Chapter VII

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As in the case of Southeast Asia, particularly Indochina peninsula, so in the Gulf region, China's main concern seems to be to ensure that the Soviet Union do not acquire a power hold in the area. This concern has acquired added importance because of the strategic significance of the Persian Gulf as a main route of oil supply to Western Powers and also because of its proximity to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The sealanes of the area became the main arena of contemporary Super Powers rivalry.

It should be noted that when the British Government announced in the late 1960s its decision to withdraw its military presence from the East of the Suez Canal, it sharply aroused Beijing's apprehension that the Soviet Union might try to thrust in the so-called "power vacuum" thus created. Till then, China did not look at the Gulf region as a separate area of policy interest but part of the Middle East or Islamic world. As an alternative to Soviet incursion in this region, China welcomed the US military buildup in this region. The outbreak and ongoing of the Iran-Iraq war had added altogether a new dimension to the politics of the region.

It would be pertinent here to briefly recapitulate China's relations with Iran and Iraq before the war, which would serve as appropriate setting for the comprehensive understanding of China's stand on the ongoing war in the Gulf.
China-Iraq-Iran: A Retrospect

Until mid-1950s there was no specific compulsion either for China or the Gulf countries to seek diplomatic relations on regular basis. The ensuing Cold War and ideological factor being more pronounced in those years, were reasons strong enough to keep them away from each other.

However, the overthrow of the pro-West government in Iraq by a revolution in July 1958 eventually led Iraq to become the first country of the region to embark on diplomatic relations with Beijing. The Communist Party of Iraq had substantial influence in the new regime. China perceived the change in Iraq as a momentous development in terms of national liberation movements world-wide. The mutual recognition, establishment of diplomatic and other relations picked up at the China's initiation. However, their relations were not smooth since the inception due to such specific variables like the Chinese position on Kuwait's independence, its attitude towards the


3 See for details, Behbehani, n.2, pp.190-98.
Iraqi Communist Party and Iraq's stand on the Sino-Soviet conflict. The most destructive blow to their relations was China's alleged support to the aborted Iraqi communist attempt to seize power in Baghdad. This brought about not only the decline in Iraqi communist influence but also the government resorted to massive arrests and massacres.  

These developments resulted in reducing Sino-Iraqi relations to lukewarm. As Iraq developed encirclement syndrome in which it saw itself encircled by adversaries such as Arab Conservatives, Israel, Syrian Baathists and Iran, it turned to Soviet Union for protection and virtually remained isolated in the region. Despite various coups and changes in the Iraqi government, its basic pro-Soviet stand remained intact and the Sino-Iraqi relations remained just normal with regular trade and cultural cooperation. Besides, like the other members of the Socialist bloc, Iraq continued to extend passive support to China on the representation issue at the United Nations.

Beijing's renewed interest in Iraq was caused by the close strategic linkage between Iraq and the Soviet Union which was

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5 Abidi, n.1, p.214.

6 See for the various interaction between the two nations, Behbehani, n.2, pp.353-4.
formalized in the Soviet-Iraqi Friendship Treaty of April 1972 and its concrete manifestations in the form of providing naval facilities to Soviet ships. These developments aroused China's apprehension regarding Soviet penetration in the region. To counterpoise the Soviet's influence in the Gulf, China manoeuvred to consolidate its relations with the Gulf states, particularly Kuwait and even more so Iran, which were at odd with Iraq. China also tried to warm up its relations with Iraq, so as to lessen its dependence on the Soviet Union. Iraq, in its quest for peaceful environment to carry on the developmental activities, reached a negotiated settlement with Iran on their territorial issue in March 1975. This period also witnessed the cooling off

