

Resolution 338: A reaffirmation of 242

Required by realities on the ground after Egypt and Syria launched the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Resolution 338 made peace negotiations a global imperative. It required the parties to comply and halt hostilities.

Resolution 338, like 242, was adopted by the UN Security Council,ⁱ essentially reaffirming the principles of Resolution 242. But the new resolution also served as the mechanism for a cease-fire after the Arab states again attacked Israel. The resolution was drafted and adopted unanimously on October 22, 1973 in an effort to halt the warfare that became known as the Yom Kippur War. That war erupted in October 1973 when Egypt and Syria broke the cease-fire and launched a full-scale military assault on Israel.

As the new war illustrated, the recommendations of Resolution 242 had not been implemented. The Arab countries had refused to meet with Israel to exchange peace for territories, preferring to abide by the 1967 post-war Khartoum Resolution signed by eight Arab heads of state that set three 'nays': "No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel." Despite the UN's call for negotiations in 242, Egypt and Syria tried to regain lost territory by force in 1973. On Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement and the most solemn day of the Jewish year,ⁱⁱ Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel, with Egyptian troops crossing the Suez Canal in an effort to regain the Sinai Peninsula, and Syrian troops overrunning the Golan Heights with similar intent.

International efforts intensified to stop the fighting, as Israel slowly turned back attacking armies. The cost to Israel was massive in fatalities, largely because Israel did not make a preemptive strike. Then - U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger flew to the Soviet Union on October 20, and together, the two nations proposed a cease-fire resolution before the UN Security Council, which became Resolution 338.

In effect, Resolution 338 legally forced the Arab states and Israel to reach a cease-fire. Parallel to this, it sought to renew efforts for both sides to sit down and negotiate a settlement based on the language of Resolution 242. Combined, those two resolutions became the basis for future attempts to establish 'a just and durable peace in the Middle East.' Ultimately, they resulted in peace with Egypt and Jordan, a result yet to be achieved through negotiations with Israel's other neighbors, Syria and Lebanon.

ⁱ See Appendices for the full text of UN Resolution 338.

ⁱⁱ The war was launched during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan—indeed the war is called the “Ramadan War” in military studies published in Arabic. This shows that launching a “holy war” during the fasting month is not discouraged; indeed it would be seen as particularly auspicious and blessed by God.

This document uses extensive links via the Internet. If you experience a broken link, please note the 5 digit number (xxxxx) at the end of the URL and use it as a Keyword in the Search Box at www.MEfacts.com