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John R. Block, Publisher
 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
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Dear Messieurs John R. Block, David M. Shribman and Allan J. Block,

We are writing to you to express our concern with a recurring pattern of factual errors and bias that many of your readers have noticed in editorials addressing the Middle East conflict and the State of Israel. In particular, we point to the editorials by Dan Simpson and the Editorial Board.

The website of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette states that the opinions presented in the editorials represent the view of the Post-Gazette as an institution. We would be appalled if the bias displayed in these editorials is truly the position of the Post-Gazette. Concerning the standards that PG editorials should meet, Editor Tom Waseleski wrote:

"They should be clear, thought-provoking, well informed and decent. People must be given enough facts in an editorial to know if the opinions are well grounded."

His words reflect the code of ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, which states that Journalists should:

1. Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work.
2. Verify information before releasing it.
3. Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
4. Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
5. Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information.
6. Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
7. Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently.

Example 1: An excerpt from a letter we sent (published by the PG) specifying egregious factual errors and distortions appearing in Christopher K. Mellon's Op-Ed, **Netanyahu, the Great Divider** (3/2/15) is provided here along with numerous examples of Dan Simpson's and the Editorial Board's editorials that fail to uphold standards of accuracy, context and avoidance of deliberate distortions of facts. We urge the Post-Gazette to address Simpson's and the Editorial Board's failures to uphold journalistic standards so that the pattern does not perpetuate.

(Excerpts as follows.)

Christopher K. Mellon's criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is both misguided and misinformed. Mr. Mellon fails to appreciate that Congress is acting well within its responsibilities by injecting itself into the debate over treaties and relations with foreign governments. Congress alone can impose sanctions and approve treaties under the Constitution.

With respect to Israel's relations with Turkey, Mr. Mellon seems unaware that it was the Islamist President Tayyip Recep Erdogan who sundered relations with Israel, not the other way around. Nevertheless, despite the antagonism, Israel's economic trade with Turkey is at an all-time high.

Contrary to what Mr. Mellon contends, the "Basic Law" changes nothing in the legal status of Israelis, Christians, and Muslims. It puts into writing what has always been understood about Israel - that it was founded as a Jewish state. Most European states and Muslim-majority states have officially-recognized state religions and give certain privileges to the state's predominant ethnicity.

Regarding his claim that Mr. Netanyahu is creating division, a recent Gallup poll shows Mr. Netanyahu's favorable rating increasing significantly among Americans. Mr. Mellon adopts an antagonistic position toward the Israeli prime minister, and if the facts don't support his argument, he jettisons the facts.

Example 2: Arabian turmoil: The peninsula must cope with two emergencies January 26, 2015

"King Abdullah in 2002 made a useful proposal for Israeli-Palestinian peace, offering Arab recognition of Israel in return for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories. The initiative was rejected by Israel."

Comment: This editorial omits crucial information. The Saudi proposal underwent significant changes in order to be accepted by the other Arab states. This included adding a non-negotiable demand that Palestinian refugees (including their millions of descendents) be allowed to settle in Israel. Such a provision is widely recognized as incompatible with the continued existence of the State of Israel.

Example 3: Dan Simpson / Iraq is crumbling, no surprise June 11, 2014

"How they were able to do that is a common story in the Middle East, featuring various sandboxes with flags and the role of oil, tribes and armed minorities such as the Israelis, the Sunnis in places like Bahrain, the Alawites in Syria and the Christians in Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria."

Comment: This editorial contains factual errors. Simpson mistakenly lumps Israel, a sovereign state, with minority groups living within majoritarian states. He is also misinformed about the status of Christians in Egypt, Syria and Palestine. They are not an armed minority, but are instead a defenseless minority who are currently suffering from Islamist violence for that reason.

(Example 3, Continued) Dan Simpson / **Iraq is crumbling, no surprise**

"At least a half-million Iraqis and more than 4,000 Americans have died since 2003."

Comment: This editorial repeats information from a discredited study appearing in the British medical journal, The Lancet. There is no credible study that counts a "half-million Iraqi" dead due to the violence since 2003.

Example 4: Rob Rogers cartoon titled, "**Which is the more heinous and cowardly act,**", depicts Israel deliberately killing a Gazan civilian. July 22, 2014

Comment: This is a defamatory charge. There is ample testimony by Israeli and American military commanders who have investigated such claims and concluded that there is no substantive evidence that Israel intentionally targets civilians. British Col. (Ret.) Richard Kemp has testified to the United Nations, "...the Israeli Defense Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare." Most recently a group of military officers headed by retired U.S. Army General Charles Wald testified on this matter. Why not report on that?

Example 5: Dan Simpson / **Potential American allies in the fight for Iraq are a sorry lot**
August 27, 2014

"And then there are the Kurds. They are claiming that if only the United States would provide them hotter weapons, they would be prepared to stand up to Islamic State forces. There are a couple of problems there. One of these is that what the Kurds want is their own country. The first problem with that is that the Kurds would create their own country out of pieces of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. "

Comment: Simpson is wrong; the Kurds have not demanded a country that would include pieces of Iran or Turkey. He is using a straw man argument, attributing to the Kurds a position they do not hold in order to deny them legitimacy.

