This report reviews NPR's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute during the fourth quarter of 2010. It begins with an assessment of the 48 stories and interviews that aired on radio shows produced by NPR, then continues with an assessment of 23 news stories, blogs and other items posted on NPR's website.

NPR's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute was relatively limited during the quarter, even though the Obama administration devoted a great deal of effort at the time to unsuccessfully restarting peace talks between the two sides. The total of 48 radio items was one of the lowest for any period during the eight years NPR has been doing these reviews (a quarterly average over that period is about 100). During the previous quarter, there were 79 stories on the radio and 61 on the web.

In general, coverage of this story during the quarter, both on radio and on the Web, met NPR's journalistic standards. However, throughout this report I do express concerns about specific stories and trends in the coverage.

The opinions expressed in this report are mine alone.

Accuracy

As in the past, I carefully reviewed all items for factual accuracy, with special attention to the radio stories, interviews and blogs produced by NPR staffers. Despite tight deadlines and other constraints, NPR's coverage of the region has been remarkably, and consistently, accurate over the years, and this was the case again during this quarter.

NPR aired or posted no corrections of its coverage of the Israel-Palestine story during the period. I found one error that should be corrected.

I do have comments about the following:

The Israeli government debated a proposed loyalty oath that generated a great deal of controversy internationally — and also led to some confusing reporting by NPR. As initially set forth by the far-right party of Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, the proposal would
have required Israel's 1.5 million Arab citizens to swear loyalty to Israel as a Jewish state. The Israeli cabinet on October 10 approved a stripped-down version of Lieberman's plan, requiring non-Jews seeking to become naturalized Israeli citizens to swear loyalty to Israel as a "Jewish and democratic state." Eight days later, following intense international criticism of the proposal, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's office said the proposal would be changed to require all new citizens — not just non-Jews — to take that loyalty oath. The legislation is still pending, as of late January 2011.

Most of NPR's coverage of this controversy, both on air and online, described the loyalty oath controversy correctly. But I found two problems:

• An October 10 Associated Press news story on NPR.org reported cabinet approval of the loyalty oath and gave contradictory information about how many would be affected if the proposal became a law. The second paragraph stated that the measure "was largely symbolic, since few non-Jews apply for Israeli citizenship." The ninth paragraph, however, quoted the Israeli Interior Ministry saying "several thousand" people would be affected. The same paragraph also quoted an estimate by an Arab advocacy group (Adalah) that the number of affected citizens would be about 25,000 (this reportedly is the number of Israeli-Arabs married to Palestinians from the West Bank). Whether "several thousand" or about 25,000, the number of people affected would be more than the "few" cited at the top of the story. The story is no longer on NPR's website.

• A December 16 piece by reporter Sheera Frenkel, which aired on All Things Considered, reported on Israel's construction of a wall dividing Jewish and Arab residents of the Israeli city of Lod. Referring to the loyalty oath, Frenkel said it would require "all new residents [of Israel] to swear allegiance to a Jewish and democratic state." In fact, the loyalty oath was to be required of all new citizens of Israel, rather than all new residents. As with most countries, there is a major difference between citizens and residents in Israel, where many thousands of temporary residents, most of them workers from Asia, would not be affected by the loyalty oath. This should be corrected.
Fairness and Balance

Using the same method as for previous reports, I made a subjective determination of the "dominant focus" of each radio piece, interview, or two-way covered by this report. The term "dominant focus" describes the overall subject matter and does not necessarily mean that the piece or interview takes sides. Of the 48 radio items reviewed for this report:

- 7 had a dominant focus on Israel;
- 2 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians;
- 6 focused about equally on Israel and the Palestinians;
- 11 focused on U.S. efforts to revive direct peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians;
- 4 focused on developments in Lebanon, including the October visit there by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad;
- the remaining 18 items focused on other specific matters.

The overall conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that NPR's radio shows provided modest coverage of the peace process and developments within Israel but gave listeners very little information about events and trends in the Palestinian territories. This conclusion is reinforced by the relative lack of Palestinian voices heard on NPR's air during the quarter (see the "Voices" section below).

The visit of the Iranian president to Lebanon gave NPR an opportunity to update listeners on the increasingly fragile political situation in that country. Because of its history and the influence of Hezbollah, just about every major political or social event in Lebanon eventually will have an impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is why Lebanon is included in this survey.

