NPR Mideast Coverage
July - September 2013

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

NPR covered these developments with 46 stories and interviews on the radio shows for which it is solely responsible: Morning Edition, Tell Me More, All Things Considered and Weekend Edition. Beginning with this quarter, I also am reviewing some of the related coverage on Here and Now, produced by WBUR in Boston in collaboration with NPR. I review stories and interviews on that show only when they feature NPR journalists; two such reports are included in this review. I do not review coverage by other public radio programs that are distributed by NPR but not produced by it, for example The Diane Rehm Show, Fresh Air, and On Point with Tom Ashbrook.

In addition to stories aired on the radio, I have reviewed 25 blogs, news stories, and other items on NPR's website related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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 Here and Now stories, which can be found on WBUR's website. In addition, Associated Press news stories selected and edited by NPR staff 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 on this topic remains remarkably accurate despite the time pressures of the 24-hour news cycle.

NPR posted two sets of corrections during the period for items subject to my review:
A September 1 report for Weekend Edition Sunday by Jerusalem correspondent Emily Harris brought two corrections. First, the report incorrectly said a group of Ethiopian Jews being flown to Israel would be the last in "a nearly 40-year-long effort." NPR corrected this on September 4 to note that the transfer of Jews from Ethiopia to Israel had been under way for nearly 30 years. The same report incorrectly said one theory traced the origin of Jews in Ethiopia to "wars with Rome, around 500 B.C." The correction said the wars were with Babylon (in modern-day Iraq), not Rome.

In a piece for All Things Considered on September 27 about Palestinian-Syrian refugees in the Gaza Strip, Harris said one family were refugees "from the 1948 war that led to the creation of Israel." A correction posted on September 30 noted that "the creation of the state of Israel led to the 1948 war."

I found no other significant factual inaccuracies, although NPR journalists did give conflicting accounts for how long it had been since Israel and the Palestinians had engaged in peace negotiations (see the Peace Talks section below).

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, subject to my review, that 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 46 radio items:

- 5 had a dominant focus on Israel;
- 2 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians;
- 1 focused about equally on Israel and the Palestinians;
- 11 focused on U.S. efforts to restart peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians;
- 13 focused on various regional aspects of the civil war in Syria, including 6 that focused on Israel's concerns, 3 that focused on U.S. policy toward Syria, 2 that
described Palestinian refugees from Syria, and 2 that focused on other regional aspects;

- 4 focused on the regional impact of events related to diplomacy over Iran's alleged program to develop nuclear weapons, in particular Israel's concerns about Iran;
- The remaining 10 items focused on other matters related to Israeli-Palestinian issues.

Individual items aired during the quarter generally met basic standards for fairness and balance.

Voices

Using the same technique of previous reports, I counted the number of times listeners heard from Israelis and Arabs (including Palestinians) in the 46 radio items under review, both on tape and in quotes. Overall, the voices of 36 Israelis and 30 Arabs appeared on tape; some individuals appeared in multiple stories or interviews. Of the Arab voices, 20 were Palestinians.

In addition, 25 of the radio stories or interviews during this period quoted Israelis and 21 items quoted Arabs (most of whom were Palestinians). Some individuals 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 2 items; Quoted in 5 items
President Shimon Peres: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Ambassador Michael Oren: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 1 item
Economy Minister Naftali Bennett: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Finance Minister Yair Lapid: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Justice Minister/peace envoy Tzipi Livni: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 1 item
Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Government spokesman Yigal Palmor: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Government spokesman Jonathan Peled: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Government spokesman Mark Regev: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Army spokeswoman Avital Liebovitch: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Former official Dore Gold: On tape in 0 items; 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
Political scientist Efraim Inbar: 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: 29

Palestinians
President Mahmoud Abbas: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 3 items
Former 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
Hamas "exile" leader Khaled Meshal: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Hamas official: Mahmoud Zahar: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Hamas spokesman Gazi Hamad: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Diplomat Saeb Erekat: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 1 item
Diplomat M. R. Areikat: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Diplomat Riyad Mansour: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Legislator Mustafa Barghouti: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
Palestinian official Nabil Shaath: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
Other Palestinians on tape: 18

The above numbers show that NPR listeners heard infrequently from Israelis and Palestinians during the quarter — a reflection of the relatively low number of stories about the two sides.