"Other Capitol elements favoring war include the Israel lobby, which wants to see American public concern diverted from what Israel is doing in Gaza and from pressing it for renewed negotiations with the Palestinians over the future of the Israel-Palestine territory. American forces fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria would serve as useful distraction in that regard from the point of view of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and his American supporters."

Comment: This is defamatory speculation. What evidence can Simpson provide that an "Israel lobby" is prodding America to go to war in Syria? Can he demonstrate an intent among Israel's supporters to divert attention from Israeli actions in Gaza? The answer is no to both of those questions.

Example 6: Engaging Iran: Visitors to Pittsburgh bring message worth noting

September 11, 2014

"Ms. Mathews and Mr. Pickering came to Pittsburgh to alert people to the importance to Americans of what is underway and to ask them to be interested and involved. Opposition to an agreement is already being encountered from the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters in the United States, weighing in with Congress through campaign contributions and other pressure."

Comment: Simpson slanders Israel's supporters. Can he produce evidence that campaign contributions are accompanied by the demand that Congress oppose engagement with Iran? Furthermore how is "pressure" as Simpson calls it any different among Israel's supporters as among Iran's supporters or any other group that engages in lobbying. There is an implicit double-standard.

Example 7: Pivotal Jordan: Refugees pose new strains to Israel's neighbor November 21, 2014

"Those relations have recently been strained by extremist Israelis, illegal West Bank settlers as well as some political figures in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party..."

Comment: The Editorial board declares the West Bank settlers "illegal." This is not true! The settlements are not illegal according to both United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 and American policy.

"Israelis should think hard before toying with the stability of Jordan....."

Comment: Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has said that Israel's national interest dictates an intense concern with Jordan's survival and has made it clear that Israel is ready to do whatever it takes to defend it. (*World Affairs*, July 3, 2014)

Example 8: Dan Simpson: Don't send weapons to Ukraine,

The U.S. has more important priorities at home; leave Ukraine to the Europeans, February 11, 2015

"First of all, it's about being relentlessly in search of enemies. We miss the Soviet Union. It has been replaced by complicated, harder-to-defeat non-state organizations such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, with Sunnis, Shiites, Alawites, Zaydis, Houthis, Gazans, Copts, Israelis and Palestinians stirred in. Wouldn't it be nicer if we just had a simple, straightforward enemy to face? as in a Soviet-style Russia headed by a 21st-century czar? We are still using weapons systems suited to fighting the former Soviet forces and facing them would require putting the factories of big campaign-donor companies back in production. Wouldn't that be nice and easier?"

Comment: Simpson again lumps Israel, a sovereign state, with a list of non-state organizations. Simpson classifies Israel as a "non-state" and potential adversary of the United States. He is entitled to his views, but not his facts. Also, does this represent the view of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette?

Example 9: A news article on July 23, 2014 gives most of its space to Israelis killing two Palestinian militants. Only at the end of the lengthy piece does it add "Elsewhere, an Israel teenager was killed.."

On the same day, the Pittsburgh Tribune Review published an article with the headline "Attack from Syria kills 13-year-old Israeli."

Comment: This reveals a bias in the selection of what is important in the news.. The attack from across the Syrian border and killing of an Israeli civilian is a potentially high risk event due to the involvement of different national entities. It deserved more than just a passing word.

Example 10: Blindness in Gaza: Leaders of Israel and Hamas make innocents suffer
July 18, 2014

"Violence in Gaza will continue to flare up, as it has three times in the past five years, until Israel starts to move seriously toward a two-state solution. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's answer to a democratic unity government between Fatah and Hamas was to suspend payment to 43,000 civil servants and continue enforcing stifling border controls. The plight of Gazans even before the Israeli operation was a humanitarian crisis, with limited clean water, electricity and opportunity for jobs and economic growth."

Comment: First, there is no mention Hamas is sworn to the destruction of Israel and that is the reason Israel responded harshly to the proposed unity government, which failed anyway. Second, Israel does not pay salaries of the 43,000 civil servants employed by Fatah and Hamas. Lastly, an official from the Red Cross, Mathilde Reidmatten, in 2011 stated, "there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza." Without denying that economic hardship exists, it is an exaggeration to describe it as a "humanitarian crisis". There is no hunger or denial of the basic necessities, there is access to health care and clean water.

The PG consistently portrays Israel as the cause of Middle East problems. This is evidenced by the numerous examples cited in this in this letter, that not only fail to meet the standards of fair and accurate reporting, but do not meet the high ethics dictated by Tom Wasilewski and the Society of Professional Journalists. This situation needs to be corrected and we are sure the PG would like to remain true to its high standards of journalism which has been a hallmark since 1786. Therefore, we would like to schedule an appointment at your office to discuss a resolution. Please call Stuart Pavilack at 412.665.4630 to schedule a mutually agreeable date and time.

Sincerely,

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