For the third year in a row, NPR news shows devoted relatively little attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (and related events) during the summer months. Shows aired only 50 reporter pieces and interviews on these topics during the July to September quarter; the average is 100 for most quarters. This was similar to the limited coverage during the summer months in both 2007 and 2008.

The items reviewed for this report generally met NPR's high journalistic standards, notably for accuracy and fairness. However, this report discusses cases in which reporters and shows:

- failed to give adequate identification for sources quoted on air,
- failed to attribute information, and
- failed to tell listeners about opposing views.

### Accuracy

NPR has aired and posted on its website two corrections for the period:

- On July 27, All Things Considered (ATC) corrected a reference in the intro to a July 23 interview, that "millions of Palestinians became refugees at the end of the 1948 war." The correction noted that, while millions of Palestinians are now considered refugees, the actual number of original refugees during the war has been estimated at about 750,000. That is the figure used by the UN's Palestinian refugee agency.

- On August 5, ATC corrected a reference in Peter Kenyon's feature piece aired on August 4, which had said Israel "was attacked by Syria and other Arab states in June 1967." The correction noted that Israel struck first, after Egypt expelled UN troops from the Sinai Peninsula and closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships.

Following are concerns about two other items during this period:
– In her two-way with *Weekend All Things Considered (WATC)* on August 16, Lourdes Garcia-Navarro described a gun battle between Hamas security forces and members of a more radical Islamist faction. She said: "Gaza is almost completely isolated, Israel and Egypt have closed their borders to it…" Later, she said: "Israel has imposed harsh restrictions on Gaza, and Egypt also keeps its border mostly closed off as well."

The first statement, that Israel and Egypt "have closed their borders" to Gaza, is too broad. Until recently, Egypt had totally closed off the crossing at Rafah. Israel has tightly controlled commerce and shipments at its border crossings with Gaza but on most days currently does allow dozens (or even hundreds) of trucks to carry supplies into Gaza. As a result, it is incorrect, as a general matter, to say that Israel has "closed" its border with Gaza because that statement implies that nothing gets through. Ordinary Gazans cannot cross into Israel or even arrange shipments of personal or commercial goods from Israel, but the border is not totally closed. It would have been better to say that Egypt has closed the border with Gaza and Israel has tightly restricted its border crossings into Gaza.

Israeli authorities probably would contest the characterization that "Israel has imposed harsh restrictions on Gaza." Given the circumstances, however, such a characterization is accurate and justified.

– In her two-way with *Morning Edition* on September 23, Garcia-Navarro described Danny Ayalon as "Israel's deputy prime minister." Ayalon is Israel's deputy foreign minister.

**Fairness and Balance**

Using the same method as for previous reports, I determined the "dominant focus" of each piece, interview, or two-way covered by this report for the period. For the purposes of this report, a two-way is a discussion between a show host and an NPR reporter; an interview is between a show host and someone from outside NPR. The term "dominant focus" describes the overall subject matter and does not necessarily mean that the piece or interview takes sides. Of the 50 radio items reviewed for this report,

- 7 had a dominant focus on Israel;
• 9 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians;
• 6 focused about equally on those two sides;
• 14 focused on various aspects of U.S. policy toward the Middle East (including relations with Israel, the Palestinians, and Iran);
• and the others focused on other specific matters, for example Iran's reported efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

Given the relatively small number of items under review, the above figures represent reasonably balanced coverage of the region. One might have wished for more coverage of some events and trends, but there is no evidence that NPR focused on one side at the expense of others.

I do have comments about "balance" issues in the following items:

– An August 8 interview by Weekend All Things Considered with British historian David Cesarani offered a fascinating bit of history from the period leading up to the founding of Israel in 1948. Cesarani is the author of a recent book, Major Farran's Hat, which tells the story of a 1947 incident that he believes contributed to Britain's decision to wash its hands of Palestine.

