

*July 16, 2019 – for immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about the accuracy of statements made in a May 11, 2019 column published in the Globe and Mail under the headline: ‘How the Liberals got trapped without a policy in the Middle East’.

The complainant, Charles Cooke, took issue with the phrase “...as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu enters his second decade in office on a self-declared mission to breach the long-established foundations of peaceful co-existence and to goad Mr. Trump into war with Iran.”

He argued that the statement was inaccurate because it was an assertion not based in fact.

The news organization responded by stating that the assertion was a fair and reasonable comment based on the columnist's view of ongoing international discord.

Distinguishing fact from opinion is a basic journalistic principle.

After a thorough review of this complaint, the NNC is of the view that the opinion writer was not making specific reference to any particular incident or conversation between political leaders, but rather, was making a statement based on his observations about the relationship between the two governments. Given that the article in question is an opinion column, it is appropriate for the writer to state what he sees as the relevant details, based on his current knowledge, observations and reporting.

In this case, while Prime Minister Netanyahu has not overtly lobbied President Trump to engage in attacks on Iran, a sampling of online search queries provides several news stories, from reputable U.S. and international organizations, which support the opinion writer's statement.

The NNC supports opinion writers' prerogative to choose their own sources. In that vein, it is not unlikely or unreasonable that a reader may find other sources that dispute the article, or that a reader may disagree with the writer's argument. However, it is the NewsMedia Council's view that a reader's difference of opinion or perspective from that of the writer does not, in itself, constitute a breach of journalistic standards.

The NNC also noted that the statement in question is, by-and-large, secondary to the main thrust of the article, which is the columnist's deeper examination of the current issue as it relates to Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East.

For these reasons, the NNC finds no breach of journalistic standards and declines to pursue further action on your complaint.

Lastly, the News Media Council noted that the news organization offered the complainant an opportunity for a letter to the editor. Letters are widely-accepted as a remedy and as a reasonable opportunity to present a point of view or set of circumstances, and to add valued diversity of voices on contentious issues of public interest.