NPR Mideast Coverage
January - March 2013

This report assesses NPR's reporting on events and trends related to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians during the first quarter of 2013.

NPR covered these and other developments with 81 stories and interviews on its radio shows: Morning Edition, Tell Me More, Talk of the Nation, All Things Considered and Weekend Edition. NPR also posted 34 related blogs, news stories, and other items on its website. All of the radio and website-only items covered by this review are shown on the "Israel-Palestinian coverage" pages of the website, except for Associated Press news stories selected and edited by NPR staff; those AP reports are posted only for 30 days under a contractual arrangement.

The opinions expressed in this report are mine alone.

Accuracy

I carefully reviewed all items for factual accuracy, with special attention to the radio stories, interviews and website postings produced by NPR staffers. NPR's reporting remains remarkably accurate despite the time pressures of today's 24-hour news cycle.

NPR has posted two corrections for the period.

One correction concerned a January 14 "Political Junkie" column by Ken Rudin concerning the controversy over President Obama's nomination of former Senator Chuck Hagel as secretary of defense. Rudin noted that some Jewish groups had expressed "concern" about the nomination because of allegations that Hagel was not sufficiently supportive of Israel. Rudin mentioned the "American Jewish Council" as one of the groups; he meant to refer to the American Jewish Committee.

NPR also posted a "post-broadcast clarification" about a story by Sheera Frenkel, aired by All Things Considered on January 1, that brought a torrent of criticism — some of it justified — from listeners and pro-Israel advocacy groups. The story reported Israel's
decision, announced two days earlier, to allow limited shipments of gravel into the Gaza Strip for privately owned projects.

While the story portrayed this step as a loosening of Israel's blockade of Gaza, it failed to make clear that Israel had, in fact, been allowing some construction materials into Gaza for use by international aid organizations, primarily United Nations agencies. In effect, the radio story seemed to suggest that Israel had barred all construction material from reaching Gaza via official channels, despite the immense devastation the area suffered from Israel's aerial attacks in December 2008–January 2009 and again in November 2012. The story did note that many tons of gravel and other materials had reached Gaza through underground tunnels connecting the Strip with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

I should note that the original website version of the story was somewhat more accurate than the radio version. The Web version said Israel's announcement applied to "private-sector buyers" and thus amounted to "a significant easing of Israel's blockade of Gaza."

After receiving numerous protests about the radio version, NPR on January 7 appended a "post-broadcast clarification" to the website version stating: "Previously, aid organizations had been allowed to import construction material into Gaza. The eased rules apply to private-sector builders." While helpful, even this clarification did not entirely dispel the confusion created by the vaguely worded story.

One other quibble: The story said Israel's policy change came in the wake of the November conflict "that left 133 Palestinians and six Israelis dead." In my report covering the last quarter of 2012, I noted the difficulty of determining precise casualty figures for Palestinians in Gaza. Even so, by the time the story aired, many news organizations seem to have adopted the figure of 165 Palestinian deaths, as cited in a December 19 UN report, so I do not understand the 133 number. There was no comparable dispute about Israel's official death toll of six people.

I have comments about the accuracy of two other items:

– An "It's All Politics" blog posting on January 7 did not clearly state former senator Chuck Hagel's positions on the Iraq war. The posting by Frank James, in explaining President Obama's nomination of Hagel to be defense secretary, said Hagel, a
Republican, had been willing to buck his party's orthodoxy "for instance when Hagel opposed the Iraq war." Hagel in fact voted for the congressional resolution (H. J. Res 114, adopted on October 10, 2002) that authorized the use of force against Iraq. Hagel later opposed President Bush's 2007 "surge" of 20,000 additional U.S. soldiers and marines to Iraq, as did his then-colleagues in the Senate, Barack Obama and Joe Biden. It would be more accurate to say Hagel initially supported the Iraq war but later opposed Bush's "surge" of additional troops.