Individual items aired during the quarter generally met basic standards for fairness and balance. However, I have comments about the following items:
– A piece by Garcia-Navarro, which aired October 21 on Morning Edition, profiled the parents of Rachel Corrie, an American pro-Palestinian activist killed by an Israeli bulldozer in 2003 while protesting Israel's demolition of a Palestinian home in Gaza. The piece focused on a civil lawsuit filed in Israel by Corrie's parents, demanding more information about the death and seeking $1 in symbolic damages. NPR's Jerusalem correspondent, Lourdes Garcia-Navarro, mentioned that an Israeli military investigation had ruled at the time that Corrie's death was an accident. However, the piece failed to give an adequate or updated response from the Israeli government to the Corrie lawsuit and the general circumstances under which Rachel Corrie died. Such a response would have been desirable as a matter of good journalistic practice in general but also because Corrie's mother was quoted in the story as saying other cases (which she did not specify) "are not fully investigated" by Israel. The piece should have offered Israeli officials a chance to respond to this allegation.

– A piece by Garcia-Navarro, aired on Morning Edition on November 12, attempted to explain the complicated situation in Ghajar, a village at the intersection of disputed borders between Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. The village used to be in Syria, and all of its residents are of Syrian ancestry. However, Israel has controlled the village since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and has given the residents Israeli passports.

    The United Nations in recent years determined that the northern half of the village — where most of the residents live — really is in Lebanon. "So now, you have the strange situation of Syrians who are Israeli citizens living in Lebanon," Garcia-Navarro reported. The Israeli government in 2010 decided to withdraw its army from the northern half of the village (the part the UN says is in Lebanon), thus creating a great deal of uncertainty for the residents: As Syrians who also have Israeli citizenship, how will they be treated by Lebanon? And will they still have access to the southern half of their village, where schools and other services are located?

    Although it is an interesting human interest story, Garcia-Navarro's piece failed to explain the broader political significance of what is happening in the village of Ghajar. And this is where an already complicated story gets even more complicated. One reason Israel is pulling out of the northern (Lebanese) half of the village is that Hezbollah – the Shiite militia and
political party in Lebanon – has used Israel's presence there (and thus on Lebanese soil) to justify maintaining its own paramilitary army. In effect, Hezbollah for years has said that Lebanon's army cannot protect Lebanon from Israel, and so Hezbollah needs to have its own army to do the job. Israel, in turn, sees Hezbollah's army as a threat; the two fought a brief, but bloody, war in 2006.

By withdrawing from the northern half of Ghajar, Israel obviously is hoping to deprive Hezbollah of its stated rationale for having its own army. Would Israel's withdrawal from Ghajar lead Hezbollah to disband its army? Almost certainly not, but Israel wants to make a point, if only to bolster its case the next time it goes to war with Hezbollah. Although complicated, this aspect of the story is important and should have been explained.

– Talk of the Nation (TOTN) host Neal Conan on December 7 interviewed former U.S. diplomat Chas Freeman about the consequences in the Middle East of Wikileaks' release of secret State Department cables. Because of Freeman’s prior service in the region and deep knowledge of Arab leaders, he was a logical person to interview about this subject. However, Conan should have reminded listeners that Freeman is a controversial figure as a result of his own past comments disparaging Israel and U.S. policy toward Israel. Opposition from the pro-Israel lobby played a significant role in Freeman's withdrawal in March 2009 as a candidate to chair the National Intelligence Council, which makes long-term assessments of major issues for the U.S. intelligence agencies.

Always known to speak his mind, Freeman made several debatable statements but was not challenged on any of them. For example, he told TOTN listeners that the Israeli government "has quite deliberately stirred up hysteria among the Israeli people about an alleged, gratuitous disposition on the part of Iran to carry out another Holocaust." Rather than questioning this statement – as he should have and characteristically does in such situations – Conan in effect endorsed it, saying: "I've had a former U.S. intelligence chief sit exactly where you're sitting and say the same thing, that Israel cannot abide the possibility of some Holocaust denier and somebody with that kind of lack of restraint, having nuclear weapons."
Annual and longer-term totals. Over the course of 2010, NPR shows aired a total of 250 pieces and interviews with some connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here is a summary of the totals for the year:

- 28 items had a dominant focus on Israel;
- 19 items had a dominant focus on the Palestinians;
- 35 items focused about equally on those two sides;
- 35 items focused on the peace talks;
- 27 focused on relations between the United States and Israel;
- 19 focused on Israel's attack on the so-called Gaza flotilla in May and subsequent developments;
- 11 focused on U.S. concerns related to the Middle East;
- 9 focused on Lebanon;
- the remaining 67 items focused on other related subjects.

