

# Palestine in UN Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper examines UN resolutions 242 and 338 to find whether these two milestone texts of UN discourse on the Palestine Question, taken as the basis for “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East,” genuinely and practically work towards an amicable solution to this prolonged problem, this almost century-long unequal conflict. The study seeks to find out whether such UN discourse is linguistically structured to achieve such an end; with the ultimate goal being offering us “the possibility that we might profitably conceive the world in some alternative way” (Fowler, 1981 cited in Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, p. 33) as is the case with any discourse study that adopts ‘critical’ goals. The study therefore employs Ruth Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) — an approach within the pluralistic framework of CDA. The findings show that temporisation of the Palestine Question has been an indirect result of the bad faith and linguistic manipulation of the powerful forces; that the way these discourses are structured is responsible for perpetuating rather than ending Israeli occupation. So rather than redressing the *ethnic cleansing of Palestine* and ending Israeli occupation as the core of the Palestine Question, UN discourse is found to protract the status quo — the consolidation of Israeli power and expansionism.

**Keywords:** Palestine, The Palestine Question, the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, Israel, Israeli occupation, UN Resolution 242, UN Resolution 338, Discourse, CDA, Peace process

## 1. Introduction

A hundred years ago, in 1917, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, declared, on behalf of the British government, Palestine “a national home for the Jewish people;” an edict that had led to Zionist immigration to Palestine, culminating in 1948 in the envisaged establishment in Palestine of a Jewish state — a ‘country of immigrants’ in the heart of mandate Palestine (1917-1948). This atrocity took place following militarised Zionist immigrants’ — constructed later as ‘Israel Defense Forces’ — launch of a planned programme to *drive out* the Palestinian people from their homeland — a *crime of ethnic cleansing* that has led to the *mass expulsion* of the Palestinian people and the onset of their ongoing dispossession and suffering. Bringing this crime to a tipping point, a hundred years later — 2017 — the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the US, Donald Trump, had declared Jerusalem — capital of Palestine and the forthcoming seat of the second global Islamic civilization — as the capital of this *de facto* ‘country of immigrants,’ this settler colonialist state.

This prolonged premeditated national trauma of the Palestinian people resulting from this 1948 Zionist ethnic cleansing of Palestine, which has in turn resulted in the Palestinian Refugee problem, exacerbated by the 1967 Israeli occupation of the rest of historic Palestine and the resultant displacement and dispossession of many more Palestinians constitute — in essence — what the Question of Palestine is simply about, and underlie much of the ensuing spillover of regional wars and political unrest in the Middle East and probably the world at large. Thus, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, the ongoing Israeli occupation, and Israel’s ongoing denial of this crime of ethnic cleansing, constitute the genesis and crux of the Palestine Question and the impetus for the ongoing martyrdom in occupied Palestine.

This Palestine problem or rather the problem created in Palestine — a protracted wrong, “born of design” rather than ‘the circumstances’ (Masalha, 1992; Saleh, 2003; Pappé, 2006) — has created much sufferings and caused much deaths in Palestine and around Palestine. It has created, among those against social injustice, a sense of disgruntlement towards the imperial forces that have helped Zionists transform Palestine into a Jewish state; leading to the mass expulsion and politicide of the Palestinian people, and the formation of a new entity on the debris of their razed homes and villages.

It has engendered — as a backlash to this historical injustice, and ongoing apartheid practices of the new colonialist entity that has systematically denied the Palestinian people their right of return and self-determination — a constant state of strife, acts of resistance versus acts of aggression to quell such resistance, between this 1948-formed “country of immigrants” (the Israelis) and the Palestinian people.

Engulfing neighbouring countries or the whole geography of the Middle East, this festering condition — augmented by the complicity of the world superpower, the implantation of post-colonialist, appointed dictatorships and puppet leaders in the Muslim countries in the region, and the manufacturing of a *discourse* that serves the strategic interests of this world superpower and this newly-found state of Israel in the heart of the Muslim world — has also contributed to the indefinite protraction of the Palestine Question and the ongoing and growing regional violence and instability.

Continued Israeli occupation then, or the grand Zionist scheme, hatched more than 100 years ago to create a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine, and the forced “resettlement” or expulsion of the indigenous Palestinians away from it through the forcible seizure of their villages and land by immigrant Zionists — constitutes, in a nutshell, the genesis and impetus to the Palestine Question and much of the radicalisation rife in the Middle East and to some extent the world at large.

A genuine resolution of this ongoing historical injustice can therefore significantly reduce such anarchy. Indeed, as one of six specific steps, outlined as part of a Grand Strategy to reduce “terrorism” in the world, former CIA official, Graham E. Fuller (2010), in an enlightening and intriguing book, states:

An early solution to the Palestinian problem must be found. It is perceived across the Muslim world as the single most egregious case of foreign imperialism, which has displaced local people and cast them into desperate living conditions in refugee camps, imposed second-class citizenship upon them in Israel, or pushed them into exile – for more than sixty [now 71] years. Palestinian suffering has grown, accompanied by a radicalization that has spread beyond Palestine. The crisis demands a quick solution, the general outlines of which are well known to all parties. The Israeli colonization efforts in Palestinian territories must end and be reversed (p. 302).