– NPR's food blog, The Salt, on March 20 carried an interesting piece by Emily Harris (NPR's new Jerusalem correspondent) about a new cookbook, The Gaza Kitchen, featuring recipes from Gaza. The original version of the blog quoted the cookbook as noting that Israel prohibited Gaza fishermen from venturing more than three miles into the Mediterranean Sea. This was correct when the cookbook was written, but the blog should have noted that Israel in late 2012 began allowing Gaza fishermen up to six miles offshore. The easing of the fishing limit was one result of the Egyptian-negotiated cease-fire agreement ending the mid-November conflict between Israel and Hamas. The blog was later corrected to note the extension of the fishing limit. [Correction: Israel did extend the fishing limit in Gaza to six miles late in 2012, but, according to the UN, reimposed the previous 3-mile limit on March 21 in response to the firing of rockets from Gaza into southern Israel. The three mile limit remained in effect when this report was published on April 18.]

Fairness and Balance

Using the same method as for previous reports, I made a subjective determination of the "dominant focus" of each radio piece or interview aired during the quarter. The term "dominant focus" describes the overall subject matter and does not necessarily mean that the piece or interview takes sides.

In terms of specific focus among the 81 items:

- 19 had a dominant focus on Israel (13 of these were related to Israeli elections in January and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's negotiations to form a new government);
• 5 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians;
• 7 focused about equally on Israel and the Palestinians;
• 13 focused on U.S. relations with Israel (12 of which dealt with President Obama's Mideast trip in March);
• 12 focused on U.S. concerns about broader Middle East issues (4 of which concerned Obama's trip and 2 of which concerned Secretary of State John Kerry's follow-up trip to the region);
• 10 focused on U.S. politics and policy, notably the debate over Chuck Hagel's nomination as secretary of defense;
• 3 items focused on Hezbollah, the radical Shiite group that exercises veto power over the Lebanese government;
• 4 focused on aspects of the civil war in Syria that directly affected Israel;
• The remaining 8 items focused on other matters related to Israeli-Palestinian issues, for example the Oscar nomination of the documentary film 5 Broken Cameras.

These figures show that NPR devoted significant attention to events in Israel, especially the January 22 election (and its aftermath) and the visit of President Obama. Listeners heard comparatively little from the Palestinian side, although several feature stories did focus some attention on specific issues in Gaza and the West Bank.

Of special note, this was a relatively quiet period (at least in terms of NPR coverage) in the continuing saga over Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. That controversy was mentioned in some of the coverage surrounding President Obama's trip to the region and in a few stories not subject to this review (because they did not refer specifically to Israel) — but the Iran issue was not a major focus.

With exceptions noted below, individual items aired during the fourth quarter generally met basic standards for fairness and balance.

Following are comments on two other items that caught my attention during the quarters:
A piece for Morning Edition on March 4 by Larry Abramson (who filled in as NPR's Jerusalem correspondent during the quarter), reported on the most recent developments concerning Israel's restrictions on Gaza and concluded with a misleading statement. Abramson recounted how the Israeli government has made it impossible for Gazan farmers to export their crops, such as strawberries, to Israel or the West Bank. He then concluded his piece by saying: "And that, of course, is the point of the Israeli sanctions, to starve this Hamas-run territory of resources." Starving Gaza of resources clearly is one Israeli tactic. But a more complete and accurate statement would have been that Israel's broader goal, or "point," is to undermine support for Hamas among the residents of Gaza. Israel has not reached that goal, but it has modified its restrictions on Gaza when they proved counterproductive and generated intense international criticism.

Abramson's piece for All Things Considered on March 12, also reporting from Gaza, dealt with the problems faced by Palestinians suffering severe kidney problems and needing dialysis treatment. Abramson reported that doctors and hospitals are making heroic efforts to help such patients but often lack the medical supplies and equipment they need to give adequate treatment. He said "the reasons for the supply shortages are many" but then gave only one reason: "Israel restricts what can come in and out of Gaza." A more complete, and fairer statement, would have noted that the health care system in Gaza also has suffered because of such problems as Palestinian financial difficulties (some self-inflicted and some caused by Israel) and political feuding between Hamas (which runs Gaza) and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The World Health Organization detailed these and other problems in a December 2012 report on Gaza's health system.