7 See, Shichor, n.2, p.171.

8 Reference here is to Shatt-al-Arab which has always been the target of the two contending powers to have complete sovereignty over the water-course. The conflict over the area is unique in the sense that it has survived all treaties and border agreements signed from time to time. The latest agreement between Iran and Iraq over the territory in March 1975 appeared to have settled the issue for the time being but later development indicates that it contained the main cause of the ongoing Iran-Iraq war. Iran could gain advantage in the agreement with the use of its military pressure supported by the Western alliances. With the departure of the Shah from the scene, ensued by upheavals in Iran, Iraq perceived it as opportune moment to rectify its grievances. See, for details, R.C. Sharma, "Geopolitics Beyond Shatt-al-Arab", in R.C. Sharma ed., Perspectives on Iran-Iraq Conflict (New Delhi, 1984), pp.37-45.
of its ties with the Soviet Union in favour of Western aid and investment. The subsequent developments in the region along with the simmering differences between Iraq and the Soviet Union constituted the Sino-Iraqi "common concern" but it did not notably activate their bilateral relations.

On the other hand, the Sino-Iranian contact can be traced back to the ancient times whose historical and trade linkage has been embodied in the famous legendary "Silk Road". This linkage had been snapped by intervention of the colonial Powers in China and the Gulf. It was later restored during the Chiang Kai-shek's regime at the initiative of Iran. However, when the communist Party of China took over the reign of the government at Beijing, a normal relations between the two nations seemed inconceivable as they found themselves in opposite camps of the bipolarized world.

In fact, at one point of time, Iran was so sceptical and obsessed by the atheistic socio-economic ideology of China that the Shah was said to have visualized a prospect of some sort of joint understanding between non-communist Powers, including Iran and the Soviet Union in order to keep a close

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9 See, Shichor, n.2, p.172.

10 Detail on historical background see, Abidi, n.1, pp.1-36; see also, Behbehani, n.2, pp.216-19.
watch over "the vast, sprawling, fast-breeding giant of the Far East." Besides, the Shah ignored Chou En-lai's conciliatory attitude towards Iran during the Bandung Conference and went ahead to join the Western initiated anti-communist security arrangement of Baghdad Pact. Not only that, in a rather dilatory move, the Shah established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1957. Irked by these moves, Beijing resorted to support Iranian opposition organizations, condemned the Iranian Government's oppressive measures inside Iran and attacked vehemently on Iran's regional and international alliances, mainly its alliance with the United States.12

In spite of China's hostility, Iran voted in favour of China on the representation issue at the United Nations in 1965-66. This might be partly influenced by Iran's belief in disciplining China and necessity of its cooperation in solving the major problems but mainly to demonstrate its independence from the United States. However, from 1967 till 1970 there was certain ambiguity in its voting pattern which reflected its subscription to "two China" theory.13

Towards the end of 1960s, as noted earlier, the two crucial developments motivated China to take active interest

11 Cited in Abidi, n.1, p.33.


13 See, Abidi, n.1, pp.87-96.
in the Gulf region. The first of these developments was
Beijing's reassessment of the international situation which
led it to identify the Soviet Union as the major threat to
its national security and favoured the Sino-American rapproche-
ment to counteract this threat.\textsuperscript{14} It induced China to adopt a
more pragmatic foreign policy guided mainly by national
interests rather than ideology. Along with this development
was the second notable event, i.e., the British declaration
in 1968 of its decision to withdraw its presence from the Gulf.
This exposed the Gulf as a distinct area of "Power Vacuum".
China's strategic concern was to undermine and repel Soviet
intrusion in this region. For the furtherance of this strategy,
China supported the US justification for militarization of Iran
and to surrogate it as a policeman of the Gulf.\textsuperscript{15} These
commonality of interests as well as strategic compulsion of
Soviet threat precepetated the normalization of Sino-Iranian
relations by late 1971. Their relations continued to grow from
strength to strength with firm conviction on the part of China
that Iran was one of the most serious obstacles to the expansion
of Soviet influence and presence in the Gulf.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} For details see, Linda D. Dillion, Bruce Burton, and
Walter C. Soderland, "Who was the Principal Enemy? Shift in

\textsuperscript{15} See, A.H.H. Abidi, "China and the Persian Gulf: Relations
during the Seventies", \textit{IDSA Journal} (Delhi), vol.12, no.2,
October/December 1979, p.160.