## 2. Theoretical Background, Data and Analytic Method

Power is exercised through *discourse*. Domination or “dominance and power relations” are enacted and perpetuated through linguistic or *discursive* forms, and are equally exposed and changed through the *critical* analysis of such forms (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000; Fairclough, 2001; Thomas, Wareing, Singh, Peccei, Thornborrow & Jones, 2004; Mesdi, 2007; Amer, 2009).

It is assumed that linguistic structures and discourse strategies are constructed in such subtle ways as to influence perception in determinate directions, induce certain or even conflicting interpretations, divert attention and deaden the senses, make an outlet for a preconceived political event, cover up a certain one, legitimate or delegitimate events and social players.

Discourses hedge and dilute, “foreground or [...] obscure responsibility and agency” (Thomas *et al.*, 2004: 52), “naturalise us into accepting certain ideas” (*ibid.* p. 33), “reinforce a particular perception of event or of whole societies,” (52) defend the indefensible, “make notions which are in fact debatable seem like ‘givens’” (Orwell, 1949/2008 cited in Sant, 2008: 35), “make lies sound truthful and murder respectable” (35), mystify social events and maintain unequal power relations. Indeed, as Amer (2009) puts it, “conflicts and wars begin and end with *words*. Before guns are fired and bombs start falling, words commit the first act of war” (26).

This is an assumption that has led to a personal conviction that the way the Palestine Question has been discursively constructed “along certain lines” or “angles of telling” rather than others has played a major role in keeping Palestine and the Middle East in the way they are now, and that changing the status quo starts from subjecting such forms or discourses to *critical analysis*.

Thus, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of those discourses — used in the pursuit to construct a solution to the *Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation* — is timely and a necessity. Accordingly, this *critical* discourse study — using Wodak and Reisigl’s three-dimensional discourse-analytic approach to CDA, the *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA) — conducts a CDA of the linguistics of some of the UN discourse on the Palestine Question — *UN resolutions 242 and 338* — the resolutions or discourse declared to terminate all states of belligerency and bring to a halt “decades of confrontation and conflict” in the Middle East.

The study seeks to see what role this discourse plays in the realities of the Palestinian struggle and the status quo; with the ultimate goal being offering us “the possibility that we might profitably conceive the world in some alternative way” (Fowler, 1981 cited in Jaworski & Coupland, 1999: 33) as is the case with CDA or any discourse study that “adopts ‘critical goals’” (Fairclough, 1995: 27).

My interest in this corpus of discourse or set of texts stems from the assumption that this set of texts is *produced by* an influential body and taken as the basis for a process declared to bring peace to a torn Middle East, and that it is *about* a people who have been suffering for decades as a result of occupation, ethnic cleansing and dispossession. It is this ‘*produced by*’ or ‘*about,*’ according to Clarke (2005), that usually stimulates a discourse analyst — in their quest for social justice and “the understanding and the solution of serious social problems (Van Dijk, 2009, P. 63-64) — to conduct a *critical textual analysis* of a certain discourse, and so is my selection of those two resolutions as the data for this paper.

In doing so, the paper — a contribution to critical discourse studies — also seeks to increase readers’ consciousness of the role discourse plays in social continuity or change, or the reproduction on the one hand, and transformation, on the other, of the status quo where discourse is used to either *reproduce* or *transform* reality.

The paper, as noted, employs Wodak and Reisigl’s (2009) “analytical apparatus”. My adoption of this approach is warranted by the nature of the issue under investigation, which involves history and present-day politics. For though discoursing on the Palestine Question is a present issue, the issue itself is not new; it is foregrounded in history; it is a hundred years long; a fact that must be taken into serious consideration when proposing a “just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement” to this century-long problem — given how this social wrong has started in the first place. This is in order to demarcate the various aspects of the phenomenon at stake, put things in their right historical perspective, and then propose a “just” solution, accordingly.

My adoption of this approach is also warranted by the assumption that discursive events or discourses, viewed by Van Dijk as “text in context” (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 23) are by definition, historical and thus can only be understood with reference to their intertextual/interdiscursive historical context. This is an aspect of discourse, a tenet of CDA that DHA foregrounds as central to the understanding of a discourse. Therefore, reference, “in intricate ways,” has to be made to the context, “to such extralinguistic factors as culture, society and ideology” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

The Discourse-Historical Approach seeks, according to Titscher and associates (2000) “to facilitate the analysis of implicitly prejudiced utterances and to assist in the decoding of allusions typically concealed in such utterances by referring to background knowledge” (p. 165). This analysis of ‘implicitly prejudiced utterances’ and this “decoding of allusions” “concealed in such utterances” is carried out in DHA in light of its concept and application of *critique* — a pillar central, actually, to all CDA approaches. ‘Critique’ here, according to Wodak and Meyer (2009), “is essentially making visible the interconnectedness of things [...] (7)”. According to Wodak (*ibid.*)

“Critical” means not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism [...], being self-reflective in my research, and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest. “Critical”, thus, does not imply the common sense meaning of “being negative” — rather “skeptical” (P. 17).

In discussing *critique*, as one of three concepts (the others being “power” and “ideology”) that indispensably figure in all variants of CDA, Reisigl and Wodak (2009) further make the following statement concerning “critical” or the concept of “critique”:

‘Critical’ stance should be understood as gaining distance from the data [...], embedding the data in the social context, clarifying the political positioning of discourse participants, and having a focus on continuous self-reflection while undertaking research (p. 87).