Voices

Using the same technique of previous reports, I counted the number of times listeners heard from Israelis and Arabs (including Palestinians) in the 81 radio items under review, both on tape and in quotes. Overall, the voices of 70 Israelis and 30 Arabs appeared on tape; some individuals appeared in multiple stories or interviews. All of the Arab voices were Palestinians.
In addition, 34 of the radio stories or interviews during this period quoted Israelis and 28 items quoted Arabs (most of whom were Palestinians). Some individuals (notably the Israeli prime minister) were quoted multiple times. By "quoted" I mean all statements, not on tape, attributed either to named individuals or to groups, such as "analysts" or "Israelis" or "Palestinians."

Along with the aggregate counts mentioned above, I counted the appearances on tape, or in quotes, of individual Israeli and Palestinian government officials and opinion leaders. The purpose of this exercise is to determine how often listeners hear from decision-makers and influential individuals on both sides. Following is a summary, which also includes individuals who frequently appeared on NPR's air in the past but were absent during this quarter:

**Israelis:**
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: On tape in 5 items; Quoted in 23 items
- President Shimon Peres: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Ambassador Michael Oren: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 1 item
- Defense Minister (outgoing) Ehud Barak: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 1 item
- Politician Naftali Bennett: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 4 items
- Politician Yair Lapid: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 4 items
- Politician Tzipi Livni: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 1 item
- Government spokesman Yigal Palmor: On tape in 0 items; Quoted on 0 items
- Government spokesman Jonathan Peled: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Government spokesman Mark Regev: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Army spokeswoman Avital Liebovitch: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Kadima Party Leader Shaul Mofaz: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Former deputy Yuval Diskin: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Former official Dore Gold: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Settlements leader Dani Dayan: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Political scientist Yaron Ezrahi: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Political scientist Ruevan Hazan: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Journalist Amos Harel: On tape in 1 item; Quoted on 0 items
- Journalist Aluf Benn: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Journalist Avi Issacharoff: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Journalist David Horovitz: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Other Israelis on tape: 50

**Palestinians**
- President Mahmoud Abbas: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 4 items
- Prime Minister Salam Fayyad: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Palestinian spokesman Ghassan Khatib: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
These numbers show that NPR listeners heard much more often from Israelis, including their leaders, during the quarter than from Palestinians. This imbalance was to be expected because of the Israeli elections in January. Once again, I must note that NPR reporters and shows only infrequently quote Palestinian leaders, particularly the Hamas rulers of Gaza; during this quarter, Hamas figures did not appear on air at all.

**Identification of voices.** Sheera Frenkel's *January 1* piece about Gaza, noted above, failed to provide adequate identification of Sari Bashi, described only as "executive director of the Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement in Tel Aviv." Bashi's quote made it clear that she is sympathetic toward the people of Gaza, but Frenkel also should have given more description of her organization, an Israeli non-profit whose stated goal "is to protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians, especially Gaza residents."

Several times in the past I have suggested that NPR reporters and shows should give more extensive background about think tanks and advocacy groups when their scholars or representatives are quoted on-air. In fact, this has been articulated as official newsroom policy by senior news executives. I believe clearer identification is particularly necessary when quoting someone from an organization with an institutional viewpoint but which has a generic-sounding name.

