NPR Mideast Coverage
October - December 2012

This report assesses NPR's reporting on events and trends related to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians during the fourth quarter of 2012. This period was dominated by the brief-but-deadly conflict in mid-November between Israel and militant Palestinian groups in Gaza. Two other significant stories followed shortly thereafter: the successful drive by the Palestine Liberation Organization to achieve "non-member observer nation" status at the United Nations and Israel's retaliatory announcement of plans to develop the controversial E-1 settlement block near Jerusalem on the West Bank.

NPR covered these and other developments with 104 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 61 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.

For the full year of 2012, NPR radio shows aired a total of 295 news reports, interviews and other items subject to these reviews. During the 10 years (2003 through 2012) of these reviews, NPR has carried 3,818 on-air reports related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Excluding 2006, which had an exceptionally high number of reports (827) due to the Israel-Lebanon war, NPR has averaged about 332 reports each year. The 295 reports for 2012 thus was slightly below the annual average, due primarily to a very small number of reports (37) in the April to June quarter. A chart showing the full ten years is below, under the "Fairness and Balance" heading.

The opinions expressed in this report are mine alone.

Accuracy

NPR has posted only one correction of a radio or Web story subject to this review. The correction, posted on December 21, concerned a story that aired on Morning Edition.
on December 3 by Philip Reeves. The story reported reaction to an Israeli announcement of plans to develop the E-1 settlement near Jerusalem. The correction said the published transcript failed to attribute a quote to anti-settlement lawyer/activist Daniel Seidemann. However, listeners would have heard the attribution.

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

As discussed below under the "Israel-Gaza Conflict" heading, NPR and many other news organizations provided some confusing information about rocket launches and other details in the early days of the November conflict. One example was a tendency to attribute all rocket attacks from Gaza to Hamas, ignoring the role of other militant Palestinian factions there.

One minor inaccuracy came in an otherwise fine story for All Things Considered on November 19 by Cairo correspondent Leila Fadel. She identified a Middle East expert, Michael Wahid Hanna, as being with the Council on Foreign Relations. In fact he is a fellow at the Century Foundation, a different think tank. I understand this will 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 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. Exactly one-half – 52 – of the 104 radio items reviewed for this report covered various aspects of the November conflict between Israel and Gaza.

In terms of specific focus among the 104 items:

- 17 had a dominant focus on Israel (9 of these were related to the Gaza conflict; for example, stories about Israeli casualties);
- 18 had a dominant focus on the Palestinians (11 of these were related to the Gaza conflict; for example, stories about Palestinian casualties);
• 21 focused about equally on Israel and the Palestinians (19 of these were related to the Gaza conflict);
• 4 focused on the Palestinian drive for recognition as a "non-member observer state" at the UN;
• In contrast to most recent periods, only 2 items during the quarter focused on Iran's alleged program to build nuclear weapons;
• 5 focused on U.S. election-year politics, 6 focused on various aspects of U.S. foreign policy, and 2 focused on U.S. relations with Israel;
• 2 focused on Egypt and 4 focused on Egypt's relationship with Gaza;
• The remaining 23 items focused on other matters related to Israeli-Palestinian issues, for example regional implications of the civil war in Syria.

The overall conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that NPR, as customary, pulled out all the stops to provide intense coverage of a major news story, in this case the Gaza conflict. I have specific comments on that coverage below. NPR provided limited coverage of the Palestinian statehood drive at the United Nations and gave its audience very little information about Israel's plan to build the disputed E-1 settlement on the West Bank. NPR also did not cover a significant development in Israeli politics: the indictment on secondary criminal charges of the combative foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, and his subsequent decision to step down pending elections in January 2013.

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

The following chart shows the number of on-air reports subject to this review for the ten-year period of 2003 through 2012, broken down by dominant focus. For simplicity, I have aggregated all items not directly related to the Israelis and Palestinians into an "other" category. This includes, for example, reports that focused primarily on Egypt, Lebanon, Iran's nuclear program, U.S. policies, and similar topics but that also included references to Israel, the Palestinians, or the conflict between them. The number of
reports in 2006 was much higher than for other years because of NPR's extensive coverage of the month-long war between Israel and the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon.