\textsuperscript{16} Shichor, n.2, pp.173-75. For the objectives of Sino-
Iranian Relations, see, Aryeh Y. Yodfat, \textit{The People's Republic of
China and the Middle East} (Bruxille, 1977), pp.11-12.
Its obsession in valuing Iran as an effective impediment to Soviet designs in the Gulf, made China to remain unconcerned regarding the internal unrest within Iran by late 1970s which, in every respect, was a people's movement. At the most, China viewed it as a passing phenomenon and believed that the Shah would be able to control the situation. In spite of being detrimental to its image among the Third World countries, Beijing faithfully supported the Shah's regime till the end. At the height of internal unrest, Chairman Hua Kuo-feng, the highest Chinese dignitary to visit Middle East, paid an official visit to Teheran on 28 August 1979 which served as a psychological boost to the already shaky regime. The knowledge of hindsight proved that it was a great diplomatic blunder, as it brought only the wrath of Iranian people. However, by its opportunistic move, China extended recognition to the new regime in Teheran within two days of its take-over and used its own Muslim community to build a bridge with it.17

Thus, one can appraise that although China's relations with both Iran and Iraq passed through a zig-zag course during the last three decades, it was just correct with both the nations, on the eve of Iran-Iraq conflict. In such a circumstance, China's predilection would be to adopt a neutral stand

17 For further details see, Abidi, n.15, pp.165-66.
on the war, without any value judgement on the claims of either contending parties.

**The War: Initial Response**

As in the case of most of the regional conflicts in the developing countries, Iran-Iraq war is the legacy of the historical past. The immediate causes of the war centred around the issue of sovereignty over the Shatt-al-Arab river and other territorial disputes, ideological rivalry, ethnic issue, regional ambition and the personality clashes between the leaders of Iran and Iraq.\(^{18}\)

Iraq considered the chaotic and isolated position of Iran, following the revolutionary upheaval in Iran and its confrontation with the United States over the hostage issue, as an opportune moment to settle old grievances.\(^{19}\) Iraq launched its attack on 22 September 1980 and occupied the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. Iraq apparently believed that a limited but decisive thrust

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\(^{19}\) See for details, Shahram Chubin, "Reflections on the Gulf War" in *Survival* (London), vol.28, no.4, July/August 1986, pp.307-9; John Muttam, *Arms and Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (New Delhi, 1984), pp.144-58; see also, Sharma, n.8, pp.37-45.
into Iran would enable it to achieve its goals.  

China's first statement on the conflict was made by Premier Zhao Ziyang on 23 September during his talk with the visiting Norwegian Prime Minister. He was reported to have stated that China was very concerned about the armed conflict and expressed hope that Iran and Iraq "will settle their disputes peacefully through negotiations, guard against Super Power interference and prevent the situation from worsening." The then Chinese Foreign Minister, Huang Hua, also referred to the crisis in the course of his speech at the General Assembly on 24 September. He expressed the hope that the two parties would settle their disputes through peaceful negotiation so as not to be exploited by those harbouring ulterior motives.

Iraq's declared objectives of the war were to regain complete control over the whole of Shatt-al-Arab and restore the three islands in the Strait of Hormuz to their Arab masters. The undeclared objectives were to destabilize the Khomeini regime, counter the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and to boost the image of President Saddam Hussein to project Iraq as the dominant power in the Gulf and in the entire Arab world. See, A.H.H. Abidi, "The Iraq-Iran War: A Balance Sheet", Sharma, ed., n.8, pp.75-77.

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On the other hand, the United Nations first reaction to the outbreak of war, which was fermenting for some months, was in the form of UN Secretary-General's appeal to both the countries on 22 September to restrain and to find a negotiated solution. He also offered his good offices to find such a solution. \(^{23}\) At the same time the UN Security Council was summoned urgently for informal consultations which resulted in a statement by the Security Council President expressing the Council's concern at the situation and appealing to both the parties to desist from armed activities. \(^{24}\) However, the formal Security Council meeting was convened after five days of the start of the war, i.e., on 26 September.