Reisigl and Wodak (2009) discuss three related aspects of “critique” to which DHA adheres: (I) text or discourse-immanent critique (aimed “at discovering inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures”), (II) socio-diagnostic critique (“concerned with demystifying the — manifest or latent — persuasive or ‘manipulative’ character of discursive practices”), and (III) future-related prospective critique (meant to “contribute to the improvement of communication (for example, by elaborating guidelines against sexist language use or by reducing ‘language barriers’ in hospitals, schools and so forth)”) (p. 88).

Now, within DHA or its “analytical apparatus,” there are *three* “systematically and recursively related” steps of analysis where a “fundamental distinction is made between contents, argumentation (or discourse) strategies, and forms of linguistic implementation” (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 158). Thus, in DHA, critical analysis begins first with an identification of the *contents and topics* of a specific discourse (“the main discourse topics of the text”); second, identification of the *discourse or argumentation strategies* deployed; and third, identification of the *forms of linguistic implementation* — the lexical and grammatical systems and selections through which the discourse strategies are realised.

It should, however, be noted that these three analytical steps are not to be understood “as a sequence of separate operational steps but as a cycle in which the three analytical dimensions are systematically and recursively related to the totality of contextual knowledge” (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 158).

In light of these analytical levels of the DHA, this paper — after providing the context of each text — the historical background — examines within its scope some of the “non-trivial” *discourse strategies* employed in resolutions 242 and 338, along with the *lexicogrammatical structures* (lexical and syntactic selections). Quite often, discourse structures and strategies “are not self-evident to the casual reader” or even discourse participants. Therefore, the paper seeks, along following a thematic (hermeneutic/interpretive) analysis of the discourse contents and themes, to note, unearth and articulate some of the discourse strategies used, and lexicogrammatical selections deployed in these texts to realise such strategies and so reproduce the status quo; shedding light in the process on the role of UN discourse on the Palestine Question in the realities of the conflict, the status of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and Right of Return to their homeland.

The paper’s ultimate aim is to clarify “the political positioning of discourse participants,” verifying in the process their *intent* and seriousness on the one hand, and consequently the *practicality* of such texts in achieving what is articulated on the other — a real *bona fide* and *practical quick* solution to the Palestine Question or only a means to perpetuate it. Critical discourse analysis is capable of revealing the role of a certain discourse in either reproducing the status quo or resisting it, and so its role in either emancipation or continued domination.

### **3. UN Discourse and the Palestine Question**

#### *3.1 UN SC Resolution 242*

After extensive consultations with Arab states, Israel, and the Palestinians, the United States and the Soviet Union believe that an historic opportunity exists to advance the prospects for genuine peace throughout the region. The United States and the Soviet Union are prepared to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, through direct negotiations along two tracks, between Israel and the Arab states, and between Israel and the Palestinians, based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The objective of this process is real peace.



(Letter of invitation to the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, 19-10-1991,  
<<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/letter-of-invitation-to-madrid-peace-conference>> (accessed August 13, 2019)).

As a background to its setting and context, Resolution 242 was adopted in the aftermath of the Israeli Aggression of 5 June (1967) (framed by Israelis as the Six-Day War), and the consequent occupation of the remnant of historic Palestine, along with the sovereign territories of the Sinai Peninsula (of Egypt) and the Golan Heights (of Syria). Thus, the resolution was issued supposedly in order to end “the state of belligerency then existing between Israel and Egypt, Jordan and Syria,” following the 1948 envisaged implantation of Israel in Palestine, and then intensified following this Aggression of 5 June — this full-scale blitzkrieg Israeli surprise attack on 5 June 1967 that has resulted in the new state’s annexation of the remnant 22% (Saleh, 2001) of historic Palestine: the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, wiping Palestine completely off the map.

Drafted by Lord Caradon, the then Britain’s representative to the UN, and issued on November 22, 1967 — 20 years after the *Partition Resolution* (181 of November 1947) — UN SC Resolution 242 (Appendix A) — through deliberate linguistic ambiguity — has been a bone of contention not only since the very moment of its adoption, but also its interpretation throughout the years to come.

This resolution — along with 338 as noted in the above quoted text, is taken as the basis for “permanent status negotiations” and the establishment of peace. The paper seeks to ascertain if this resolution is really geared towards and linguistically structured to achieve “a just, lasting and comprehensive peace” between Arabs and Israelis through realising the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, as foregrounded in the invitation to the *Middle East Peace Conference* or whether it is a linguistic means to protract the status quo.

Proposed by the UK, and supported by the USA, Resolution 242 has, in violation of the UN principle of “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war,” not only authorised the then new state’s existence within the 78% of Palestine it annexed in the 1948 *ethnic cleansing of Palestine* (Pappe, 2006), but also provided for it the grounds or *linguistic means* to dodge and debate the extent of withdrawal from *the* remaining 22% of the territory of Mandate Palestine it occupied in the Aggression of 5 June, and which the resolution is supposed to demand for its immediate return. And so becoming one of the most commonly referred to in Middle Eastern politics or the Israel/Palestine question, 242 has been instrumental in granting to Israel further land requisition or annexation of Palestinian territory.