This table shows a relative balance, over time, in NPR's coverage of Israel and the Palestinians. Apparent imbalances in some years reflect news events. In 2005, for example, NPR devoted substantial resources to covering Israel's agonized debate over withdrawing from the Gaza strip. Similarly, NPR's coverage in 2007 was somewhat skewed to the Palestinian side because of the conflict in Gaza between the Hamas and Fatah factions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Totals</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Items</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>3818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel Focus</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinian Focus</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel-Pal Focus</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Focus</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voices

Using the same technique of previous reports, I counted the number of times listeners heard from Israelis and Arabs (including Palestinians) in the 104 radio items under review, both on tape and in quotes. Overall, the voices of 58 Israelis and 69 Arabs appeared on tape; some individuals appeared in multiple stories or interviews. Of the Arab voices, 52 were Palestinians; the rest were other Arab nationalities, mostly Egyptian.

In addition, 67 of the radio stories or interviews during this period quoted Israelis and 66 items quoted Arabs (most of whom were Palestinians). Some individuals (notably the Israeli prime minister and defense 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 4 items; Quoted in 12 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
- Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom: On tape in 0 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor: 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 2 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Defense Minister Ehud Barak: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 5 items
- 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 2 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Army spokeswoman Avital Liebovitch: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Kadima Party Leader Shaul Mofaz: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Interior Minister Eli Yishai: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Knesset Deputy Speaker Danny Danon: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Political scientist Yaron Ezrahi: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Political scientist Ruevan Hazan: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Journalist Amos Harel: On tape in 2 items; Quoted on 0 items
- Journalist Avi Issacharoff: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Journalist David Horovitz: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Other Israelis on tape: 39

**Palestinians**
- President Mahmoud Abbas: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 2 items
- Prime Minister Salam Fayyad: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Palestinian spokesman Ghassan Khatib: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 1 items
- Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 1 item
- Hamas "exile" leader Khaled Meshal: On tape in 3 items; Quoted in 3 items
- Hamas official: Mahmoud Zahar: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Hamas spokesman Gazi Hamad: On tape in 1 item; Quoted in 0 items
- Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 1 item
- Diplomat Saeb Erekat: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Diplomat M. R. Areikat: On tape in 1 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Palestinian official Nabil Shaath: On tape in 0 items; Quoted in 0 items
- Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi: On tape in 2 items; Quoted in 0 items
These figures reflect the larger-than-usual number of stories and interviews that aired during this quarter. In general, listeners heard a reasonable balance of Israeli and Palestinian voices, especially in regard to the Gaza conflict. One change from most previous periods was that NPR listeners heard directly from senior Hamas figures, notably exile leader Khaled Meshal, who visited Gaza immediately after the November fighting.

The following chart shows an annual breakdown, for the 2003–2012 period, of the Israeli and Arab (including Palestinian) voices appearing on air or quoted in radio reports subject to this review. Overall, this table shows that Arab voices tend to appear on air more often than do Israeli voices. It must be kept in mind, however, that nearly one-half of the reports covered by this review focus on topics only indirectly related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (events in Egypt and Lebanon, for example).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voices</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israelis on tape</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>2216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabs on tape</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>2609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli prime minister on tape*</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli prime minister quote*</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA leader on tape**</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA leader quotes**</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Identification of voices. For the most part, NPR reporters and shows seem to be attempting to give listeners sufficient information about the people they quote or interview as guests. One minor exception was a piece by Anthony Kuhn for Morning Edition on November 20, which identified Omar Shaban only as "director of the Gaza-based think tank Pal-Think." Kuhn should have noted that Shaban and his think tank are not affiliated with Hamas or any other faction in Gaza.

Range of voices. Because of the Gaza conflict, NPR listeners heard more frequently than usual from ordinary Israelis and Palestinians. NPR reporters diligently searched out Israelis and Gazans affected by the fighting, including relatives or friends of those who were killed or wounded.

The Israel-Gaza Conflict

NPR’s listeners and readers could be forgiven if they felt that the news from Israel and Gaza in November sounded like old news. The deaths and destruction resulting from several thousand rocket attacks and air strikes during a two-week period seemed, at first glance, remarkably similar to a conflict almost exactly four years earlier. This latest round of violence also is likely to be repeated, in some form, sometime soon. The November 2012 conflict took place in circumstances substantially different from previous versions, however, and those differences could well shape future trends in this small corner of the Middle East.

NPR covered the November conflict with 52 radio stories and interviews and 32 website postings (blogs, AP news stories, and other items) between November 11 and the implementation of an Egyptian-negotiated ceasefire agreement on November 21–22. A handful of follow-up stories continued into December. The immediate antecedents for this violence began in late October, but NPR (and most other international news organizations) paid little attention until the situation exploded into a significant conflict on November 14.
My overall assessment is that NPR provided accurate and balanced coverage of the most important events during the height of the violence. NPR also reported the human dimension of the story by seeking out civilians on both sides. However, NPR failed to give its listeners and readers adequate background information necessary for a fuller understanding of why this particular conflict arose at this particular time, how it was different from past conflicts and what the potential consequences might be. In other words, NPR's radio and Web audiences learned the essentials about the daily bombings and political posturing on both sides but learned very little about the overall context, including the motivations on either side of the Israel-Gaza border or about the events and trends leading up to this round of violence.