Identification of voices. In my reviews I often have made the point that listeners deserve some background information about the people they hear on air, especially individuals who might be unfamiliar to Americans, academics, and others held out as experts on complex topics. During this quarter I found several such cases meriting comment.
In a piece for All Things Considered on July 15, Emily Harris reported on how Israelis and Palestinians were nervously watching the tumultuous events in Egypt. Harris quoted Mukhaimer Abu Saada and identified him only as "a political analyst who lives in Gaza." Saada is a political science professor at Al-Azhar University, one of two large universities in Gaza City; it was founded in 1991 by then-Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and has been closely affiliated with Arafat's Fatah party, which lost control of Gaza to Hamas in 2007. At least in his statements to the Western news media, Saada tends to take a generally neutral position vis-a-vis the two Palestinian factions. Harris did give more detailed descriptions of the three other people whose voices appeared in the story: Ilan Mizrahi, former director of Israel's overseas spy agency, the Mossad; Ruth Wasserman Lande, a former Israeli deputy ambassador to Egypt; and Adel Abdel-Rahman, a Fatah advisor and unofficial spokesman on the West Bank.

Foreign affairs correspondent Jackie Northam, in a piece for All Things Considered on July 25, described Hussein Ibish as a "senior fellow with the American Task Force for Palestine." The task force is a pro-Palestinian think tank and lobbying group based in Washington; Ibish is an American writer and scholar who once served as Washington correspondent for Lebanon's English-language newspaper, the Daily Star. Greg Myre also gave an unclear identification of Ibish in an August 14 Parallels analysis of the chances for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Harris, in a July 29 piece for All Things Considered about Egypt's crackdown on tunnels into Gaza, quoted Omar Shaban, identifying him as a political analyst "of Pal-Think." That title offers little clarity for listeners. As I have written in previous reviews, Shaban appears to be an independent political thinker who was a staffer for Catholic Relief Services in Gaza before founding Pal-Think, which he describes as a "Gaza-based think and do tank." The website version of the story did provide a link to Pal-Think's website.

Host Linda Wertheimer interviewed Marwan Muasher for Weekend Edition Saturday on August 3 about the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, identifying him only as "of the Carnegie Endowment for International peace, where he oversees research on the Middle East." Muasher, a periodic guest on NPR news programs, should also have been

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**Context Note:**

The text above provides a detailed account of various media reports and analyses on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, including the identification of political analysts and former officials. It highlights the complexities and neutrality required in reporting on such sensitive topics. The text is a reflection of the dynamic geopolitical landscape and the challenges faced by journalists in accurately representing diverse perspectives.

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**Additional Information:**

- **Al-Azhar University:** A prominent Islamic university in Egypt, founded in 970.
- **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:** A think tank that promotes international peace, democracy, and economic development.
- **Mossad:** The Israeli national intelligence agency.
- **Daily Star:** A Lebanese English-language daily newspaper.
described as a former foreign minister of Jordan. Muasher, by the way, expressed a great deal of skepticism about the chances for success in the peace talks.

– Harris, in a September 5 piece for All Things Considered about Israel's views toward the civil war in Syria, identified Yiftah Shapir only as a "Middle East security analyst." Shapir is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, a military-oriented think tank affiliated with Tel Aviv University. His expertise has been Israel's military capabilities in relation to other countries in the region.