Through this Resolution, “the United States has laid down the foundation stone for a new map for the Jewish state” (Shash, 1999: 19), commensurate with the strategic role it plays in the region. It has also established or opened — though in a latent manner — the door wide for whatever measures seen or deemed necessary for Israeli security and hence expansionism.

Orchestrators of 242 begin, after *expressing* their “continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,” by *emphasizing* “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war [...]. Now given how Israel was established in 1948 on 78% of Mandate Palestine by means of war, we notice here an obvious contradiction for the UN has recognized the new state’s existence within the boundaries created in 1948 through the acquisition of territory by war.

The discourse producers next proceed as to state that “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East” requires, amongst other things:

- (i) Withdrawal of Israel [i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict [and] (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area in their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.

First, by making or restricting reference to “the recent conflict,” i.e. 1967, and by calling for “respect and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area,” the resolution completely ignores the *status quo ante* that has led to the *status quo* — the ethnic cleansing of Palestine or the fact that the Question of Palestine has started since the establishment of Israel in 1948. This is a discourse strategy — *misrepresentation of reality and distortion of facts* — employed to create a new reality; it is meant to obscure the status quo ante in favour for the status quo. This linguistic omission of historic Palestine concurs with the invention or creation of Israel. Resolution 242 ignores such significant historical fact. It treats the Palestine Question as though it was the product of 1967 and not 1948, which is a misrepresentation of reality and distortion of facts as noted. While the fact is that Israel prior to 1948 was non-existent. The Palestine Question is rooted in 1948.

It is useful in this connection to state also the role *Zionist discourse* played in the creation of Israel. Besides the use of force and the collaboration of the UK, the envisaged *de facto* establishment of Israel in 1948 was aided by years of *Zionist mythology* and the discursive construction or concoction of various discourses about a mythologised distant national origin such as those of the ‘biblical land,’ ‘Return to Zion,’ ‘a land without people for a people without land,’ ‘the promised land,’ the ‘historical right,’ ‘ancient historic connection,’ ‘Land of Israel,’ ‘settling an empty land,’ and ‘making the desert bloom,’ ‘voluntary exodus’ (of about a million indigenous Palestinians) ‘God’s ‘chosen people,’ anti-Semitism, and hegemonic identity narratives of this sort whose prime function is to deceive, distort facts, misrepresent reality, and in the process enact, exercise and sustain hegemony — a typical colonialist practice considered central to the creation and survival of Israel in Palestine.

Resolution 242 simply ignores this inexorable historical fact created by such *Zionist mythology* and *war*; it disregards the heart of the problem — the problem as a “national



cause;” the problem as a people whom Zionists (later constructed as Israelis) have *uprooted* from their *place of origin* and made to languish in diaspora; the problem of a people whom Zionists have “expelled from their homes at gunpoint” and then *denied* return. Resolution 242 ignores such fact, contributing thus to a warped or distorted perception of the reality of things. The resolution makes no mention of this issue. It deals with the Palestine Question as “a refugee problem,” thus treating the Palestine Question “as one of resolving the refugee issue” and not that of a national cause; and so it does not deal with the Palestine Question as such, which can obscure and obliterate the cause and give Israel more leeway to debate, temporise and stall, effecting in the process a total memoricide of *the ethnic cleansing of Palestine*, of the Palestine Question as a “national cause.”

By characterising and dealing with this man-made atrocity as nothing but a “refugee problem,” the politically powerful group or “engaged intelligentsia” (Amer, 2012) behind the resolution disregard the root of the problem. By reducing the Palestine Question from being a *national cause*, from being an act of ethnic cleansing to a mere *refugee problem*, Resolution 242 not only fails to be *practical* and *bona fide*, but also helps *obfuscate* and *obliterate* the national rights of the Palestinian people, perpetuating their uprootedness and sufferings.

Further, it must be noted that producers of the resolution make no *explicit* mention of the *agent* behind this “refugee problem,” which takes attention away from and obfuscates the *human agency* behind the “refugee problem.” Here the UN *de-agentialises* actions of which the Israelis are agent. This *passive agent deletion* helps conceal or obscure human agency (i.e. Zionists/Israelis) as the one bringing about this “refugee problem.” This marginalisation or omission of the agent — a discourse strategy — in such *agentless passives* — those calculated de-agentialised constructions — can contribute to a perception that the agent is relatively unimportant. Consequently, a consumer may be more likely to focus on the foregrounded information spending less, if any, time thinking about the agent or actor.