A complete explanation of all the various factors that led to the November conflict is beyond the scope of this report. In summary, the major factors included but were not limited to:

- Upcoming elections in Israel, where the conservative government of Benjamin Netanyahu faced increasing political pressure to act against rocket fire from Gaza, which had diminished after an Israeli assault on Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 but had resumed with more intensity in recent months;
- The new reality in Egypt, where an elected government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood (the parent organization of Hamas, the ruling faction in Gaza) had succeeded the autocratic Mubarak regime (which had been hostile to Hamas and had cooperated with Israel's attempts to suppress Hamas);
- Egypt's long-term inability (or unwillingness) to control smuggling in the Sinai peninsula adjacent to Gaza, including the smuggling into Gaza through tunnels of missiles and other weapons;
- Hamas's recent acquisition from Iran (via Sudan and the Sinai) of medium-range missiles capable of reaching Israel's two largest cities, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv;
- A mixed picture of daily life in Gaza, where a small number of politically connected entrepreneurs had grown rich off the smuggling trade while overall unemployment and hardship were growing;
Israel's continued control of most land, air and sea approaches to Gaza, and Israel's routine monitoring of Gaza by drones, along with its use of drones to attack specific militants.

NPR has reported on most of these developments sporadically and piecemeal since the large-scale conflict between Israel and Gaza in 2008–09. However, neither before nor since the outbreak of the latest violence has NPR given its listeners and readers a comprehensive overview, or even regular coverage, of how the trends related to Gaza built to the point where an explosion was certain to occur.

I should note that the November violence came at a difficult time for NPR, which was without a permanent correspondent in Jerusalem, its key listening post for the region. Former correspondent Lourdes Garcia-Navarro had returned home in the summer after three years in Jerusalem. In the meantime veteran Asia correspondent Anthony Kuhn was manning the Jerusalem post, along with freelance reporter Sheera Frenkel. Once the fighting started, Kuhn went into Gaza, where he stayed for most of the conflict, and NPR dispatched London bureau chief Philip Reeves, another veteran foreign correspondent, to Jerusalem. They were joined later on by Peter Kenyon, a former Jerusalem correspondent now posted in Istanbul. In addition, the Israel-Gaza fighting broke out shortly after the U.S. elections, when most Americans (including NPR) were still recovering from the deluge of political news coverage and were focusing on domestic matters.

Under these circumstances, NPR did a remarkably good job of covering both the daily violence in Gaza and southern Israel as well as some of the developments that emerged during the conflict. Among these were the severe psychological toll on civilians in Gaza and neighboring Israeli communities from an almost endless siege of rockets and bombs; the apparent success of Israel's new anti-rocket system called the Iron Dome; and the political pressure on Israeli leaders to end the rocket attacks from Gaza.

One example of NPR's on-the-scene reporting was the back-to-back coverage on All Things Considered, on November 15, the second day of the most intense fighting. Kuhn reported from Gaza City, describing to host Audie Cornish how residents had learned to distinguish between the "whoosh" sounds of outgoing rockets fired by Hamas and other Palestinian groups versus the "large building-rattling explosions" of Israeli bombs landing on buildings in Gaza. This was followed by Sheera Frenkel's report from
the Israeli town of Kiryat Malachi, near the Gaza border, where three civilians had died when a Palestinian rocket struck their apartment building. Frenkel vividly described the scene in one apartment hit by the rocket and the anger of residents at a top government official-turned-politician who showed up, apparently seeking publicity.

Similarly, Reeve's report from Gaza for Morning Edition on November 26, days after the fighting ended, may have been revelatory for many listeners, on several levels. Reeves described how the manager of a small kindergarten in Gaza City dealt with the concerns of her young charges about the violence they had witnessed. In one scene, little boys wearing military-style uniforms pointed toy guns in the air and pretended to shoot imaginary Israeli planes. In another scene, Reeves said an instructor told the children to stamp on and set fire to a poster featuring Israel's Star of David – as a means of therapy, "to let out their emotions" in the words of the instructor. A Palestinian spectator clearly was uncomfortable with the scene, telling Reeves that "it does not look good to the international people" and perpetuates violence to have children carrying toy guns and preparing for conflict.