One such think tank is the [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org), representatives of which often are quoted in stories about the Middle East. Although it has worked hard to position itself as a non-partisan, unbiased source of information, the
institute clearly has a strong pro-Israel perspective, perhaps befitting its origins as a spin-off from the powerful lobby, the American-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC). Even though scholars at the institute have a wide range of views, it is fair and appropriate to call the institute itself a "pro-Israel" (or even an "Israel-centric") think tank. Michele Kelemen should have done so in her February 5 piece for Morning Edition, quoting Matthew Levitt, head of the institute's counter-terrorism program. Talk of the Nation host Neal Conan also could have given a similar description on February 11 when introducing Andrew Tabler, a senior fellow at the institute's Program on Arab Politics.

Range of voices.

NPR listeners heard a reasonably broad range of viewpoints from Israel, courtesy of coverage of the January 22 Israeli elections. Attempting to explain Israel's fractious political system, Larry Abramson sought out Israelis across the spectrum, from far-right nationalists to center-leftists, the latter of whom have been in the minority in recent decades.

One striking example was Abramson's January 18 piece for All Things Considered, which quoted a voter expressing the kind of hard-line views that are the bedrock of political parties even to the right of Prime Minister Netanyahu's Likud. Gladys Carlin said she was supporting a new far-right party headed by Naftali Bennett, a former Netanyahu aide, because "I want a check on him," referring to the prime minister. "It's the Arabs who won't come to the table and it's the Arabs who really hate us and don't want to make peace," Carlin told Abramson. "And nobody seems to get that."

Because there was so little coverage from the Palestinian side during the quarter (just five stories), listeners did not hear a very wide range of Palestinian voices.

The Israeli Election

NPR's coverage of the region was dominated during much of January and early February by Israel's January 22 election and its aftermath. Israel's political system has been unusually unstable during the past decade, with a revolving cast of political parties — some of them focused around a single charismatic leader, or a single issue.
The instability was in evidence again this year, when a once-influential centrist party (Kadima) founded by former prime minister Ariel Sharon faded into the background, and two new parties emerged under young, dynamic leaders. One of the new parties is Yesh Atid, founded by broadcaster Yair Lapid, himself the son of a former journalist who started a centrist party that did well in one election then collapsed. NPR's Larry Abramson aptly described Lapid as Israel's "hope and change candidate" — a charismatic leader, like Barack Obama, who channeled the desires of many young Israelis disenchanted with the status quo. The other new party, Habayit Hayehudi (Jewish Home), is headed by Naftali Bennett, a former Netanyahu aide who ran well to the right of his former boss. Lapid and Bennett had little in common, aside from their youth, but both were willing to take on the so-called religious parties representing the ultra-Orthodox.

Abramson, filling in as NPR's Jerusalem correspondent for three months, generally did an excellent job of keeping listeners up to date on an exceptionally complex and volatile election campaign. He had to explain new political forces that were somewhat ambiguous, while keeping up with voter sentiment that shifted dramatically toward the end of the campaign, especially in the last four days after polling stopped, under Israeli law.

One element missing from most of NPR's coverage was historical context. Listeners (and website readers) were given little sense of how this election fit into the pattern of Israel's fluctuating political system, or, indeed, why the mood of Israeli voters appeared to be so much more volatile this year than in the past.

On election day, Israeli voters clearly rebuked Netanyahu, giving only 31 seats (out of 120 in the Knesset) to the coalition he had crafted between his own center-right Likud Party and the Yisrael Beiteinu Party, which largely represented Russian immigrants. Lapid's brand new Yesh Atid finished in second place, with 19 seats, beating out several other long-standing parties, including the once-dominant center-left Labor Party, which won only 15 seats.

The election results caught everyone by surprise, including several commentators and "experts" quoted on NPR. For example, on January 18, just four days before the voting, columnist Jeffrey Goldberg, speaking from Jordan during a reporting trip to the region, sounded very much as if he expected a triumph by right-wing parties. "I think if
you're a settler, you're feeling pretty good about this election," he told All Things Considered listeners. Goldberg noted that Netanyahu was "competing against his own right" and thus playing for the votes of settlers. Goldberg also noted that Israel's "right-wing block has become more right-wing," a statement that held up in the election results and may have, in fact, reflected some of the problems Netanyahu confronted with the broader electorate.