This UN *de-agentialisation* or the omission of the agent behind this “refugee problem” perpetuates injustice as such calculated use of *agent deletion* obscures *causal agency*, thus obviating the need for blame attribution, responsibility and accountability, and rehabilitation. We are told that there is a “problem;” but we are not told about what or who has caused the ‘problem’ (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. UN Resolution 242

Original text	Deconstructed
<p><i>The Security Council,</i> <i>Affirms further</i> the necessity <i>(b)</i> For achieving a just settlement of <b>the refugee problem</b> (emphasis added).</p>	<p><i>The Security Council,</i> <i>Affirms further</i> the necessity <i>(b)</i> For achieving the Palestinian <b>Right of Return</b> in an attempt to redress the ethnic cleansing Zionist immigrants perpetrated in 1948.</p>

Now notwithstanding this disregard of this historical fact of 1948 as the year of the *de facto* creation of Israel and the consequent Palestinian “refugee problem,” brought about by the new state rather than, say, a natural disaster, the resolution *has* to do with, and was adopted as a development of such a historical fact. It has to do with the UN principle of “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war,” hence its call (i) for the “withdrawal of Israel [i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” and (ii) “Termination of all claims or states of belligerency”. However, in ignoring the then recent fact that Israel was established through the force of arms or “the acquisition of territory by war,” the resolution *contradicts* itself. It contradicts itself when it emphasises “the territorial inviolability” and “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.”

Second, the resolution gives the impression that Israel is to withdraw from *the* territories it occupied in that same year (i.e. 1967). However, a critical analysis of the linguistics or grain-of-sand like means used reveals, much to the frustration of the Palestinian people, something else. Let us first take a look at the following extract — in Table 2 below — taken from paragraph 1 (i) of the resolution with its reconstructed or deconstructed version next to it:

Table 2. UN Resolution 242

Original text	Deconstructed
Withdrawal of Israel[i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict	“Withdrawal of Israel[i] armed forces from <b>[the]</b> territories occupied in the recent conflict”

According to the phraseology or wording of the text of the resolution above, Israel is to withdraw from territories it occupied in the recent conflict; territories, any territories; five or ten percent of the area of *the* occupied territories can, from the Israeli point of view or the Machiavellian discourse producer, for example, fulfill the “requirements”. The way discourse here is carefully worded with the calculated omission of the inclusive definite article “the” makes or gives room for Israel to withdraw from “some” or “certain” territories rather than *the* territories, i.e., *all the territories* it occupied in that invasion. This manipulation of articles can ensure infinite hedging and temporisation.

The linguistics of the resolution do not specify the extent of withdrawal, which must be; given “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war,” *full* withdrawal. Such *non-committal statements and vague formulations* give Israel the grounds for lack of over-precise commitment and the means to delay and dodge withdrawal. Such language creates a *false impression* — a discourse strategy known as *creating false impression*.

So this creates another *contradiction* between the preambular or opening phrase: “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” discussed above and this *non-committal* or *ambiguous use of language* concerning the complete withdrawal from the territories

acquired by war. In other words, if “the acquisition of territory by war” or “force” is inadmissible, then *full* and *immediate* withdrawal from *all* the territories occupied by aggression must take place, and immediately and unconditionally. But this is not the case in the resolution. On the contrary, the discourse strategy of *vague formulations* used gives Israel much wiggle room to indefinitely temporise, stonewall and hedge the principles of the UN Charter and Geneva Conventions, disputing and denying the interpretation of the Palestinian viewpoint of the resolution, which is *total* and *immediate* Israeli withdrawal.

The same discourse strategy, realized linguistically in the same manner, is also used with reference to withdrawal of *the* Israeli armed forces where the inclusive definite article is again omitted (see Table 3).

Table 3. UN Resolution 242

Original text	Deconstructed
Withdrawal of Israel[i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict	Withdrawal of [ <b>the</b> ] Israeli armed forces from [ <b>the</b> ] territories occupied in the recent conflict

It is “Withdrawal of Israel[i] armed forces [not **the** Israel[i] armed forces] from territories occupied in the recent conflict”. The omission of the definite article along with absence of “total” as in “total withdrawal” gives Israel a room to hedge and dodge the number or percentage of the withdrawal of its armed forces, for example, **some** rather than **the** or **all** forces, which would make it redeployment rather than actual withdrawal.

Further and in contrast to this calculated omission of the definite article from paragraph 1 (i) of the Resolution — “Withdrawal of Israel[i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” we find that “the” is used in paragraph 2 (c), in connection with the necessity “For guaranteeing **the** territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area [...] (emphasis added)”.

So it when it comes to territorial withdrawal where Israel is the one to withdraw, it is “Withdrawal [...] from territories” — some territories without specification. But when it comes to guaranteeing the inviolability of the territory where Israel is particularly involved and concerned given its formation in the region by war, it is “the territorial inviolability,” with “the” being used — specific and unambiguous. In other words, when it comes to the Israelis, the phrasing of the resolution makes it less demanding, while making it more demanding when it comes to the Palestinians.

Before leaving this point regarding the debatable extent of “withdrawal,” I do not wish to pass over the use of *modality* in the resolution as another form of linguistic realisation of the discourse strategy of using non-committal or ambiguous language (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. UN Resolution 242

Original text	Deconstructed
The Security Council...,  Affirms that the fulfilment of [the UN] Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which <b>should</b> include the application of both the following principles (emphasis added)...	The Security Council...,  Affirms that the fulfilment of [the UN] Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which <b>must include/includes</b> the application of both the following principles...

The resolution states “that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:” that of the “Withdrawal of Israel[i] armed forces,” and that of the “Termination of all claims or states of belligerency...” discussed above. So for “just and lasting peace” to take place, the Security Council advises (i.e. does not obligate) the invading forces to apply the Principle of “withdrawal”. They “should;” rather than “must.” Using this form of modality rather than the other provides the grounds again for non-committal. The discourse producers make the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces a matter of *advisability*, rather than an *obligation* — “should”. This choice of modality will certainly be different and have a binding rather than advising effect if “must,” for example, were used in lieu of “should”. It would have still been more binding had the unquestionable present simple tense been used instead — includes — as illustrated in the table above.