I also have compiled a summary of the "dominant focus" for the nearly 3,300 radio pieces and interviews subject to my reviews since the beginning of 2003. Here is a snapshot of the totals for the eight years:

- 654 items had a dominant focus on Israel
- 608 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians
- 543 focused about equally on those two sides
- the remaining 1,486 focused primarily on other matters, such as U.S. policies toward the Middle East, the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, and events in Arab countries and Iran.

Voices

Using the same technique of previous reports, I counted the number of times Israelis and Arabs (including Palestinians) appeared in the 48 radio items under review, both on tape and in
quotes. Overall, the voices of 52 Israelis and 57 Arabs appeared on tape; some individuals appeared on tape in multiple stories or interviews. Of the Arabs, 45 were Palestinians and the rest were other nationalities.

**Annual totals.** During the full year 2010, listeners heard from a total of 173 Israelis and 164 Arabs (of whom 134 were Palestinians) in the stories under review. Again, some of these were individuals who appeared on air more than once. In addition to voices on tape, 165 items aired during the year quoted Israelis and 122 quoted Arabs.

In addition, 50 items that aired during this period quoted Israelis and 46 items quoted Arabs (including Palestinians); some individuals (for example, the Israeli prime minister) were quoted multiple times. "Quotes" means all statements, not on tape, attributed either to named individuals or to groups, such as "analysts" or "Palestinians."

In addition to the aggregate counts mentioned above, I counted the appearances on tape, or in quotes, of individual Israelis and Palestinians, including 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 have appeared on NPR's air in the past but were absent during this quarter:

**Israelis:**
- Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 3 items
- President Shimon Peres: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Ambassador Michael Oren: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Defense Minister Ehud Barak: On tape in 0 item; Quoted in 2 items
- Government spokesman Mark Regev: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Government spokesman Yigal Palmor: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Kadima Party Leader Tzipi Livni: On tape in 0 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Army spokesperson Avital Liebovitch: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Likud Party member Danny Danon: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 1 item
- Other Israelis on tape: 42

**Palestinians:**
- President Mahmoud Abbas: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Prime Minister Salam Fayyad: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Palestinian spokesman Ghassan Khatib: On tape in 1 items; Quoted in 0 items
For the full year, 2010, the voice of Prime Minister Netanyahu appeared in 7 radio stories; he was quoted by reporters or hosts in 47 radio stories. Listeners heard the voice of Palestinian President Abbas in 5 stories during the year; Abbas was quoted in 17 stories.

The above figures, when taken as a whole, suggest that listeners heard very little from officials on either side during the quarter, and the voices they did hear from the region were twice as likely to be Israeli as Palestinian. The number of voices tends to run in tandem with the “dominant focus” totals.

Moreover, listeners heard only rarely from senior Palestinian officials — of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank or the de facto Hamas government in Gaza. For example, this was only the third quarter in eight years during which listeners heard nothing directly from the top Palestinian leader (in this case, Mahmoud Abbas). The previous occasions were the April-June quarter of 2004 (when Yasir Arafat was still alive) and the July-September quarter of 2009. The absence of Abbas from the air during this quarter was particularly striking because the Obama administration was working so hard to lure him back into peace talks with Israel.

Identification of voices. I am happy to report that NPR reporters and shows seem to be making an effort to give listeners more background information about the individuals who appear on air, at least in coverage of the Middle East. This is an area where I have been critical of NPR's coverage because listeners cannot be expected to be familiar with, and know the backgrounds of, people and institutions in foreign lands.