Following are comments on specific aspects of NPR's coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict:

**Casualties.** One of the news media's first obligations in covering any conflict is to report, as accurately as possible, the numbers and identities of the killed and wounded. Casualty figures tell part – but only part – of the scale of a conflict, and reporting them helps outsiders understand the human impact of bombs, rockets and other implements of war. Casualty figures also play into the propaganda that is an inevitable aspect of any war, especially in the polarized Middle East, and so they must be treated carefully by news organizations.

In every recent conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, by far more Palestinians than Israelis have been killed and injured – reflecting the comparative military power and technological prowess of the two sides. This was true again in the November conflict. According to official Israeli military figures, six Israelis (five
civilians and one soldier) died and 240 civilians were wounded between November 14–22.

Reporting Palestinian casualties accurately always is more of a challenge, largely because of disputes over who is a civilian and who is a combatant. By late November, most news organizations, including NPR, reported that more than 160 Palestinians had died, but there was considerable uncertainty over exactly how many of them were civilians. For example, an AP story posted on the NPR website on November 23 (but no longer available) used a figure of 166 Palestinians killed, "including dozens of civilians." The UN's humanitarian aid agency, in a December 5 report, said 103 Palestinian civilians had died and 1,399 Palestinians had been injured, "mostly civilians." The UN agency updated its figures in a December 19 report, saying that 165 Palestinians had died "of whom 99 are believed to be civilians, including 33 children and 13 women."

A December 24 Web posting by the military arm of Hamas, the Al-Qassam Brigades, quoted the Hamas government as saying 184 Palestinians had died in Gaza. This report gave confusing and possibly contradictory details, however, saying that "86.8% of the martyrs and the wounded were male and that more than half of them were children and elderly people. . ."

The Israeli military website, noted above, said 30 "senior Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists" had died in the conflict, but said nothing about other Palestinian casualties except to insist that Israel does everything possible to avoid civilian casualties. As usual, both the Israeli and Palestinian news media generally avoided any mention of casualties on the opposing side.

I am citing these contradictory reports, some posted weeks after the fighting ended, to demonstrate the difficulty news organizations such as NPR face in reporting accurate casualty reports during the confusion of war.

In its coverage, NPR appeared to be cautious in reporting casualty figures – so cautious that some of its reports simply skirted the topic. For example, reporting for All Things Considered on November 22 from Gaza about one family whose young son was injured by shrapnel from a rocket, Kuhn did not mention any overall casualty figures – nor did the host-read introduction, which led with a mention of funerals in Gaza. If any story should have reported casualty figures, this was it. In the same show, Reeves told
listeners that the Israeli death toll had risen to six with the death of an Israeli reserve captain, compared to an estimated Palestinian total of 161. Reeves did not give a breakdown civilians versus combatants on either side.

One of NPR's few on-air references to specific civilian Palestinian casualty figures came in the Reeves report for Morning Edition on November 26, mentioned above, about the impact on Gaza's children. Reeves quoted Palestinian officials as saying "at least 40 children were killed, and 10 times that number were injured."

**How many rockets?** In addition to casualties, one measure of the scale of any conflict is the amount of armaments used. This was a particularly appropriate measure for the Israel-Gaza conflict, which resulted from Israel's concerns about the high number of Palestinian rockets fired into southern Israeli communities.

After some initial confusion in the first days, NPR was reasonably consistent and accurate in reporting the number of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel. However, during the course of the conflict NPR gave its radio and Web audiences virtually no information about how many bombs and missiles Israel fired into Gaza. The main reason would appear to be that the Israeli government – the chief source of information on this question – extensively publicized how many Palestinian rockets landed in Israel but played down how many airstrikes it used in response.

In brief, the background is that Palestinian rocket fire into Israel dropped sharply after the war in December 2008–January 2009 and remained at a relatively low level through the first ten months of 2012, according to Israeli military figures. By early November, just before the latest conflict began, Palestinians had fired nearly 600 rockets into Israel during 2012, about the same number as in all of 2011.

The initial round of the November conflict began on November 10, when the two sides traded fire across the border following an explosion at a tunnel used to smuggle weapons from the Sinai into Gaza. Over the next two days, the Israeli military said that Palestinians had fired 120 rockets into Israel, representing a much higher daily rate than customary since the 2008–09 war.

In its reporting, NPR did not attempt to keep track of all the rocket and missile attacks but did give its radio and Web audiences general summaries, in some cases using
inconsistent information. On November 14, a Two-Way blog posting by Mark Memmott, reporting on the outbreak of violence, simply quoted the Israeli military as saying "more rockets have been fired Israel's way today," without giving any numbers. The host-read introduction to Kuhn's report for All Things Considered, on the same day, said Israel's airstrikes into Gaza "were in retaliation for the launching of more than 100 rockets at Israel in recent days."