A wishy-washy word, “should” is not “must”. It does not have the force or level of urgency and enforceability as the *obligatory* “must” even if one is to argue that it is being used in a legal sense. In such contexts, “should” has the capacity to be manipulated. It can provide room for debate. Had “must” been used in place of “should” in the above-mentioned apparent UN affirmation — or the present tense that signals factuality and unquestionableness — reality could have been different, or at least might have been different. But for such change from “should” to “must” or the present tense to take place, then a change has to take place in the *intent* underlying such discourse.

Let us now consider another issue or pitfall in the resolution. As shown in the extract below, producers of this resolution speak of “secure and recognized boundaries” – apparently an “innocent” phrase that does not merit attention.

*The Security Council,*

1. *Affirms* that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

- (i) Withdrawal of Israel [i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;
- (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within **secure and recognized boundaries** free from threats or acts of force (emphasis added).

Now, notice that the ‘little’ word “secure” is what CDA practitioners would call a *floating* or *empty signifier* — “a signifier without a signified” or a word without referent or at least a particular one. In other words, what constitutes what is “secure” for one might not be the same for another. A word like this is open to one’s wily and resourceful imagination. This is a discourse strategy known as *hedging*. How would you define “secure”?

The *indeterminacy* or floating nature of the lexical selection “secure” — or its derivatives such as “security” — makes it difficult to pin down exactly what makes “secure;” it lacks any particular referent or signified, hence, making it here all open to Israel’s imagination to envisage and dictate — since it is the belligerent force — what is “secure;” to fill in this empty signifier in accordance with its own specifications.

Indeed, the *ambiguity*, *nebulosity* and *indeterminacy* of this floating signifier — “**secure and recognized boundaries** free from threats or acts of force (emphasis added)” — embedded in paragraph 1 (ii) of the resolution, gives, in a manner similar to the omission of ‘the’ from Principle (i), much leeway to Israel — whose problems with boundaries and obsession or preoccupation with “security” is unlike any other state in the world given how it was founded — to decide what boundaries it deems “secure” and in accordance with its own imagination.

Can anyone tell what “secure and recognized boundaries” could eventually mean to Israel? Can anyone predict the interpretations and lebensraum this empty signifier could have when it comes to Israel’s view of “security” and what is “secure”? What about if “secure” means the transfer of the rest of the Palestinians outside the boundaries of historic Palestine? Clearly, “secure and recognized boundaries” is prone to *interpretations*, not to an *exegesis*.

Given how Israel was created, it is always *security-conscious*. The fact that *every* Israeli city was, as stated by Moshe Dayan (1915-1981) — one of Israel’s former army commanders and defence ministers — “built on its Palestinian counterpart” (Saleh, 2001, P. 46) makes Israel to be constantly beset with issues of security despite the present imbalance of power. Given this asymmetry of power, this gives ‘Israel,’ the occupying power, the upper hand to dictate, out of a desire for further territorial acquisition or land requisition on the one hand, and a relatively “genuine fear” (Pappe, 2006) on the other, what is “secure” and consequently needs to be “recognized”.

Clearly, “secure and recognized boundaries” go in tandem with “Withdrawal [...] from territories”. The *indeterminacy* of “secure” complements or corroborates the *ambiguity* of “Withdrawal [...] from territories”.

A further instance of such indeterminate floating signifiers where a “wiggly room can be made for a rhino” is found in Principle (c) of Paragraph 2, where 242 affirms the necessity “For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones [...]” Here consider the lexicalisation “[...] through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones [...]”.

*Demilitarised zones!* Now what could this mean, apart from giving ‘Israel,’ the occupying force, *carte blanche* to sustain its power and domination over the region? — the region that had never in recent history been in conflict or in a state of belligerency until this envisaged establishment of Israel in this region. What could it denote apart from further enacting and reproducing *unequal* arrangements of power; apart from laying to Israel – and it must be Israel since it is Israel that is the alien entity in the region — the ground to perpetuate hegemonic relations or asymmetrical relations of power in the Middle East?

Notice also that the establishment of “demilitarized zones” is not everything. It is *a* measure amongst a multiplicity of “measures,” one of which is demilitarisation, but the total number of which can only be identified in light of Israel’s definition of security. So “measures including” have to be noted and underlined. It deserves much self-reflection for what other potential “measures” might be is open to Israel’s imagination and what it would again deem “secure”.

Further, Resolution 242, as quoted at the beginning of this section, states in paragraph 1 that “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East” requires (i) “Withdrawal of Israel [i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” and (ii) “Termination of all claims or states of belligerency [...]”. So, 242 calls for “the establishment of a just and lasting peace”. Here I wish to underline “a just and lasting peace” — peace as being qualified with “just” and “lasting”.