  My concern is that the intro led listeners to believe this interview would focus on the "Jewish terrorists" who battled British rule in Palestine at the time. The interview did deal with bombings and other attacks by Jewish groups, but the Jewish terrorism angle served more as background to the discussion than as the principal focus. It is understandable that the show would want to pique listeners’ interest by using a dramatic, even provocative, opening. But given the sensitivity of this topic, it would have been better to err on the side of caution and simply tell listeners they were about to hear a little-known story that helps explain why Britain abandoned Palestine after World War II, thus enabling Israel to come into being.

– Garcia-Navarro's August 11 piece for ATC, recapping the Fatah (political) party conference the previous week, did a very good job of summing up the political challenges facing Fatah, which used to dominate Palestinian political life. However, the piece focused primarily on personalities and dealt only briefly with the policy platform Fatah also adopted at the meeting. That platform, the full text of which had not been released at
the time, reportedly included language favoring peace talks. However, the platform also restated Fatah's long-held advocacy of resistance to Israel "in all its forms."

Garcia-Navarro's piece mentioned this but did not include the Israeli reaction. Key members of the current Israeli government (including Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Defense Minister Ehud Barak) focused on that element of the Fatah platform and denounced it as indicating that Israel does not have a viable partner for peace talks. Listeners should have been told about the Israeli reaction, even if it was predictable.

– Garcia-Navarro's September 10 piece for ATC set the background for a previously announced plan by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to establish a Palestinian state in two years. The piece should have given listeners reaction from two of the parties in a position to impede the plan’s success: Israel and Hamas. Citing different reasons, Israeli officials and Hamas both rejected Fayyad's plan shortly after it was announced on August 25. Neither reaction was reported in the piece, however.

Voices

Because NPR shows aired a relatively small number of stories about the region, the number and range of voices appearing on air was very limited. Using the same technique of previous reports, I counted the number of times Israelis and Arabs (including Palestinians and Lebanese) appeared in the 50 radio items under review, both on tape and in quotes.

Overall, 32 Israelis and 38 Arabs (including Palestinians) appeared on tape; some individuals appeared on tape multiple times. Of the Arabs, 31 were Palestinians and the rest were other nationalities.

In addition, 24 items that aired during this period quoted Israelis and 19 items quoted Arabs (including Palestinians); some individuals were quoted multiple times. "Quotes" means all statements, not on tape, attributed either to named individuals or to groups, such as "analysts" or "Palestinians."

The overall conclusion from the above numbers is that NPR listeners heard a reasonably balanced number of Israeli and Arab voices in the 50 stories under review.
I also counted the appearances (or lack thereof) on tape, or in quotes, of individual Israelis and Palestinians, including officials and opinion leaders. Following is a summary:

**Israelis:**
- Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 6 items  
- President Shimon Peres: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items  
- Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 1 item  
- Defense Minister Ehud Barak: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 0 items  
- Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Ambassador Michael Oren: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 1 item  
- Spokesman Mark Regev: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Spokesman Yigal Palmor: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Spokeswoman Avital Leibovitch: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Spokesman Jonathan Peled: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Academic/activist Gerald Steinberg: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Activist Yehuda Shaul: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Other Israelis on tape: 20  

**Palestinians**
- President Mahmoud Abbas: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items  
- Prime Minister Salam Fayyad: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items  
- Hamas leader Khalid Meshaal: On tape in 0 items; quoted in 0 items  
- Diplomat Saeb Erekat: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Fatah Council member Nabil Shaath: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Fatah Council member Abdullah Abdullah: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items  
- Other Palestinians on tape: 27  

The overall conclusion from the above table is that NPR listeners heard very little during the quarter from Israeli or Palestinian leaders and top officials. Indeed, this was one of the few periods in recent years during which listeners did not hear the voices of either the Israeli prime minister or the Palestinian president (the latter was not even quoted).

**Identification of voices.** Once again, NPR reporters and shows seem be to slipping back into old habits of failing to give adequate identification of individuals and institutions unfamiliar to many listeners. Following are several examples from this period:
Peter Kenyon's July 7 piece for ATC, focusing on the Palestinian militant group Hizb ut-Tahrir, included tape of Khalil Shaheen, identified only as "senior editor at Al-Ayyam newspaper." It is unlikely that many NPR listeners know that Al-Ayyam is one of the most prominent newspapers in the Palestinian territories and is closely affiliated with the Fatah movement and the Palestinian Authority.