In contrast to the above examples, I want to cite an August 28 Two-Way blog posting by Krishnadev Calamur, describing the motives of Russia, China, and Iran for supporting the Syrian government. Among those quoted was Andranik Migranyan, who Calamur described as director of the "New York-based Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, a nongovernmental organization funded by private Russian donors that is considered close to the leadership in Moscow." This is the same language All Things Considered host Robert Siegel used the previous day in an interview with Migranyan; that interview was not subject to my review because it dealt strictly with Syria and not the impact of events there on neighboring countries.

Range of voices. Because the number of Israelis and Palestinians appearing on air was relatively small, the range of voices listeners heard from the region also was limited. Listeners heard only a handful of stories from the Palestinian territories or from ordinary Israelis. In one good example of enterprise reporting, listeners heard from Palestinian refugees who had lived in Syria but escaped the fighting there by heading to the Gaza Strip. Emily Harris described their experiences in a piece aired by All Things Considered on September 27, although she did not say how the refugees made their way from Syria to Gaza.

Syria and Israel

August and September brought significant — and somewhat surprising and confusing — developments in the two-plus-year civil war in Syria and the international response to it. The driving event was the revelation that rebel-held areas near Damascus had been attacked by chemical weapons on August 21. The United States and other
countries previously had expressed varying degrees of certainty that Syrian government forces had used chemical weapons against rebels and their supporters in northern Syria during March and April. The August attack in southern Syria seemed to confirm that the government of Bashar al-Assad was willing to use even chemical weapons in its struggle to stay in power. A U.S. government preliminary assessment of the attack, released on August 30, said 1,429 people, nearly a third of them children, died as a result of the attack and gave a "high degree of confidence" that the government was to blame.

In addition to its potential affect on the course of the civil war, the chemical weapons attack had wide-ranging regional implications — especially for Syria's neighbors that had been flooded with Syrian refugees and for Israel, technically still at war with Syria.

NPR covered these regional aspects in 14 radio reports and interviews and three website-only reports subject to my review. NPR also provided many more stories that focused directly on Syria and thus were not subject to my review. Following is a description of how NPR covered the regional implications of this story.

The first story subject to my review was a Morning Edition interview on August 27 in which Emily Harris described Israel's desire for tough action against the Assad regime. Harris noted that Israeli officials saw action — or inaction — against Syria as setting a precedent for confronting Iran over its alleged program to develop nuclear weapons. Harris said the Israelis argued that Syria's reported use of chemical weapons against rebels "proves that certain types of governments should not have access to weapons and mass destruction . . . that this attack in Syria should remind the world that action should be taken against Iran and its nuclear weapons program."

NPR also gave extensive coverage to President Obama's plan, later modified, to carry out military attacks against Syria's chemical weapons facilities. The regional dimensions were addressed in a half-dozen stories and interviews during the last week of August and the first week of September, when Obama was weighing military action and whether he could get support for it from Congress and U.S. allies. This included lengthy "special coverage" on Saturday, August 31, leading up to the president's surprising announcement that he would ask Congress to endorse an attack against the Syrian military. That Obama's decision to ask for Congressional approval was a surprise can be
seen in a statement by NPR White House correspondent Scott Horsley, just prior to the speech. Horsley said the administration did not want to go to Congress "because this is a case where better to ask forgiveness than permission."

In the days following the president's speech, NPR offered several reports on reaction in Israel. Most of these reports suggested Israelis were somewhat ambivalent about a U.S.-led attack against Syria. Israelis wanted to punish the Assad regime but worried that they might suffer the consequences of an expanded conflict. Even so, all the reporting found that Israeli leaders worried that Obama's seeming hesitation to act against Syria was another demonstration of what they saw as his reluctance to tackle the much bigger challenge of attacking Iran to halt its alleged nuclear weapons program.

In an interview with WBUR's Here & Now on September 3, Harris reported the ambivalence in Israel about the prospect of U.S. airstrikes against Syria, coupled with concern among officials about U.S. hesitation in the case of Iran. WBUR put a misleading headline on its website version of the story: "Growing Support in Israel for U.S. Action on Syria." Harris's report instead said analysts and ordinary Israelis were uncertain about what the United States should do about Syria.