In the course of the debate, the Chinese representative, Ling Qing, expressed China's concern over the armed conflict, between the two Gulf countries both of which have "friendly relations with China." \(^{25}\) He stated China's philosophical rectitude that "differences among the Third World countries can and must be settled peacefully through consultation or negotiation without resorting to force." \(^{26}\) He expressed the


\(^{24}\) UN Doc.S/14190, 23 September 1980.


\(^{26}\) This has been repeated in statements see, UN Doc.S/PV. 2254, 29 October 1980, p.17; S/PV.39, 23 October 1982, p.16; S/PV.2383, 12 July 1983, p.13.
hope that Iran and Iraq would "take to heart the overriding interest of combating hegemonism and safeguarding world peace" and would exercise restraint, "without letting the situation go out of hand." 27

In a rare international gesture, a resolution was passed unanimously which called on the parties to "refrain immediately from any further use of force and settle their dispute by peaceful means." 28 This unanimity was due to the observance of hands-off policy by the Super Powers in the conflict. 29 It made no mention of the word "cease-fire" nor demanded the withdrawal of Iraqi forces to the positions they had occupied before the start of hostilities. The Iranians, being deeply aggrieved by these omissions, refused to accept the Security Council resolution and saw no use in any discussion concerning the conflict. 30

In ensuing debate, after hearing the position of respective countries involved in the conflict, China characteristically warned the Security Council of the mounting risk of Soviet "expansion" in the Gulf region. Its representative cautioned that "the ambitious hegemonists, with a covetous eye on this strategically important region, are seeking every opening to


29 See for details Muttam, n.19, pp.148-54.

30 UN Doc. S/14206, 1 October 1980.
step up their infiltration and expansion there." He further added that "the continuation and escalation of the conflict can only provide the hegemonists with such an opportunity, with all the disastrous consequences for the people of that region. 31

Changing Warfront and Question of Mediation

In the war front, Iraq failed to achieve a quick lightening victory. The war soon developed into a stalemate with the Iraqi being prevented from advancing further or consolidating their hold on the occupied areas. On the other hand, Iran, surviving initial shocks, galvanized in a patriotic fervour and manifested its remarkable resilience in meeting the multifarious Iraqi challenge. Iran quickly formulated its conditions for ending the war in uncompromising terms and has not retracted them since then. 32 The threat of escalating the war loomed large with the Arab nations backing Iraq mostly by their fear of Islamic resurgence among their own population.

When the Gulf Cooperation Council was formed in September 1981, the Chinese official journal welcomed it as Gulf countries' desire to become strong by closing their ranks and "opposing

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32 For details see, Muttam, n.19, pp.163-65.
Super Power interference in the affairs of the Gulf region." China expected it to "play a positive role in securing peace and stability in the Gulf, the Middle East and the world at large."33

In addition to Islamic Conference and the Nonalignment's peace missions, the Secretary-General appointed the former Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, as his special envoy to facilitate authoritative communication and bring about negotiation for peace on an urgent basis.34 These efforts were supported by China and asked the warring nations to extend their cooperation to them.35

However, the fundamental problem that each mediation team faced was that neither side of the conflicting parties was interested in peace except on its own term.36 The Iraqi attitude seems to have changed in later period. By mid-1981,


34 See UN Doc. S/14244, 5 November 1980.


36 See, for various peace missions' objectives and performance, Muttam, n.19, pp.165-69; see also Gruman, n.18, pp.72-81.
Iran had less compulsion to agree to a cease-fire and, therefore, Iran rejected even Olaf Palme's peace proposal as well.37

Meanwhile, "the merchants of death" were operating from behind the scene to provide desperately needed arms and spare parts to both combatants. China vigorously criticised the Super Powers for adding "fuel to the flame by selling arms" to the warring parties.38 However, China itself cannot be absolved of a similar crime of exploiting the conflict as China itself has undertaken to supply these governments with arms, ammunition and spare parts in quantities unheard of before. Its first arms deal with Iraq was said to have signed probably in early 1981.39 However, both the Chinese and the Iraqi repeatedly denied the reports of such a deal. The Chinese insisted that they have "not sold any weapons to Iraq because this is incompatible with our principled stand on the war between Iraq and Iran" which is based on "strict neutrality".40

37 See, Statesman (New Delhi), 29 June 1981.


The restocking of armament was followed by intense fighting in the sanguinary hostilities in which the Iranian performance was stupendous.