Recall at this juncture that Palestine has been taken by force of arms, a fact that renders 242, however ‘just’ it might appear to certain stakeholders, to remain unjust; it remains so as long as more than half of the Palestinian people live outside their historic homeland in squalid refugee camps, or as long as it legitimises the Israeli seizure of more than 80% of Mandate/historic Palestine. Actually it remains so as long as Israel — a colonialist entity — itself exists (in the heart or at the expense of another nation) or at least as long as the bulk of the Palestinian people is still homeless and stateless as noted.

Therefore and in connection with the question of practicality, talking about “the establishment of a just and lasting peace” can never be the case. Calling it “just” and “lasting” when it is nothing but a travesty of justice and a gross distortion of and disregard for inexorable historical facts is an illusion calculated to *misrepresent reality* and *divert attention* — a discourse strategy designed for the omission of something and the invention of another.

Indeed, how can it ever be “just” and “lasting” when the same resolution gives the occupying power, as noted, much leeway to *even* debate the extent of withdrawal from territories whose



totality, if returned *in toto*, would still *only* constitute 22% of historic Palestine? How can it be “just” and “lasting” when this occupying power has been for 52 years so far debating and is still debating withdrawal, refusing to withdraw from those territories it has occupied since 1967, let alone the 78% of historic Palestine — seized in 1948 — that make up Israel proper. This is a *misrepresentation of reality and a distortion of facts*.

Peace can neither be “just” in this case nor “lasting,” unless the words “just” and “lasting” denote or connote something else in the English language or to the drafters of the resolution or those adopting it. In fact, the *total* withdrawal of *the* Israeli armed forces from *the* “territories occupied in the recent conflict” would still be *unjust* as this would constitute only 22% of former Palestine as noted.

Indeed, the whole notion of partitioning Palestine (UN Resolution 181 of November 1947) was unjust, let alone the reality created following 1948 and then the 1967 Israeli occupation of the remnant 22 percent left off Mandate Palestine which Resolution 242 provides the ground for Israel to even keep of such vestige what it judges convenient to its lebensraum, i.e. “Withdrawal [...] from territories” rather than “the” or “all” “territories occupied in the recent conflict,” and to the extent it deems “secure.” In this context, I find apposite to quote Article 19 of the *PLO (Palestine Liberation Movement) Charter* (also known as the *Palestinian National Charter* (1968) :

The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of the state of Israel are entirely illegal, regardless of the passage of time, because they were contrary to the will of the Palestinian people and to their natural right in their homeland, and inconsistent with the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly the right to self-determination.

Further, it should be stressed that the way 242 is constructed leaves it open as to when exactly or even approximately this “withdrawal” — regardless of its disputable extent — is to take place as there is nothing in it that specifies immediacy or stipulates a certain deadline or timeframe for withdrawal, which *must* be *immediate* given the resolution’s apparent emphasis on the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war,” and its affirmation that “the fulfilment of [UN] Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East”. It is *ambiguous, nebulous, and indefinite*; it only says “withdrawal of Israel [i] armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” which, in practice, may take effect in a day or on the Judgement Day. Recall that 242 was adopted in 1967, and we are so far in 2019, and Israel is still stalling, debating withdrawal *from* territories or *the* territories. It is 52 years now and no withdrawal has yet taken place. The ambiguity, nebulosity and indeterminacy of the linguistics of the resolution have lain the grounds for such indefinite evasion and dodging of the issue.

The linguistics of the resolution have made it possible not only to *overlook* the fact that Israel was born in 1948 through “the acquisition of territory by war” and the ethnic cleansing of

Palestine — at the hands of the predecessor of the Israel Offence Forces, the Zionist gangs of the *Hagana*, *Stern Gangs*, and *Irgun*, but also *debate* withdrawal from the territories — 22% — of historic Palestine, it annexed in 1967. The Israeli occupation has, therefore, continued, and “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” has been nothing but UN discourse, and “the need to work for a just and lasting peace” has been nothing but mirage, and the perpetuation rather than “termination of hostilities” has been nothing but the case.

Therefore — and based on the (1) *misrepresentation of reality and distortion of facts*; (2) inherent contradiction embedded in the preambular phrase of the resolution: “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and how Israel was established; (3) use of *non-committal statements and vague formulations* such as the deliberate commission or calculated omission of the definite article “the;” (4) *ambiguity, nebulosity and indeterminacy* of “secure and recognized boundaries;” (5) lack of enforcement through the *use of non-committal language* as represented by the calculated use of modality: “should include” rather than *must* or the use of the present simple: *includes*; (6) *empowering Israel* “through measures” that include “the establishment [in neighbouring countries and any likely future Palestinian “entity”] of demilitarized zones” to ensure Israeli hegemony in the region; (7) *creation of false impression* as found in paragraph 1: “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East;” (8) *contradiction* between “the need to work for a just and lasting peace” and the much leeway or deliberate ambiguity in “withdrawal [...] from territories;” and (9) *intentional lack of a timeframe* for withdrawal of the occupying power — the paper concludes that UN SC Resolution 242 of November 1967 is flawed, contradictory and biased, and is thus neither *practical* nor *bona fide* in laying the ground for peace or putting an end to Israeli occupation. In view of all this, the paper further concludes that if ‘peace’ is to be achieved based on this resolution; it is bound to be precarious and temporary.