During this quarter, however, I heard more cases than not where NPR gave listeners enough information about the people they were hearing from on air. A good example was Garcia-Navarro's piece on October 22 for Morning Edition describing the waning influence in Israel of the Labor Party and other left-wing institutions. Among the people quoted was Yaron Ezrahi, a political science professor at Hebrew University who Garcia-Navarro described as "a
member of the intellectual left in Israel." Given the subject of the piece, this description helped listeners understand Ezrahi’s point of view.

**Range of voices.** Listeners heard a somewhat broader range of viewpoints from the region than often has been the case in the past. One example was Garcia-Navarro's **October 22** piece for ATC. She gave listeners a chance to hear sharply differing views on the always-controversial subject of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Garcia-Navarro quoted a local council representative in one West Bank settlement, the chief executive officer of a national organization (Yesha Council) that represents settlers, and an official for Peace Now, the leftist group that opposes the settlements.

Only rarely do NPR listeners get a chance to hear from an Israeli or a Palestinian who rejects the underlying tenets of the so-called peace process, including the "land for peace" formula set out in UN resolutions. One such opportunity came on **December 3**, when Garcia-Navarro took listeners on a tour of the "old city" in East Jerusalem. Part of the tour was led by Daniel Luria, executive director of Ateret Cohanim, an agency that buys real estate in East Jerusalem (much of its money coming from wealthy Americans) with the express purpose of putting Jewish families in homes that had been occupied by Palestinian families.

Luria expressed a no-compromise attitude in stark terms that must have come as something of a surprise to some American listeners: "Land for peace doesn't work," he said. "God gave this land to the Jewish people. The land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people. Anyone who wants to live here in the Jewish state, 100 percent, but if not, then bad luck. There is no shortage of Arab states. This is a Jewish state for Jewish people, full stop."

**The Peace Talks**

After nearly two years of non-stop work, the Obama administration has very little to show for its plans to restart peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians.

President Obama was able to host a high-profile summit of regional leaders at the White House early in September. Two rounds of talks followed in subsequent weeks — only to come to a halt because of a disagreement over Israel's decision to restart construction in Jewish settlements in the West Bank.
NPR gave its listeners and website readers reasonably comprehensive coverage of the fits-and-starts of the peace process, which at times can confuse even experts. Rather than focusing exclusively on diplomatic chatter, NPR tried throughout the year (to explain what the peace process, or lack of it, means for ordinary Israelis and Palestinians. A good example came shortly after the Obama administration on December 8 gave up its efforts to restart direct peace talks. On December 16, Morning Edition ran a Garcia-Navarro piece quoting ordinary Israelis and Palestinians about the peace process – or, more accurately their lack of interest in the peace process.

Among other things, this piece gave listeners an appreciation of the fact that many young Israelis and Palestinians know virtually nothing about their counterparts on the other side. They appear more interested in their own lives than the broader issues within, and between, their two very different societies. Among the exceptions to this rule, Garcia-Navarro reported, are the residents of Jewish settlements in the West Bank; they are "deeply engaged in the political situation because their presence in the occupied West Bank is one of the main points of contention in the peace process."

**Website**

In addition to reviewing NPR's on-air coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (and related stories), I reviewed relevant coverage provided on the NPR website. During the October-December quarter, npr.org carried 23 items with some connection to the Middle East conflict. These items were in addition to Web versions of stories that aired originally on NPR's radio shows.

Of the 23 Web-only items:

- 10 were Associated Press news reports selected by NPR staff and edited for inclusion on the "Mideast" topic page of the 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 NPR staff do not select or edit these items.

- 8 items were news-related blog postings by NPR's Two-Way and other blogs.
• 3 items were longer-form news, news-analysis or commentary pieces by NPR staff members; this includes movie, music or theater reviews. One was a commentary about jazz in Israel.
• 1 was a hard news report (similar to wire stories) compiled from staff reporting and AP stories; and
• 1 was a commentary provided by Foreign Policy magazine, which is one of NPR's Web "partners."

In terms of dominant focus, 6 items focused primarily on the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Four other items focused on Israel, 2 focused about equally on Israel and the Palestinians (none focused primarily on the Palestinians). The rest focused on other subjects, for example, Iran and Lebanon. Of the 23 Web-only items, 17 quoted Israelis while 9 quoted Arabs (including Palestinians).

Website postings were remarkably accurate, especially considering many were written under tight deadlines.