In the midst of war, on 20 June 1982, the Iraqi President once again proposed cease-fire and made considerable "concession" but it proved to be of no avail. At the request of Iraq's strong ally, Jordan, the Security Council met on 12 July. It unanimously adopted a resolution calling, for the first time, a "cease-fire" and an immediate end to all military operations in the Gulf war, as well as for a withdrawal of forces to internationally recognized boundaries. It decided to despatch a team of UN observers "to verify, confirm and supervise" the cease-fire and withdrawal. Further, it urged that the mediation efforts be continued in a "co-ordinated manner through the Secretary-General." While speaking on the resolution, the Chinese representative, Ling Qing, expressed China's concern over loss of lives, properties and untold suffering to the people and the threat to the security of Gulf and Middle East region. He further urged that for the fundamental interests of the two peoples they should "seek an early cease-fire through negotiation and peaceful solution of the dispute."


This resolution too met similar fate as that of the previous one. Iran not only rejected it but also dissociated itself from "any action taken by the Security Council so far with regard to the Iraqi war of aggression against Iran." Its insolence towards the Security Council sprang from its grievance that it remained inactive when Iraq was on the offensive. By 13 July, the Iranians not only recovered their territories but also crossed the international border in the Basra sector. The new situation, thus arisen, had confounded many nations. Even the Chinese official daily stated that, "When Iran recovered Khorramishahr and largely regained its pre-war position, it was hoped that the two countries would cease-fire and negotiate peace but unfortunately that hope was not realized." 45

As the military advantage swung in Iran's favour, its demands as a precondition for a cease-fire started mounting. Besides demanding unconditional withdrawal, compensation for war damage, restoration of 1975 agreement and "punishment of the aggressor", Iran insisted on the repatriation to Iraq of 150,000 expelled Shia, and right of passage through Iraq for

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44 Patriot (Delhi), 11 July 1982.
Iranian troops on their way to the Lebanese war front. By mid-July 1982, Iran's stated aim, which was overriding all else, was complete "liberation of Iraq" which meant overthrowing of the Baathist Government headed by President Saddam Hussein and the establishment of an Islamic regime in Iraq. The predicament of Iraq can be visualised from its repeated request to the United Nations and the nonaligned nations to continue their peace efforts.

On Iraq's request, the Security Council session was convened on 4 October which again unanimously passed the resolution submitted by Jordan, the President of the Security Council during that month. The resolution, besides reiterating measures suggested in the previous resolutions, called "without further delay" to implement its decision to dispatch UN observers and reaffirmed the urgency of the continuation of the mediation efforts. The UN Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, poignantly pointed out the hollowness of seemingly strong authoritative resolution by stating soon after its adoption that effective deployment of UN observers was "contingent on


48 Times of India, 16 July 1982.

the concurrence and cooperation of the parties concerned and cease-fire.\textsuperscript{50} The absence of congenial atmosphere was clear from Iran's boycott of the Council's meeting and the statement at a press conference where the Iranian Ambassador declared that his government would not "recognize the legitimacy of the resolution."\textsuperscript{51} This once again proved the futility of Security Council's resolution in the climate of mistrust and grievance.