Table 5 below sums up those *discourse strategies* employed in UN discourse on the Palestine Question along with their *forms of linguistic realisation* as embedded in Resolution 242 to sustain and reproduce the status quo:

Table 5. Summary of Discourse Strategies and Forms of Linguistic Realisation Characterising UN Discourse on the Palestine Question

No.	UN Discourse Strategies	Forms of Linguistic Realisation	Examples
1	De-agentialisation of Israeli actions of war /Obscuring causal agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passivisation/passive agent deletion</li> </ul>	Table 1
2	Misrepresentation of reality and distortion of facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lexical selections</li> </ul>	Table 2, 3
3	Empowering Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of modality</li> <li>• Definite article omission</li> <li>• Avoidance of the present simple tense</li> </ul>	Table 1, 2, 3, 4

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of empty/floating or indeterminate signifiers</li> <li>• Passivisation/passive agent deletion</li> </ul>	
4	Creating false impression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of modality</li> <li>• Definite article omission</li> <li>• Avoidance of the present simple tense</li> </ul>	Table 2, 3
5	Using non-committal statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of modality</li> <li>• Definite article omission</li> <li>• Avoidance of the present simple tense</li> </ul>	Table 2, 3,4
6	Ambiguity, nebulosity and indeterminacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of modality</li> <li>• Use of empty signifiers</li> <li>• Definite article omission</li> <li>• Avoidance of the present simple tense</li> </ul>	Table 2, 3,4
7	Hedging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of empty/floating or indeterminate signifiers</li> <li>• Use of weasel words</li> <li>• Use of modality</li> </ul>	Table 2, 3,4

### 3.2 UN SC Resolution 338

Issued on October 22, 1973 during the *Ramadan/October War*, SC Resolution 338 (Appendix B) “sought to end hostilities in the 1973 war and to resume negotiations based on Resolution 242” (Smith, 2007: 348). The war was initiated by Egypt and Syria in an attempt to recover their territories — the Golan Heights of Syria and the Sinai Desert of Egypt — occupied by Israel in 1967 along with the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, the territories forming the 22% of historic Palestine the then newly-found state of Israel did not manage to seize in its ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

A concise three-paragraph text, Resolution 338 — after calling “all parties to present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy,” Resolution 338 — “*Calls upon* all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts.”

Now in its call for “the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts,” Resolution 338 does not differ from Resolution 242 in essence regarding the Question of Palestine. It endorses the same problems rife in resolution 242, thus perpetuating rather than ending the status quo as far as the Palestine Question is concerned. Therefore, the paper concludes that Resolution 338 (1973) is neither *practical* nor *bona fide* in ending the status quo.

#### 4. Conclusion

Studying the linguistics of UN resolutions 242 and 338 — taken as the basis for a resolution of the Palestine Question and so “peace” and in the Middle East, this paper has shown that the way the Palestine Question — a protracted wrong, “born of design” rather than ‘the circumstances’ — is represented in UN discourse “along certain lines rather than others” has played a major role in the status quo. The paper has demonstrated that discourse is deployed by the powerful to enact, normalise and sustain domination and control; to obfuscate the perpetrator of a crime and down play the seriousness of an event; and that the “Selection of one term rather than another often entails choosing particular modes of conceptualising the reality in question” (Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss, & Mills, 1992: 73).

Structured subtly to provide the occupying power with the time and cover necessary to create further “facts on the ground” and enable further consolidation of Israeli control of territory, the paper has highlighted that neither UN Resolution 242, nor Resolution 338 is found to be *bona fide* or *practical* in ending Israel’s occupation. On the contrary, the paper has shown that these UN resolutions are responsible for *reproducing* the status quo rather than genuinely redressing the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

The way these resolutions is structured does not lay the ground for peace, but rather indefinite protraction of this unequal conflict where, given the current imbalance of power the Palestinians are continuously being the main “losers” within this form of social life. The way such UN resolutions is structured has made Israel for 52 years (i.e. since 1967) so far to debate withdrawal and is still debating, refusing to withdraw from those territories it has occupied by force since 1967, and sought by the Palestinians for a state to bring to an end their sufferings and homelessness; their past displacement and present occupation.

In a nutshell, this paper has shown — through observing, analysing and articulating the *linguistic artistry* of the powerful and the discursive sources and key textual resources of their power and dominance — that UN discourse on the Palestine Question as it stands has given the powerful the mechanisms for further expansionism; for keeping dodging, and indefinitely perpetuating the status quo rather than ending occupation and redressing the ethnic cleansing of Palestine as the core of the Palestine Question.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX A

#### UN RESOLUTION 242 (1967)

##### **Resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967**

*The Security Council,*

*Expressing* its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,

*Emphasizing* the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security,

*Emphasizing further* that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

1. *Affirms* that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

(i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;

(ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

2. *Affirms further* the necessity

(a) For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;

(b) For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;



(c) For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

*Adopted unanimously at the 1382nd meeting.*

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**Source:** <http://www.alzaytouna.net/arabic>

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## APPENDIX B

### UN RESOLUTION 338 (October 22 1973)

#### Resolution 338 (1973) of October 22 1973

*The Security Council,*

*Calls upon* all parties to present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;

*Calls upon* all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;

*Decides that,* immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

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**Source:** [mideastweb.org](http://mideastweb.org)

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