Most news coverage, including by NPR, characterized the results as an almost even balance, of roughly 60 seats each, between right-wing parties and center-left parties, when the small Palestinian-Arab parties were factored in on the side of the center-left. In his morning-after report for Morning Edition on January 23, Abramson noted that Netanyahu would have to "work the phones and try to form a government that won't lead to another surprise, by falling apart prematurely."

A veteran politician (and, by now, Israel's second longest-serving prime minister), Netanyahu did work the phones, but it took seven weeks of intense bargaining. In mid-March, he finally cobbled together an unsteady government, including his own coalition party and those of the two upstarts, Lapid and Bennett. Left out were the religious parties, which in one form or another had taken part in Israeli governments for decades. Lapid and Bennett were each given cabinet posts (Lapid in the top post of finance minister), but Netanyahu kept for himself the position of foreign minister, which previously had been held by his controversial coalition partner, Avigdor Lieberman.

Abramson told All Things Considered listeners on March 14 that Netanyahu had managed to form his government "just in time for the arrival of President Obama" the following week.

President Obama's Visit

Overseas trips by U.S. presidents normally are theatrical events more than substantive ones. All the speculation prior to President Obama's March trip to the Middle East — including his first visit to Israel, as president — was that it would be all theater. For example, White House correspondent Scott Horsley told Weekend Edition Sunday listeners on March 17 that the White House had lowered expectations for the trip because "if you don't expect much, then it's harder to be disappointed."
Despite the White House stage management, Abramson told Morning Edition listeners on March 20 that "a lot of Israelis I talked to are incredibly excited" about the visit. Abramson did note that "there is some mistrust" between Obama and Netanyahu, and Abramson and others told NPR listeners in advance of the trip that many ordinary Israelis simply did not like or trust Obama.

One interesting point that emerged from the run-up to Obama's trip was that each side's top diplomat in the United States — Israeli ambassador Michael Oren and the Palestinian observer to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour — told Morning Edition listeners that the existing situation is not "sustainable." Host Steve Inskeep interviewed Oren on March 15 and Mansour on March 19. Both diplomats told Inskeep that the current situation cannot continue for either side, but, of course, they gave diametrically opposite explanations for who was to blame and what each side must do if progress is to be made. In the past each side often has accused the other of stalling for time. If the diplomats really meant what they said in the Morning Edition interviews — obviously a big if — that might suggest a growing recognition that neither side can afford to stall forever.

Another fascinating discussion took place on March 19 on Talk of the Nation, when substitute host Lynn Neary interviewed Harvard law professor Robert Mnookin about the art of negotiating intractable conflicts — whether between nations or individuals. Mnookin said a key step is getting both sides to "be a little more empathetic" about the constraints facing those on the other side of the negotiating table. "I wish, for example, that the Israeli government would more often think about what might be done to strengthen the hand of the Palestinian moderates who might well want their leaders to negotiate," Mnookin said. "And similarly, I think the Palestinian leaders can think about: What might we do that could lessen the tensions behind the table among Israeli Jews?"

Someone who might have listened to that advice was Barack Obama, who two days later, in his keynote speech in Jerusalem, asked people on both sides to recognize the needs of the other side.

Readers of the website found an excellent overview, by Greg Myre on March 19, of the challenges facing any U.S. effort to restart the peace talks. Myre noted that the
Israelis and Palestinians both have domestic reasons for their inability, or unwillingness, to take the politically difficult steps necessary for any peace agreement to succeed.