The next morning, November 15, Kuhn told the Morning Edition audience that "since Saturday [November 10], there have been hundreds of rockets hitting southern Israel. . . ." Memmott's Two-Way blog, updated early that afternoon, said "Hamas has now fired more than 130 rockets" toward Israel. Memmott may have obtained his information from a contemporaneous AP report, posted on the Web site (but no longer available), that used the more careful and accurate formulation of saying "Hamas fighters and other militant factions" had fired the rockets. I found several other cases in which NPR reports attributed all rocket fire to Hamas, when in fact Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian groups launched at least some of the rockets from Gaza.

One example of the perils of quoting official sources came later on November 15, when All Things Considered host Melissa Block interviewed Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the United States. Oren, a respected military historian, told Block at the very beginning of the interview that Israel's action in Gaza was justified because "about 1,000 rockets have been fired at Israeli citizens over the course of the past month alone." Block did not question this figure, which is understandable given the confusing news reports. Nor did Oren say where he got the number, which clearly was incorrect. Just the day before, the Israeli military said on its website that 822 rockets had been fired at Israel during all of 2012 (of which 478 were fired from January through October, according to a count by Israel's semi-official Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center).

The Two-Way blog picked up Oren's exaggerated figure the next day, quoting Israel as saying it was acting "in response to the more than 1,000 rockets fired by Hamas into Israel last month. . . ." Again, the blog mistakenly attributed all rocket attacks to Hamas rather than to a combination of Hamas and other Palestinian factions.

The Oren interview also was remarkable for the ambassador's astonishing response to a question about Palestinian civilian deaths, which he said Israel tried hard to
avoid. When Block asked about reports that some Palestinian civilians who died had been used as human shields, Oren's response was: "Well, they were in the vicinity. I don't have specific details. But civilians who have been hurt were in the vicinity of rockets and other military sites used by Hamas to attack our civilians." In other words, Oren seemed to be saying that all Palestinians, including civilians, who happened to live in the vicinity of where rockets were fired were culpable, and thus fair game.

In contrast to repeated, if sometimes confusing, mentions of Palestinian rockets, NPR gave its audience very little information about the extent of Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. Some of the few reports about this topic came on November 17, when Weekend Edition Saturday host Scott Simon began an interview with Kuhn by saying "Israel hit the Gaza Strip with nearly 200 airstrikes, widening a range of military targets to include the prime minister's office and other government buildings." This was the same number and formulation used in an AP story posted on the NPR website that day (but no longer available); the AP attributed the number to the Israeli military. A Two-Way blog later that day, by Melisa Goh, said: "Around 300 airstrikes overnight hit the Hamas prime minister's headquarters, a police compound and a vast network of smuggling tunnels, among other targets."

The only other precise number given by NPR was in an AP story posted on November 21 (and no longer available), which said Israel had carried out "more than 1,500 airstrikes that initially targeted rocket launchers and weapons storage sites, then widened to include wanted militants and symbols of Hamas power." A follow-up AP story posted the next day used the same figure.

However, listeners to NPR radio programs never heard a total count of how many airstrikes Israel had carried out in Gaza. Nor did they hear any kind of report summarizing how much physical damage had been done by the conflict, either in Israel or in Gaza.

Why? In reporting any conflict (or just about any other news event, for that matter), one of the most important questions is: Why is this happening? NPR asked this question on behalf of its listeners and readers only a few times during the course of the Gaza conflict.

Much to her credit, substitute Morning Edition host Linda Wertheimer asked that obvious question on November 15, the second day of the fighting: "Why is this happening now?" Anthony Kuhn, who had just arrived in Gaza City and had been in the Middle East only a few days, gave an ambiguous answer emphasizing Israeli politics. He
noted that elections were planned for January and Prime Minister Netanyahu was under pressure to respond to a sudden upsurge of rockets from Gaza.

Later on the same day, *Talk of the Nation* host Neal Conan asked the same question of Edmund Sanders, the Jerusalem bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*, also reporting from Gaza. Sanders admitted he was "a little bit stumped" by the question but then suggested that Hamas had been emboldened by the Egyptian revolution to "be a little bit more aggressive" and was "maybe testing Israel," which in turn had reached its limit with Palestinian rocket attacks. Conan added that elections were approaching in Israel, saying "we can't overlook that."