The intro to this piece also mentioned "the air of tension [in Ramallah] that marked the second intifada." The piece did not explain for listeners that the second intifada was a period of Palestinian violent resistance against Israel from 2000 to about 2004. The Second World War does not need such an explanation for Americans (at least not yet), but the second intifada does.

Kenyon's July 15 piece for Morning Edition centered on a new report from the left-wing Israeli group Breaking the Silence, which has drawn attention to what it claims were Israeli military atrocities during the Gaza war. The piece included tape from two anonymous Israeli soldiers making statements about abuses they said they witnessed; tape from a leader of Breaking the Silence, Yehuda Shaul; plus a defense of the military from an Israeli army spokesman.

After NPR aired its first report about allegations from Breaking the Silence on March 26, I criticized the lack of background information about the group and a failure to include information about other media reports that cast some doubt on the group's allegations. The July 15 piece also failed to provide any meaningful information about Breaking the Silence and its agenda. It also relied on anonymous sources, which violated NPR’s policy, and did not explain why NPR allowed the soldiers anonymity.

In general, the July 15 piece should have provided more context about the latest development on a months-long controversy over alleged Israeli abuses during the war. Many earlier allegations by Israeli soldiers were based on hearsay evidence, enabling the military to dismiss them as unsubstantiated claims. The statements cited in the July 15 report were anonymous but, according to Breaking the Silence, were based on first-person evidence. The intro and the piece itself should have made all this more clear for listeners.

In the weeks after Breaking the Silence released its report, the Israeli government launched a campaign to deprive the group of its funding from European governments.
Israel demanded that Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, and other countries stop supporting the group and other groups that had criticized Israel's actions during the Gaza war. As a result, it is clear that Breaking the Silence is a controversial group in Israel. However, NPR has not reported on this controversy even though it has twice reported on the group's allegations.

In the July 15 piece, Kenyon also should have attributed his statement that "hundreds of Palestinian civilians" were killed in the Gaza war. Most Palestinian sources have claimed that more than 1,000 civilians died, while the Israeli government has put the civilian death toll at just under 300. "Hundreds" is much too broad a characterization under any circumstance, and it is particularly problematic given the politically charged dispute over how many civilians were killed. A better alternative would have been a range of casualty figures, with attributions given for each end of the range.

– Kenyon's August 2 piece for Weekend Edition Sunday, focusing on a Palestinian school in Gaza that was destroyed by Israeli bombs during the December-January war, needed more information about the school, particularly because of its name: the American International School in Gaza. Most listeners probably were surprised to hear about an American school in Gaza. Judging by its website, this school appears to be a Palestinian project whose primary American connection is a pending affiliation with U.S. accrediting agencies.

– Mike Shuster's August 25 piece for Morning Edition (part of a series about Iran's nuclear ambitions) included tape from Muhammad Sahimi. Shuster described him as a writer for the web site Tehran Bureau and "a long-time critic of Iran's conservative government." This was fine as far as it went, but listeners would not know whether Sahimi is an Iranian (and, if so, whether he still lives in Iran) or an American, or anything else about him. A more complete description would have said Sahimi is an Iranian-American professor of chemical engineering at the University of Southern California who writes for left-of-center blogs in the United States.

– Garcia-Navarro's piece for ATC on September 21, concerning Israel's reaction to a controversial United Nations report on the Gaza war, failed to give listeners enough information about two Israeli voices. Jessica Montell was described as executive director of B'Tselem, "an Israeli human rights group." Although Montell said her group's criticism
of the Israeli government "can be quite harsh," the piece should have given listeners a bit more background about the long-running disputes between B'Tselem and the Israeli government. The piece also quoted Gerald Steinberg, an Israeli professor who also runs a group called NGO Monitor. The piece should have made much more clear that Steinberg's group has an agenda of attacking human rights groups and other non-governmental agencies that are critical of Israel (but has little to say about groups supportive of Israel).