Also in the run-up to Obama's trip, *All Things Considered* on March 19 aired two stories about a planned Israeli settlement on the West Bank that has become a flashpoint: the so-called E-1 (for East-1) settlement just east of Jerusalem. Larry Abramson reported from both sides, including from the large settlement of Ma'ale Adumim that would be linked to Jerusalem with the construction of E-1. Abramson quoted the mayor of Ma'ale Adumim as saying that his constituents need more housing for their growing families, housing that E-1 would provide. Abramson also quoted Palestinians and other settlement opponents as saying Israel's real goal in building E-1 is to cut off the Palestinian portions of the West Bank from East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want as their capital.

In a companion piece, Sheera Frenkel reported from the Palestinian side. This piece gave listeners a clear, if startling, understanding of the difficulties Palestinians already face in traveling around the West Bank — and the added difficulties they would face once E-1 is built.

Once President Obama was in the Middle East, there was plenty of theater, of course, but he did wade into substance much more than anyone had expected. The highlight was a dramatic speech to young people in Israel, on March 21, that obviously was intended to help revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. NPR radio shows covered the speech with two stories: a news report by Abramson for *All Things Considered* right after the speech, and a wrap-up report by Scott Horsley for *Morning Edition* the next day. Possibly because Obama did so many different things on the trip, with a very tight schedule, neither of those reports went into depth about the speech or analyzed its significance. However, website blogger Eyder Peralta did post extended excerpts from the speech shortly after Obama delivered it.

Overall, NPR covered Obama's trip with 16 stories and interviews on its radio shows and six reports (and one set of cartoons) on its website.

One impression is that much of NPR's coverage of the trip sounded as if the president had gone only to the State Department, or to one of Washington's many think tanks, rather than to the Middle East. This is because listeners heard very few Israeli or Palestinian voices — all of them in short sound bites. Instead, listeners heard many of the
same Washington- or U.S.-based voices who frequently appear on NPR's air. For example:

– Two shows, *Talk of the Nation* on March 20 and *All Things Considered* on March 22, did extensive interviews with Aaron David Miller, a former U.S. diplomat who now is a vice president at the Wilson Center in Washington and an articulate commentator on U.S. Middle East policy (and a frequent guest on NPR’s air).

– NPR’s final wrap-up news story about the trip, by White House correspondent Scott Horsley, aired on *Weekend Edition Saturday* on May 23, as the president was heading home. This was a fine news piece that summarized some of the key points from the trip. But Horsley fell into the same trap as many other Washington-based reporters: relying too heavily on Washington-based voices to comment on overseas events. In this piece, Horsley quoted Haim Malka, who used to live in Israel but is now a Middle East expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Jeremy Ben-Ami, who founded *J Street*, a pro-Israel lobbying group, as a centrist alternative to the increasingly conservative AIPAC. (Ben-Ami also appeared in Horsley's piece for *Morning Edition* on March 21, the day Obama landed in Israel). Horsley obviously was reporting on a tight deadline, but he would have done his listeners a favor by letting them hear directly from Israelis and Palestinians about what Obama accomplished on his trip. To be fair, Horsley did include tape from one Israeli student and one Palestinian in his March 22 piece for *Morning Edition* about Obama's big speech in Jerusalem.

– *All Things Considered* on March 22 turned to the man who seems to be NPR's current all-purpose analyst about the Middle East, former diplomat Aaron David Miller. As always, Miller had thought-provoking things to say — but, of course, his perspective is that of a veteran American diplomat and analyst, not that of Israelis or Palestinians.

– Similarly, *Tell Me More* host Michel Martin had a discussion about Obama's trip on March 25 with Peter Beinart, a journalism professor and editor of the Open Zion blog on *The Daily Beat*, and Saeed Khan, a history lecturer at Wayne State University. Both are perceptive analysts with interesting comments about Obama's trip. But, once again, NPR's listeners also deserve to hear comments from people whose daily lives can be affected when U.S. presidents come to their lands.
The Hagel Controversy

I have included in this review NPR's coverage of President Obama's nomination of former senator Chuck Hagel as secretary of defense. Among the chief arguments Republicans made against the nomination of Hagel (himself a lifelong Republican) was that he was anti-Israel, or at least not sufficiently supportive of Israel, and might even be anti-Semitic. NPR's radio shows carried ten news stories and interviews that addressed Hagel's views about the Middle East in general and Israel in particular; the website carried four such items.

