucks carrying relief supplies into Gaza. As with everything else about the war, the cease-fire's effectiveness and what supplies actually reached Gaza was subject to dispute. NPR reporters frequently mentioned the cease-fires and noted the number of trucks said to have crossed into Gaza – but because of the lack of direct access it was impossible to determine how effective these aid deliveries were.

In the weeks after the war ended, the UN and other aid agencies engaged in an almost daily tug of war with Israeli authorities over delivering supplies to Gaza. According to the UN, Israel routinely denied entry to food items Israel considered "non-essential" and even to items such as plastic sheeting (intended for temporary housing), reportedly because it could be made into prayer mats for mosques. More important, Israel prohibited entry of nearly all types of construction material – necessary for rebuilding houses, schools, and other facilities – on the grounds that Hamas would use it for military purposes.

Israeli Civilians.

As noted above under the "Voices" section, NPR reporters and shows made sure listeners heard from Israelis living in towns and cities within rocket range of Gaza. It's difficult for anyone who has never witnessed a rocket attack to realize just how terrifying it can be, and so these interviews were important to help listeners understand why Israel's

leaders responded to the constant barrage of rockets from Gaza. If there had been more of this type of reporting in the months prior to the war, NPR listeners might not have been surprised when the war broke out on Dec. 27, 2008.