On November 19, as the conflict was at its height, *Morning Edition* host Renee Montagne asked Kuhn for a reminder of what started the fighting. He explained the background, including the cross-border attacks immediately before Israel's November 14 assassination of Hamas military chief Ahmed al-Jabari, the trigger event for the most intense fighting. "So both sides say the other side started it, and the retaliations and the killings just stretch back long before this escalation," Kuhn said.

NPR reporters, editors, radio shows and the website should have done more to explain why the fighting had broken out.

**What was different?** As noted at the beginning of this discussion, many Americans probably thought the November fighting between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza was just another round of a seemingly never-ending conflict. In some respects, they might be right; as in the past, the fighting pitted militarily unequal partners but did not produce a decisive victory by either side, despite conflicting claims to the contrary. Even so, this round of fighting took place under circumstances that were dramatically different from previous ones. Whether the changed circumstances lead to significant changes in the overall conflict remains to be seen.

NPR took several days to get around to helping its audience understand the new circumstances surrounding the Israel-Gaza conflict. Cross-border attacks started over the weekend of November 10–11 and the main fighting broke out on November 14 with Israel's aerial assassination of the Hamas military chief. But only on November 19 did
NPR begin digging beneath the surface to explain how things had changed since Israel last went to war in Gaza.

The very best explanation – and one of the best reports produced by NPR during the entire conflict – came in a November 19 posting by NPR's website foreign editor, Greg Myre, titled "5 Reasons Why The Israeli-Palestinian Fighting Is Different This Time." Myre is well-qualified to address the topic, having served for several years as a New York Times reporter in Jerusalem.

Myre emphasized the new circumstances in the Arab world, notably in Egypt, since the uprisings of 2011–12; the acquisition by Hamas of longer-range rockets capable of reaching Jerusalem and Tel Aviv (Israel's two biggest and most important cities), countered by Israel's successful deployment of its "Iron Dome" anti-missile system; the total absence of a credible peace process between Israel and the Palestinians; and Washington's "skittishness" about deeper involvement in the Middle East.

Myre's analysis was not detailed and he did not draw conclusions from his five reasons. Even so, his piece gave readers important information for understanding the complexities of the current situation, especially the impact of the upheavals in Egypt and other Arab countries. Myre should have appeared on at least one of NPR's daily radio news shows so his message would reach a broader audience – or the news shows should have conducted other interviews exploring the issues Myre raised.

Two radio reports on November 19 also were useful to those who heard them. Reporter Jennifer Ludden (a former NPR Middle East reporter) moderated an informative discussion on Talk of the Nation about the "new landscape" in the Middle East. Guests were Ethan Bronner, a former New York Times Jerusalem correspondent who was sent back to the region to help cover the fighting; Rami Khouri, a Palestinian-Lebanese journalist and analyst based in Beirut; and Amos Harel, a military correspondent for the center-left Haaretz newspaper in Israel. The conversation delved deeper into some of the same trends Myre had highlighted in his piece but also addressed broader questions, such as whether Israel's conflict in Gaza might represent a trial run for a much bigger conflict with Iran over its nuclear program.

Also on November 19, Cairo correspondent Leila Fadel explained for All Things Considered listeners the importance of changed relations between Egypt and Hamas.
Fadel also highlighted the limited maneuvering room for Egypt's new president, Mohammed Morsi, given the peace treaty with Israel, which he had promised to respect.

Finally, in a helpful interview with *Morning Edition* on November 23, former U.S. diplomat Robert Malley (now head of the Mideast program at the Brussels-based International Crisis Group think tank) described the conflict as the first of a new era since the Arab uprisings and the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. NPR listeners have come to expect this type of in-depth analysis. They deserved more of it during the Israel-Gaza conflict.

**Egypt's Role.** Of all the interesting outcomes of the conflict, one of the most significant could be the role of the "new" Egypt under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the past, Israel often had a difficult relationship with the Mubarak regime but still found it necessary to seek Cairo's help in dealing with Hamas. Now, Israel must seek that help from Egyptian leaders who do not share its deep hostility toward Hamas.

Several NPR reports during the fighting highlighted aspects of Egypt's changing role vis a vis Gaza. One example was Fadel's November 19 piece for *All Things Considered*, noted above, quoting an Egyptian official as saying Cairo would no longer cooperate with Israel's siege of Gaza, which he said had made Gaza an "open-air prison."

After the cease-fire was announced, Fadel reported for *Morning Edition* on November 22 that Morsi had "made Egypt the guarantor of the cease-fire."

One important point that should have come through more clearly in the coverage concerns the one noted in the previous paragraph: Egypt's role in supporting the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Israel has faced widespread international criticism since 2007 for its tight restrictions on all access to Gaza, but Egypt generally has escaped similar criticism for its role in restricting the one border crossing it controls, at Rafah.