The Security Council thus remained stalemated. The General Assembly on Iraq's request took up the consideration of the question as an agenda item entitled: "Consequences of prolongation of the armed conflict between Iran and Iraq". During the discussion the Chinese representative, Xie Qimei, expressed the hope that two contending parties would adopt a "sensible approach" and said that the war would only aggravate the controversies and "provide opportunities for the Super Powers to step in and interfere in the affairs of the region."\textsuperscript{52} He further stated "as China is a friend of both Iran and Iraq... we hope that they will come to the negotiating table as soon as possible in order to terminate hostilities and restore good

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The UN Monthly Chronicle}, vol. 19, no. 11, December 1982, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Hindu} (Madras), 6 October 1982.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{UN Doc. A/37/PV.39}, 23 October 1982, p. 16.
neighbourliness.\textsuperscript{53} China also voted positively the resolution which declared that the conflict endangered international peace and security, proposed an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of forces from internationally recognized boundaries "as a preliminary step" towards the peaceful settlement of the dispute.\textsuperscript{54} This resolution was also rejected by Iran.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi troops displayed better performance in defensive war and there was no sign of revolt among the Iraqi Shias against the Saddam Hussein regime which Iran expected.\textsuperscript{55} Soon, the war reverted to a stalemate.

Another flare up was caused by the French decision to sell Iraq five Super-Etendard jets and Iran responded by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz if Iraq used them against it. Far more serious development was the attack on civilian targets of each other. These events found expression in the Security Council resolution, which was for the first time not passed unanimously. One gets the impression that with little more patience and effort, the Security Council could have reached an effective consensus resolution, especially considering Iran's

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54}The General Assembly Resolution 37/3, 22 October 1982.
\textsuperscript{55}Asoka K. Sheel, Oil, Arms and Islam in the Gulf (Jaipur, 1986), pp.72-73.
participation in the consultation process. In accordance with
the general mood, the Chinese representative, Ling Qing, said
that, "in the present circumstances, the question of how to
bring about the participation of both sides in the process of
peaceful negotiations is an extremely urgent one." The haste
with which the Security Council went ahead marred the prospect
which made the Iranian Ambassador, Said Rajai Khorassani, to
state that the Security Council "has no credibility whatsoever.
It has lost its last chance." This episode reminded the
relevance of Evan Luard suggestion that less time should be
spent in the drafting of resolutions and in making debating
points, and more in promoting negotiations between parties to
a dispute.

Since early 1984, there is increasing contacts between
Iran and China which led to increasing shipment of arms to
Iran. It was further cemented by the Chinese Foreign Minister,
Wu Xuequan's visit to Teheran in November 1984 and the Speaker
of Iranian Majlis, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to
Beijing in July 1985. In fact, the latter is reported to have

57 Cited in Tribute (Chandigarh), 2 October 1983.
59 See, Patriot, 23 February 1984, 5 April 1984; Ibid.,
5 April 1984.
said that the visit had been "successful even beyond expectation" and it signified a "new chapter" in bilateral relations.\textsuperscript{60} These visits were followed by the reports of increasing arms sale to Iran by China. However, China firmly denied these reports.\textsuperscript{61}

As a signal to the international community its willingness to resort to desperate measures, Iraq indulged in wanton destruction by bombing civilian targets, using chemical weapons and initiating oil tanker attacks. By these acts Iraq expected the mobilization of international pressure on Iran to agree for a negotiated settlement. These incidents, no doubt, evoked the urgency of finding a solution to the crisis. However, the comity of nations were still preoccupied with the nicety of balanced posture.\textsuperscript{62}

The Chinese perceived in these developments a danger of "internationalizing the war" and drawing the region into the "whirpool of the Super Powers' global contention."\textsuperscript{63} It further exhorted the belligerent countries to "cease all hostilities in


\textsuperscript{61}\textit{FBIS-CHI} 85-061, 29 March 1985, p.1.


the Gulf, refrain from attacking ships of countries not parties to the war and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other littoral countries." 64

At this juncture, the Secretary-General initiated certain bold steps on his own authority such as despatching a team of specialists to investigate allegation against Iraq of using chemical weapons, 65 successfully arranged, for the first time, an agreement between the combatants to observe ban on attacking civilian targets in June 1984. However, this precarious agreement was ruptured by Iraq when it again resorted to aerial raids on three Iranian villages in March 1985.