Although NPR's news reporting about the Hagel controversy was fair, I found that the two main daily news programs, Morning Edition and All Things Considered, allowed Hagel's critics to make irresponsible ad hominem attacks that were unsupported by any significant evidence.

The first case was a January 7 interview by All Things Considered of Elliott Abrams, a former Reagan administration official who now is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Abrams lashed out at Hagel with repeated attacks, saying the former Republican senator was "certainly quite antagonistic toward Israel" and "seems to have some kind of problem with Jews." Host Melissa Block tried repeatedly to draw specifics from Abrams to support his assertions, beyond vague quotes from various sources, but he deftly sidestepped her quest for actual facts. Ombudsman Edward Schumacher-Matos discussed this interview in his blog on January 27.

On January 8, Morning Edition carried a joint interview with Danielle Pletka, a vice president at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, and Vali Nasr, a policy analyst who worked for the State Department during Obama's first term and now serves as dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Nasr discussed the Hagel nomination in serious policy terms, but Pletka launched into visceral attacks against Hagel as someone who "has omni-directionally managed to offend everybody." In one smear, Pletka said: "I don’t want to indict the man by who's come out to support him but any time that you get positive ratings by the press TV in Iran, it's probably not a good sign." Host Steve Inskeep, normally adept at challenging unfounded or outrageous statements during interviews, seemed unable to do so in this case.
In contrast to these aggressive attacks, *Talk of the Nation* on **January 30** offered a thoughtful *conservation* with the ubiquitous Aaron David Miller. Miller's 2008 book, *The Much Too Promised Land*, included some of the quotes from Hagel that opponents used to claim he was anti-Semitic and anti-Israel. Miller told host Neal Conan that "Chuck Hagel is not an anti-Semite. I don't think he's an enemy or adversary of the state of Israel." In reality, Miller argued, Hagel believes "in what I would call a special relationship with the state of Israel, but not an exclusive one." Opposition to Hagel's nomination had less to do with Hagel himself than with Republican opposition to President Obama in general, he added.

**Website**

In addition to reviewing NPR's on-air coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (and related matters), I reviewed relevant coverage on the NPR website, NPR.org. During the January-March quarter, NPR.org carried 34 items with some connection to the Middle East conflict. These items were in addition to the website versions of stories that aired originally on NPR's radio shows.

Of the 34 website-only items:

- 17 items were news-related postings by NPR's *Two-Way* and other blogs;
- 6 were news reports or background pieces by the Associated Press selected by NPR staff and edited for inclusion on the "Mideast" topic page of the website. In general, these reports are available for about one month after the initial posting, and thus, unfortunately, do not provide a permanent record of news events for users of NPR's website. I did not review dozens of other AP stories that were automatically, and temporarily, available on NPR's website through an automated process known as "auto-feed." It is my understanding that such items are not selected or edited in any way by NPR staff.
- 6 were news or analysis stories by NPR reporters or editors;
- 2 were picture shows;
- 1 was a movie review;
- 1 was a pairing of cartoons from feature syndicates;
• 1 was a national high school debate topic.

In terms of dominant focus among these 34 website-only items:

• 8 items focused primarily on Israel (4 of them on the elections);
• 3 items focused primarily on the Palestinians;
• 5 focused about evenly on Israel and the Palestinians;
• 5 focused on U.S. policies (including the Hagel nomination);
• 4 focused on U.S. relations with Israel, notably Obama's visit there;
• 9 items focused on various other matters with some connection to Israel and/or the Palestinians.

Of the 34 website-only items, 21 quoted Israelis and 11 quoted Arabs (including Palestinians).

On the whole, website-only items met NPR's basic journalistic standards for accuracy, fairness and balance.