Numerous stories at the close of the conflict mentioned that the future of Israel's blockade of Gaza would be a major point of contention in negotiations over implementation of the cease-fire. An example was a joint report on November 22 for *All Things Considered* by Reeves and Fadel, in which Fadel said the blockade was "essentially a siege" of Gaza. However, neither in that report, nor in any other coverage,
was anything said about whether Egypt would relax its restrictions on the Rafah border crossing.

**What Next?** Very few reports, during or after the fighting, addressed the obvious question of what will happen next in the unstable relationship between Israel and Gaza. One of the few was a question posed on **November 17** – midway through the fighting – by *Weekend Edition Saturday* host Scott Simon to Robert Malley of the International Crisis Group. Malley told listeners that the conflict likely will be repeated yet again because Hamas will restock its weapons and will have even more popular support within Gaza. Israel's only alternative is to acknowledge that Hamas rules Gaza and will continue to do so, and that means engaging with Hamas either directly or through the Egyptians, Malley said.

One week later, on **November 24** after the fighting ended, a joint interview of Kuhn and Reeves on *Weekend Edition Saturday* covered some of the issues facing both Israel and Gaza. Similarly, a *Talk of the Nation* discussion **November 26** summarized many of the central questions facing all sides in the wake of the war. Former U.S. diplomat Martin Indyk, for example, noted that Morsi had assumed responsibility for the cease-fire, Hamas had become responsible for enforcing the cease-fire among Gazan factions, and it was possible that Hamas and "a right-wing government in Israel can find a way to do business without fighting each other." After this, NPR essentially dropped the subject through the end of the year.

**Fajr rockets.** It could be argued that the November conflict might not have occurred, or might have been conducted at much lower level, if Hamas had not succeeded in obtaining longer-range rockets, known as the Fajr-3 and Fajr-5, from Iran. Eliminating those rockets, which can reach Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, clearly was Israel's chief objective, and the fighting stopped once Israel reportedly concluded it had achieved that objective – at least for the time being.

In that context, NPR should have given its listeners and readers more information about the importance of these relatively recent additions to the Hamas arsenal. Other than passing references, the only detailed report about the missiles came in a Greg Myre piece
for the website on **November 16** describing the significance of the first rocket to reach Jerusalem. Although it did not get into the details of missile-smuggling from Iran via Sudan and Egypt, this was the single most comprehensive report about the missiles NPR produced during the period of fighting. Myre's piece would have reached a much broader audience had it been aired on one of the daily news programs in addition to being posted on the website.

**Palestinians at the UN**

For the second year in a row, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his Palestinian Authority attempted to jump-start (or, in Israel's view, circumvent) the peace process by seeking recognition of Palestinian statehood from the United Nations. The attempt failed in 2011 when Abbas went to the UN Security Council, where the United States used its veto to block action. The Palestinians signaled early in 2012 that they would try again, this time at the General Assembly, where a simple majority vote would suffice to upgrade their UN standing from "non-member observer entity" to "non-member observer state." Israel and the United States vociferously opposed the move, arguing that the Palestinians could gain real statehood only through negotiations.

NPR gave substantial coverage to the high-profile 2011 battle at the UN, as noted in my report on Mideast coverage for the third quarter of that year. In 2012, the outcome was a foregone conclusion, since the Palestinians clearly had the votes they needed in the General Assembly, and so neither Israel nor the United States mounted a full-scale attempt to block action. As a result, the story had less impact, and NPR and other news organizations paid much less attention to the Palestinian "statehood" fuss than just a year earlier.

Nearly all of NPR's coverage of the story took place on November 29, the day of the UN vote, and the following day. On **November 29**, Reeves reported from Jerusalem for *Morning Edition* on the conflicting views of Palestinians and Israelis, and diplomatic correspondent Michele Kelemen reported from Washington for *All Things Considered* on the reaction once the UN vote took place. The website also carried two blog postings, one by Mark Memmott summarizing the key issues before the vote and another by Eyder
Peralta reporting reaction. Reeves gave Palestinian reaction in a November 30 piece for Morning Edition.

Taken together, these reports covered the basic issues but did not adequately explore the consequences, for both Israel and Palestinians, of the new Palestinian status at the UN.