For the first time since the war started, the Secretary-General made a daring move by visiting the two warring nations in April 1985. However, Iran's adament stand against the proposal of negotiated settlement remained the same. It favours the continuation of the war of attrition and counts on Iraq's eventual exhaustion both economically and politically.

**Summary Observations**

From the above analyses, it is clear that China's observance of "neutrality" in the Iran-Iraq war has been a

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64 Ibid.

65 *UN Monthly Chronicle*, vol.21, no.3, March 1984, p.3.
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logical corollary of its policy of maintaining friendly relations with both Iran and Iraq. China studiously avoided making any value judgement on the claims of either contending party. Its reportings on the event has been rather factual. As the conflict turned to a protracted war, a shift was discernable in China's emphasis on various machineries for resolving the conflict and its attitude towards the Super Powers.

At the initial stage of the conflict, China not only highly appreciated all the three levels of diplomatic efforts to mediate (made by Islamic Conference, nonaligned countries and the United Nations) but also expressed its support and urged the combatants to extend cooperation to them. However, as the war staggered on, there was decreasing reference to these peace initiatives in its speeches. That might be due to the lack of success. On the other hand, there was increasing emphasis on the need of Security Council to uphold its sole responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and bringing the belligerents to negotiation. 66

However, Beijing's concern for bringing about a negotiated peaceful settlement and "restoring friendly

neighbourness" between the warring nations do not go well with its massive volume of arms transaction with both the countries. In return for supplying arms, China could draw dual benefit of huge profit and as well as technological and intelligence know-how, which it could use for vitalizing its military modernization programme. The ample acquisition of arms, ammunition and spare parts from various countries, including China, boosted the belligerents' confidence of prevailing over the other; consequently, hitherto all the peace efforts have foundered.

Another notable shift has been in regard to China's attitude towards the two Super Powers. Hitherto, it was critical of Soviet Union alone but by the mid-1982, it changed its stance as it has been denouncing both the Super Powers for their hegemonistic design. Initially, it accused the Soviet Union of "fishing in troubled water." It warned the warring nations of Soviet's "covetous eyes" on the strategically significant region, 67 dismissed the Brezhnev's peace proposal as an "empty talk," 68 later, however, it consistently warned the combatants of danger of the Super Powers' intervention and


interference under any pretext. For instance, Chinese National People's Congress Standing Committee Chairman, Peng Zhen, said, "The Gulf area is one of those regions where imperialists and hegemonists (i.e., United States and the Soviet Union) are making trouble. The situation there is touch-and-go." 

However, with the limited success of controlling the conflict from escalation, the majority of the nations (except arms dealers) showed indifference and insulated themselves from the conflict mainly due to the lack of success in various peace missions and ineffectiveness of the numerous resolutions. Thereby, they tended to leave the belligerents to their fate. But the United Nations cannot relegate itself to the position of watching from the sideline especially it being a conflict between the two Third World countries with the Super Powers observe a "hand-off" policy. It is a challenge to its credibility.

Since the UN Secretary-General emerged as the only go-between trusted by both sides, it shows that there is still room for the United Nations to effectively play its role in

69 See, UN Doc.A/37/PV.39, 23 October 1982, p.16; see also A/PV.2546, 1 June 1984, pp.9-10.

reaching a settlement. On the basis of principled diplomacy, the Secretary-General should be encouraged to evolve a comprehensive multilateral peace initiatives which should be conciliatory in tone and nature. Besides, it should aim to achieve lasting peace in the region by eliciting commitment from the nations of the region to manage their affairs jointly. The comity of nations should not only extend an unambiguous support to the Secretary-General's effort but also reach a consensus to ban further supply of arms to the combatants and pledge to assist in the post-war reconstruction of two countries.

This approach of low-key pressure coupled with positive incentives would be feasible for both the belligerent countries and provide a face saving device. Towards this end, China's cooperation, considering its leverage with both the combatants as supplier of arms, is imperative.