Morning Edition listeners on September 4 heard a description of official Israeli concerns about Syria — and the U.S. response — not from the Israelis themselves but from a Washington expert with close ties to a broad range of Israeli leaders. David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy, affirmed what Harris had reported for Here & Now: that Israeli officials wanted the United States to take direct action against Iran but were uncertain whether military action against Syria, including toppling Assad, would be in Israel's best interests.

Another report on Israel's concerns about Syria came on All Things Considered on September 5, when Harris again reported widespread uncertainty about what should be done. Harris quoted David Horovitz, editor of the right-leaning web newspaper, Times of Israel, as expressing concern about President Obama's decision to let Congress vote on attacking Syria. The possibility that Congress might block U.S. action against Syria — or that Obama might refrain from attacking Iran — shows that "when all else fails, at a last resort, Israel needs certainly to be able to take care of itself, by itself," Horovitz said.
An analysis piece by the Associated Press, posted on NPR's website on **September 10**, gave none of the Israeli ambivalence reflected in NPR's reporting. That piece said Israel "was among the most supportive of a military strike on Syria." Even so, it said, Israel seemed generally pleased with Russia's proposal for a diplomatic solution under which Syria would surrender its chemical weapons. Another AP analysis piece, posted the following day, said "there was much angst" in Israel over what lessons Iran's religious leaders might draw from the Syria situation. That piece quoted Danny Gillerman, a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, as saying President Obama's "hesitations and weakness" showed that U.S. allies (meaning Israel) "cannot trust it."

One of Israel's most prominent political scientists, Reuvan Hazan of Hebrew University, suggested there was no ambivalence in Israel about military strikes against Syria — so long as the United States took the action, not Israel. In an interview with *Weekend Edition Sunday* about the regional impact of events in Syria, aired **September 15**, Hazan said Israel itself was in "a horrible situation" because it would face negative consequences whether or not it acted against Syria. But Israelis supported U.S. action "one hundred and ten percent," he said.

NPR listeners twice heard directly from senior Israeli officials about their attitudes toward Syria. First, in a **September 16** piece for *Morning Edition*, diplomatic correspondent Michele Kelemen quoted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as focusing on the Iranian element of the equation. "The determination the international community shows regarding Syria will have a direct impact on the Syrian regime's patron, Iran," Netanyahu said.

Three days later, Israel's outgoing ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, told *All Things Considered* that the prospect of U.S. military action had forced Syria to agree to surrender its chemical weapons; a similar threat was needed to convince Iran to give up its nuclear program, he said. Oren also said Israel "has no intention of being involved in Syria," except to respond if the Syrians "ever shoot at us."

Harris gave more background to Israel's position on weapons of mass destruction, and the treaties to control them, in a **September 23** piece for *Morning Edition*. Harris quoted two Israeli analysts as saying, in essence, that Israel benefits from its policy of
ambiguity about such weapons. As Harris noted, Israel is known to have a sizable arsenal of nuclear weapons, but it is uncertain whether Israel currently has biological and chemical weapons.

Major international events involving the Middle East inevitably have domestic political consequences for the United States. That certainly was the case for the Syria situation. Domestic reaction to Obama's threat to attack Syria ranged all over the lot, with some liberals siding with Obama's threat and many conservatives opposing it. One of the most unusual developments was that the powerful pro-Israel lobby, AIPAC — which generally is critical of Obama — sided with the president, at least as long as he threatened Syria, as well as Iran. NPR congressional correspondent David Welna reported on September 12 that AIPAC was having unusual difficulty getting members of Congress to back its position in favor of a military strike against Syria. Welna told Morning Edition listeners that some longtime supporters of Israel backed military action against Syria but others did not. Welna wrote a similar story for the website the same day.