**Range of voices.** The range of voices heard on air was more limited than usual. Listeners did hear from nearly 10 ordinary Palestinians as the result of Kenyon's reporting in the West Bank and Gaza during July. Kenyon's **July 7** piece for *ATC* on the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir included tape from a member of that group — the first that I can recall in the six-plus years I have been reviewing NPR coverage.

At the other end of the spectrum, Kenyon's **July 22** piece for *Morning Edition* about brisk real estate sales in Jewish settlements on the West Bank, included tape from the mayor of the Maale Adumim settlement, who said he and fellow settlers would band together "and will not let our government compromise" with President Obama.

Otherwise, listeners heard very little during the quarter from ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, or from political leaders, for that matter.

**Other Matters**

– Two pieces by Kenyon gave listeners needed updates about the situation in Gaza. One was a **July 13** piece for *ATC* on the launching of the UN's effort to clear rubble from Gaza. The second was the **August 2** piece for Weekend Edition Sunday about a school that was destroyed by Israeli bombs.

NPR gave its listeners generally superb coverage of the month-long war during last winter but pretty much has ignored the consequences ever since. By my count, the July 13 piece was only the fourth piece about reconstruction (or the lack of it) in Gaza
since the war ended. (The other stories were in January, March, and April; another piece in May dealt with Israel's restrictions on aid deliveries into Gaza.)

Listeners have heard too little about the state of social services and other aspects of daily life in Gaza or about the political situation there. Similarly, listeners have heard almost nothing about life in the Israeli towns bordering Gaza now that they have experienced several months with relative freedom from Palestinian rocket attacks.

– Kenyon's **August 4** piece for *ATC* about the disputed village of Ghajar along the borders of Israel, Lebanon and Syria, noted that Ghajar "is an Alawite village." Very few listeners can be expected to know anything about the Alawites, so this reference should have been more complete. Fortunately, the text version on the web did offer an explanation: "Alawites, a minority sect of Shiite Muslims, live mainly in Syria."

**Website**

During this quarter NPR's website, npr.org, carried 10 stories related to the Middle East conflict, in addition to posts of stories that aired on radio shows. Of these 10 stories, 6 were Associated Press news reports, two were postings on the Two-Way blog, and two were feature pieces written by NPR correspondent Corey Flintoff. Each item met NPR's basic journalistic standards.

**Iran Series**

During the last week of August, NPR shows ran a multi-part series entitled "The Challenges of a Nuclear Iran." The pieces in this series covered the gamut of policy and political questions faced by leaders of Western and Middle Eastern nations as they contemplate the possibility that Iran will develop nuclear weapons in coming years. Only three pieces in the series are covered by this review due to their significant references to Israel: Mary Louise Kelly’s **August 24** piece on *Morning Edition* examining U.S. options for dealing with a nuclear-armed Iran; Mike Shuster’s **August 25**
piece on *Morning Edition*, examining whether Cold War-type deterrence could be effective in the case of Iran; and Lourdes Garcia-Navarro’s **August 26** piece on *All Things Considered* reporting on Israel's anxieties about potential threats posed by Iranian nuclear weapons.

In the **August 24** piece concerning U.S. military options, Kelly posed a misleading dichotomy. After several comments from experts on the pros and cons of a military attack against Iran, Kelly said: "Still, as Iran inches closer to a bomb, the risks of military action must be weighed against the risk of doing nothing – a calculation that U.S. officials, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, are well aware of."

This statement ignores the existence of other options, including the one that the Bush and Obama administrations have relied on so far: negotiating with Iran and using international sanctions to keep up the pressure on the Iranian government. Other pieces in the series discussed these options in some detail, and this piece did have one reference to diplomacy. However, with that one rather dramatic statement about war or doing nothing, the piece gave listeners a misleading impression that military action is the only real alternative to standing by while Iran builds nuclear weapons. A better alternative would have been to say that "military action must be weighed against the risk that diplomacy, sanctions, and other options might fail to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions...."