Israeli Settlements

One immediate, direct consequence of the November 29 vote at the UN was Israel's announcement the next day of plans to build thousands of additional housing units in East Jerusalem and in West Bank settlements – including in an undeveloped area, known as E-1 (for East-1) between East Jerusalem and the large settlement of Maale Adumim. The planned E-1 settlement is perhaps the most controversial of all West Bank settlements because it would create a band of Jewish settlements linking East Jerusalem and Maale Adumim and thus, Palestinians argue, make it difficult for them to have a viable, contiguous state on the West Bank. Israel rejects this contention and insists it has the right to build wherever it wants in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

NPR covered this story in four reports:

- A Two-Way blog posting by Eyder Peralta, on November 30, based on reports from the New York Times and Reuters. The posting also included a map, first published by Le Monde Diplomatique in 2009, illustrating what a Palestinian state might look like if Israel continues to build in all existing settlements and to control all of the West Bank zone (known as Area C) now under its sole jurisdiction. The blog should have, but did not, make crystal clear that the map was an artist's version and did not necessarily reflect what a potential Palestinian state actually would look like. Peralta amended the blog later in the day to say that the map was "an artist rendering," and he included a different map showing Israel's settlements and "security barrier" around the West Bank. Even so, the posting could have given a clearer picture of why the E-1 plan is so controversial – and why Israel defends it.
Numerous references to the settlements issue in an extended set of interviews about a Palestinian state on *Weekend All Things Considered* on **December 1**. Host Guy Raz posed questions about the settlements to three guests: Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad; Israel's Ambassador Oren, and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

A reaction piece by Philip Reeves for *Morning Edition* on **December 3**. Reeves traveled to the site of the expanded West Bank settlements, where he met and interviewed Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli attorney and activist who, as Reeves said, "campaigns against Israeli settlement building in the occupied territories." Seidemann described the proposed E-1 settlement as "the fatal heart attack of the two-state solution." Reeves also interviewed a Palestinian official, who made the same point, and Benny Kashriel, the mayor of Maale Adumim, who said his residents were "very, very happy" about the Israeli building plans.

A Two-Way blog posting by Krishnadev Calamur, on **December 4**, reporting several developments related to the settlement issue, including denunciations of Israel's plans by five European governments.

One of the main questions faced by NPR and other news organizations, in reporting on this subject, was how to characterize the potential impact of Israel's construction of the controversial E-1 settlement. Palestinians and many international governments insist that construction of E-1 would create a physical barrier between the northern and southern halves of the West Bank, thus eliminating the "contiguity" of a potential Palestinian state and cutting off East Jerusalem from the West Bank. Israel rejects this contention, arguing among other things that it could build roads and tunnels through E-1 enabling Palestinians to travel around the various parts of the West Bank and to/from East Jerusalem.

Most of NPR's reporting was careful to attribute claims about E-1 and to give both the Israeli and Palestinian positions. An exception was this key paragraph in Calamur's December 4 blog posting:

*Israel's latest project, in the area known as E1, has been a hotly contested issue for years. Palestinians say it would form a barrier between Palestinians living in East Jerusalem and those in the rest of the West Bank. This would make it extremely difficult,*
if not impossible, for the Palestinians to have a viable, contiguous territory in the West Bank.

The final sentence of this paragraph should have been clearly attributed to the Palestinians, and Israel should have been given a chance to respond to the criticism.

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 61 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 61 website-only items:

- 22 were news reports 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 computer-generated process known as "auto-feed." It is my understanding that such items are not selected or edited in any way by NPR staff.

- 24 items were news-related postings by NPR's Two-Way and other blogs.

- 7 were news or feature stories by NPR reporters or editors.

- 4 were explanatory or background reports (3 from the AP and one by NPR website foreign editor Greg Myre)

- 2 were movie reviews;

- 2 were pairings of cartoons from feature syndicates

In terms of dominant focus among these 61 website-only items:

- 3 items focused primarily on Israel;
5 items focused primarily on the Palestinians (2 of these were related to coverage of the Gaza conflict);

31 item focused about evenly on Israel and the Palestinians (26 of which reported on the Gaza conflict);

5 focused on the Palestinian drive for UN recognition as a non-member observer state;

2 items focused on U.S.-Israeli relations, 2 items focused on U.S. election-year politics, and 1 focused on other US-regional concerns;

2 focused on regional implications of the Syrian civil war;

10 items focused on various other matters with some connection to Israel and/or the Palestinians.

Overall, 32 of the 61 items reported on the November conflict between Israel and Gaza.

Of the 61 website-only items, 44 quoted Israelis and 42 quoted Arabs (including Palestinians).

On the whole, website-only items met NPR's basic journalistic standards for accuracy, fairness and balance. As noted above, two blog postings, on November 30 and December 4, failed to give adequate information about the dispute over Israel's announced plans to build the controversial E-1 settlement near Jerusalem.