Peace Talks

What could be an important milestone, or simply the first phase of yet another failure, took place in late July and early August: the opening of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Optimists, of whom there were very few, suggested these talks had real potential to lead to the "final status" peace agreement that has eluded political leaders and diplomats over recent decades. The much more numerous skeptics insisted Secretary of State John Kerry had embarked on little more than a fool's errand that would collapse sooner or later, possibly making the conflict even more difficult to resolve.

The United States, acting in its usual role as mediator, has imposed an unprecedented degree of silence around the talks. Some observers have seen that silence as a hopeful sign — that diplomats might be able to make progress if their every move is not subjected to intense media scrutiny.

NPR carried 11 radio stories and interviews and 8 website reports about the opening of negotiations and reaction to the talks. Here is a summary of some of NPR's coverage:
– In a piece for All Things Considered on July 29, diplomatic correspondent Michele Kelemen previewed the opening of preliminary talks in Washington between the top Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. These sessions were intended to lay the groundwork for actual negotiations.

– A Kelemen follow-up piece for Morning Edition on July 31 reported on the first day of talks and quoted Kerry, lead Israeli negotiator Tzipi Livni and lead Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat. Kelemen quoted Kerry as saying "all the key issues will be on the table," including borders, security, Palestinian refugees, and the status of Jerusalem.

– Just as the initial talks got under way, Emily Harris gave All Things Considered listeners a report illustrating, in a microcosm, the on-the-ground reality behind one of the most contentious issues facing negotiators: borders. In her August 5 report, Harris described the dispute over a fresh water spring located between the Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh and the Israeli settlement of Halamish, near Ramallah in the West Bank. The settlers' use of the spring is the subject of a weekly protest by Palestinian villagers and their international supporters. The Palestinians say the spring is an important source of fresh water for them, while the settlers insist they were the ones who developed it from a mere hole in the ground. Harris ended her report by noting that if the peace talks succeed in producing a final agreement, "the lines negotiators draw on a map would change the lives of people on this land."

– A perennial issue in any peace talks involves the large number of Palestinians in Israeli prisons — more than 6,000 as of late September, according to the leftist Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. As a "good will" gesture toward the West Bank Palestinian leadership, Israel periodically releases some prisoners, usually those nearing the end of their sentences. This happened again on August 13, the day before the formal peace negotiations were to begin. In a piece for All Things Considered, reporter Sheera Frenkel described Palestinian reaction to the release of 26 prisoners, the first of 106 Israel said it would free in coming months. Frenkel quoted two relatives as celebrating the release of prisoners who had spent years in prison, some for committing violent crimes. Frenkel also quoted the sister of an Israeli lawyer killed by one of the released prisoners. The sister questioned why the government would release prisoners "as a goodwill gesture toward the peace process that nobody believes in."
The next day, **August 14**, in a *Morning Edition* interview, Frenkel said she had walked around Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods and found no optimism on either side about the prospects for success in the negotiations.

NPR’s most detailed and comprehensive reporting on the peace talks came in a website *analysis* on **August 14** by website international editor Greg Myre, who covered previous rounds of negotiations as a Jerusalem correspondent for *The New York Times*. Myre described some of the major issues on the table, including settlements and Jerusalem, and the political challenges facing the leaders on both sides.

Unfortunately, Myre quoted only Washington-based experts and no one in Israel or the Palestinian territories. Most of NPR’s other coverage of the peace talks also featured comments only from Washington-based experts and diplomats. Aside from Frenkel's August 14 reference to the pessimism she found in Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods, NPR listeners heard little about the peace talks directly from ordinary people on either sides.

The only opportunity for listeners to hear significant commentary from senior Israeli and Palestinian spokesmen came in a Harris *piece* for *All Things Considered* on **September 2**. Harris started her report with news about the fatal shooting a week earlier, by Israeli security forces, of three Palestinian men in a large West Bank refugee camp. Both sides often take violent or provocative actions just as peace talks get under way. Sometimes such actions even disrupt the negotiations — but in this case the talks continued.

