

## Introduction:

# Correcting the Record on Resolution 242

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**Resolution 242  
says that as part  
of a final peace  
settlement, Israel  
must have “secure  
and recognized”  
borders.**

United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 is the most important UN resolution for peacemaking in the Arab-Israel conflict. Though carefully negotiated forty years ago in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, it has remained the foundation for all peacemaking efforts — from the Israel-Egypt treaty of peace to the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, to the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo Agreements. For any student of the Middle East it is well known that the resolution never established the extent of Israel’s required withdrawal from territories captured during the Six-Day War in exchange for peace with its Arab neighbors.

Nevertheless, over the past decade, several press organizations have falsely characterized UN resolutions as requiring Israel to withdraw entirely from the West Bank and Gaza. For example, an Associated Press (AP) article asserted that “Security council resolutions 242 and 338 call on Israel to withdraw from all territory captured in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, which includes east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Golan Heights.”<sup>1</sup> This characterization was completely inaccurate. Resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from “territory,” decidedly not “all territory,” and the borders of such a withdrawal were meant to reflect each state’s right to live in “secure and recognized” boundaries in the region.

The *New York Times* caught this distinction, and it ran a correction for committing essentially the same error as the AP: William A. Orme had cited “resolutions” calling on Israel to withdraw to its “pre-1967 borders.”<sup>2</sup> As the correction pointed out, no such resolutions exist. In this vein, *New York Times* Executive Editor Joseph Lelyveld addressed his employees in a speech which, among other complaints, included the following castigation: “Three times in recent months we’ve had to run corrections on the actual provisions of UN Resolution 242, providing great cheer and sustenance to those readers who are convinced we are opinionated and not well informed on Middle East issues.”<sup>3</sup>

The *New York Times* acknowledged its errors with corrections, such as the one published on September 8, 2000:

An article on Wednesday about the Middle East peace talks referred incorrectly to United Nations resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Security Council Resolution 242, passed after the 1967 Middle East War, calls for Israel’s armed forces to withdraw “from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” no resolution calls for Israeli withdrawal from all territory, including East Jerusalem, occupied in the war.



**Resolution 242  
does not mandate  
Israeli withdrawal  
from all territories  
taken in the 1967  
war.**

Lelyveld clearly understood the content and meaning of Resolution 242. He also understood that by repeatedly getting it wrong the *New York Times* was harming its own credibility. Nonetheless, some of its finest columnists fell into this same trap of misrepresenting Resolution 242. For example, Thomas Friedman, who covered the Arab-Israeli conflict from Beirut and Jerusalem, wrote a column in 2002 which again distorted Resolution 242:

Earlier this month, I wrote a column suggesting that the 22 members of the Arab League, at their summit in Beirut on March 27 and 28, make a simple, clear-cut proposal to Israel to break the Israeli-Palestinian impasse: In return for a total withdrawal by Israel to the June 4, 1967 lines, and the establishment of a Palestinian state, the 22 members of the Arab League would offer Israel full diplomatic relations, normalized trade and security guarantees. *Full withdrawal, in accord with U.N. Resolution 242, for full peace between Israel and the entire Arab world. Why not?*<sup>4</sup> [emphasis added]

The latest contributor to this effort to twist the original meaning of Resolution 242 is former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in his 2006 book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. Carter asserts, for example, that Israel should undertake a “withdrawal to the 1967 border specified in UN Resolution 242.” In a critique of the Carter books, his former colleague, Professor Kenneth W. Stein of Emory University, attacks Carter’s attempt to revise Resolution 242: “Nowhere in the resolution does it stipulate what or where Israel’s border should be, nor does the resolution mandate Israeli withdrawal from all territories taken in the 1967 war.”<sup>5</sup>

An ancillary problem is the exact status of the pre-1967 boundary, known as the 1949 Armistice Line, which was only a military line and not a recognized international boundary. As the main drafter of Resolution 242, Lord Caradon, the British ambassador to the UN in 1967, stated in 1974:

It would have been wrong to demand that Israel return to its positions of June 4, 1967, because those positions were undesirable and artificial. After all, they were just the places where the soldiers of each side happened to be on the day the fighting stopped in 1948. They were just armistice lines. That’s why we didn’t demand that the Israelis return to them.<sup>6</sup>

Yet Carter assigns to the 1949 Armistice Line a new legal significance. He writes that Resolution 242 “confirmed Israel’s existence within its 1949 borders as promised in the Camp David Accords and Oslo Agreement.” Not only is this statement inconsistent with Resolution 242, but it is not to be found in either



**President Bush:  
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of 1949.”**

the 1978 Camp David Accords or the 1993 Oslo Declaration of Principles. Unfortunately, Carter widely lectures on university campuses and it is difficult to ascertain the impact of his mistaken rendition of Israel’s international legal obligations.

Since Carter’s presidency, U.S. officials have been careful to protect Israel’s rights and the true meaning of Resolution 242. The most recent example of this was President George W. Bush’s letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on April 14, 2004, which stated:

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949.

Undoubtedly Bush’s letter helped rectify the growing misinterpretations of Resolution 242. Significantly, it was also supported by large bi-partisan majorities in both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives on June 23-24, 2004. Nonetheless, the need to explain the real meaning of Resolution 242 is growing. For that reason, the essays in this book are of extreme importance for the academic, diplomatic, and journalistic communities that avidly follow developments in the Middle East.

## Notes

- 1 “Syrian Minister Hails Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon,” Associated Press, April 8, 2000.
- 2 Many of these examples are to be found in Jeff Helmreich, “Journalistic License: Professional Standards in the Print Media’s Coverage of Israel,” *Jerusalem Viewpoints*, August 2001, [www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=2&DBID=1&LNGLD=1&TMID=111&FID=253&PID=0&IID=1126&TTL=Journalistic\\_License:\\_Professional\\_Standards\\_in\\_the\\_Print\\_Media’s\\_Coverage\\_of\\_Israel](http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=2&DBID=1&LNGLD=1&TMID=111&FID=253&PID=0&IID=1126&TTL=Journalistic_License:_Professional_Standards_in_the_Print_Media’s_Coverage_of_Israel). See also, William A. Orme, “Peace Negotiators Meet in Egypt as Israeli Election Nears,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2001, A6.
- 3 From an internal *New York Times* report on a speech by Executive Editor Joseph Lelyveld at the Fourth Annual Newsroom Retreat held in Tarrytown, New York, September 14, 2000. Cited by *SmarterTimes.Com*.

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- 4 Thomas Friedman, "An Intriguing Signal from the Saudi Crown Prince," *New York Times*, February 17, 2002, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9801E3D6133FF934A25751C0A9649C8B63&scp=1&sq=thomas%20friedman%20february%202002&st=cse>.
- 5 Kenneth W. Stein, "My Problem with Jimmy Carter's Book," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2007, [www.meforum.org/article/1633](http://www.meforum.org/article/1633).
- 6 Cited from the *Beirut Daily Star*, June 12, 1974, by Andrea Levin, "Correcting Carter's Distortion," *Jerusalem Post*, January 16, 2007.