In her piece, Harris quoted several people, including a relative of one of the Palestinians killed in the refugee camp; Husam Zomlot, an official of the ruling Fatah party in the West Bank; Zalman Shoval, a former Israeli ambassador to the United States; and Hilik Bar, the speaker of the Israeli Knesset (parliament) who is a political ally of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The website gave a misleading summary and headline to this story, implying a connection between the peace talks and the fighting in Syria: "Syria Turmoil Threatens Israel-Palestinian Talks." The story itself did not make such an explicit statement. Harris did quote Knesset speaker Bar as saying that if Israel was involved in the Syria conflict
because of an American attack, "the atmosphere both in Israel and the Palestinians will be bad." Harris added that Bar said "nationalistic feelings on both sides would get stronger."

Throughout NPR's coverage of the peace talks, reporters and writers did have some trouble putting the negotiations into historical context. In particular, the reporting gave confusing accounts of how long it had been since Israelis and Palestinians actually had negotiated with one another. Here is a sampling of what NPR had to say on the subject:

– In a Two-Way blog posting on July 19, Eyder Peralta said Kerry had come closer to getting the two parties back to the negotiating table "than anyone else since 2008. . ." An updated posting the same day, by Greg Myre, said negotiations "would be the first such talks in several years."

– In a Parallels blog posting on July 23, Greg Myre said the Israelis and Palestinians haven't held peace talks "in the past three years."

– Scott Neuman, in a Two Way blog posting on July 28, reported that Israeli and Palestinian negotiations were about to sit down to peace talks, "picking up from where they left off five years ago. . ."

– Neuman used the five-year time scale again in a Two-Way blog posting on August 11, reporting on the Israeli government's approval of a plan to build 1,200 apartments in West Bank settlements. He said the July 31 meeting in Washington was "the first in five years."

– In her introduction to the August 14 interview with reporter Frenkel, Morning Edition host Renee Montagne said Israeli and Palestinian negotiations were "starting the first formal peace talks in five years."

Either the three-year or the five-year timeframe could be considered accurate, depending on what previous set of negotiations was being discussed. The most recent actual talks between the two sides took place, briefly, in September 2010, almost exactly three years before the events of 2013. At that point, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met twice face-to-face, and their negotiators continued meeting for about three weeks. The Palestinians withdrew from the negotiations after Israel refused to renew a 10-month freeze on West Bank settlements —
a freeze Israel had reluctantly agreed to, at U.S. insistence, to lure the Palestinians into negotiations.

Prior to 2010, the most significant Israeli-Palestinian negotiations took place from late 2006 until September 2008. During that time, Abbas and Israel's then-prime minister Ehud Olmert, reportedly met some three dozen times, each making significant offers that never congealed into a final agreement. Those talks failed for numerous reasons, including Abbas's loss of control over the Gaza strip in 2007 and Olmert's growing political weakness because of personal scandals. The end of those talks took place about five years before the latest ones in 2013.

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 July-September quarter, NPR.org carried 25 items with some connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These items were in addition to the website versions of stories that aired originally on NPR's radio shows.

Of the 25 website-only items:

- 15 items were news-related postings by NPR's Two-Way, Parallels, and other blogs;
- 3 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.
- 3 were news or analysis stories by NPR reporters or editors (2 by Greg Myre and 1 by David Welna); 2 were movie reviews and 1 was a book excerpt; and
- 1 was a pair of cartoons about the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

In terms of dominant focus among these 25 website-only items:

- 0 items focused primarily on Israel;
• 0 items focused primarily on the Palestinians;
• 2 items focused about evenly on Israel and the Palestinians;
• 8 items focused on U.S. efforts to restart Israel-Palestinian peace talks;
• 4 focused on regional aspects of the war in Syria;
• 3 focused on Iran;
• 8 items focused on various other matters with some connection to Israel and/or the Palestinians.

Of the 25 website-only items, 17 quoted Israelis and 9 quoted Arabs (including Palestinians).

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