Chapter VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENTS
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The analyses presented in the preceding pages carry derivative evaluation of China's performance and pursuit of its interests. The attempt here is not to recapitulate what has already been discussed but to present some general observations and overall evaluation of China's role and interaction in the United Nations on the major conflict-situations in Asia.

I

To evaluate China's role, it would be appropriate to recall that on the eve of restoration of China's representation to the United Nations, a major re-alignment of international politics was evolving. China has perceived, since late 1960s, that the main threat to its national security emanating from the Soviet Union due to the introduction of the military element in their antagonistic relations and promulgation of Brezhnev's doctrine of "limited sovereignty". These developments goaded China to respond to overtures of the United States, which was hitherto regarded as its arch-enemy. In line with this policy, President Nixon's move toward the normalization of Sino-American relations was favourably responded by China. The development that followed, in turn, greatly hastened the process of Beijing's representation in the United Nations.
It should be noted that in the changed international situation, China found it prudent not to couch, as in the past, its policy pronouncement in revolutionary ideological terms. Instead, it opted for policy stances, with emphasis on "shared historical experiences", which would identify China's interests and objectives with that of the Third World countries. China also emphasised the commonality of interests among the Third World countries, on many of the issues that confronted the World Organization. In the process, it sometimes arrogated to itself the role of a spokesman of the Third World interests at the United Nations. The attempt obviously has been to assume a role of leadership of the Third World. At the same time, Beijing continued its stringent criticism of both the Super Powers -- US and USSR -- for their imperialistic and hegemonic policies, respectively, over the world. It characteristically warned against the Soviet Union and accused it of following a "vicious" policy while "flaunting the label of socialism".

It is interesting to note that despite China's repeated declaration that it would not like to be, or act as, a Super Power, it did demonstrate its aspiration for a global role and a status of equality with the two Super Powers. However, it is

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1 See, Supra, p.35.

a common knowledge that aspirations are often far from reality. China's capability in terms of military and economic strength, and its political influence has been lagging far behind that of the two super powers. China still remains a regional power. As such, its major areas of concern are Asia in general and its immediate neighbourhood, in particular. Its whole strategy has been geared to promote, in Asia, a balance of influence favourable to Beijing and to prevent any power hostile to it from gaining access to or control of areas in its vicinity from which it could posit threat to China itself. This strategy has been prompted not only by the security consideration but also with the objective of acquiring predominant position in Asia.

What has been noted above runs as a common thread in China's actions and reactions to various conflict-situations discussed in the preceding pages.

II

The Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 was the first conflict-situation which China faced just after a couple of weeks of its gaining membership to the United Nations. As both the warring nations were its immediate neighbours, Beijing has had its own historical relations and strategic perception of them, which had already moulded China's preference and prejudices. 3

3 See, supra, pp. 39-45.
China, which had looked to growing Indo-Soviet relations with apprehension, was further alarmed when the two countries signed in August 1971 the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. On its part, China had already moved closer to Pakistan, particularly since early 1960s, partly following the dictum that "an enemy's enemy is a friend." Further, India being a strong contender of leadership among the Third World and a great power in Asia, China had additional reasons to form an axis against India.

The simmering Indo-Pakistani crisis, beginning March 1971, prompted China to unleash its condemnation of India, depicting it as a surrogate of Soviet Union. When the war broke out, Beijing extended full support to Pakistan's claims. Greater part of Beijing's statements at the United Nations were directed against India and the Soviet Union, accusing them of interference in internal affairs of Pakistan. On the other hand, Beijing justified its support to Pakistan's claims at the United Nations. In doing so, it projected itself as the champion of the principle of national integrity of all small and medium sized countries.

China's representative at the Security Council, in collaboration with the United States, served as a counterpoise to Soviet's support to India on the conflict-situation. It

4See, supra, p.53.
is also of interest to note that once the war was over, Bangladesh applied for membership to the United Nations. Although most of the member-states favoured for it, China exercised its veto power to block the membership. This, it continued for four consecutive years mainly to increase Pakistan's leverage in the negotiation with India and Bangladesh on POW case and other outstanding issues.

Its role as a veto wielding power as well as its condemnation of the East Pakistani liberation movement as a cessationist had considerably damaged Beijing's revolutionary image. This instance demonstrated the prevalence of power-politics consideration over ideological commitment in China's foreign policy at the early stage of its participation in the United Nations.

The final outcome of the conflict-situation was the emergence of Bangladesh as a new state and the re-establishment of the pre-eminent position of India in the sub-continent. Contrary to its claims that "the fall of Dacca is... the starting point for endless strife on the Asian sub-continent", 5 China gradually reconciled to the reality of the situation. In accordance with the prevailing desire of the member nations, China softened its stand on the issue of Bangladesh's membership.

Once the situation stabilized after Bangladesh gained its membership, China moved towards the normalization of relationship with both Bangladesh and India to win them over from the Soviet Union's influence.  

III

Similarly, Beijing's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict has been motivated not only by its interest in establishing friendly relations with Arab countries but also to prevent domination of the region by a power hostile to it. The latter concern has been prompted by its perception that the region was not only a crucial link in any attempt to encircle China by an ambitious power but also a bridgehead for control of the intermediate zone and to establish hegemony in Asia.

Until late 1960s, China's apprehension was mainly directed against the United States for making use of the Middle East in its attempt of hostile encirclement against China. Subsequently, it guarded against similar attempt by the Soviet Union. To counter such strategic calculation, China geared its policy to establish friendly relations with the Arab countries.

6 See, supra, p.62.

7 See, supra, pp.63-73.
After the initial wooing, China's attitudinal change towards Israel was clearly discernable. By mid-1950s, China realised that the Arabs' hatred of Israel was the dominant force in the Middle East. Thereafter Beijing's policy statements on Middle East consistently supported the Arabs in their conflict with Israel. Precisely, in line with this attitudinal change, China was among the first countries to recognize and extend full diplomatic privileges to the PLO (1965). The same pattern of policy continued when it joined the United Nations in 1971. However, the PLO's high expectation of Beijing's active role in promoting its interest at the United Nations were belied. Beijing adopted a position of passive supporter rather than as a active initiator and promoter of a solution to the question of Palestine.

During the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, China made use of the occasion to reinforce its solidarity with the Arabs. Its representative at the United Nations hailed the Arabs's unity in their common endeavour not to accept the Super Powers' strategy of "no war, no peace" situation in the Middle East. It regarded their use of oil weapon as an upsurge of the Third World desire to be masters of their own destiny. Its representative also hurled verbal thunder bolts against both the Super Powers and reinforced its accusation of their collusion for establishing global hegemony. 

8See, supra, pp.74-76.
Notwithstanding its verbal supports and rhetorics, China avoided getting itself directly involved in the conflict-situation. Most of the time, it resorted to merely urging the Governments concerned and peoples to resist the interference and domination of external powers.

Another aspect of its stance on the conflict-situation was its attitude towards the Peace Keeping Operations. Its tradition of opposing Peace Keeping Operations continued even after gaining its representation to the United Nations. However, its opposition through the use of its veto power would have invited the wrath of international community, especially the Third World countries, which valued these operations as the stabilising factors in the conflict-ridden world. Beijing found a way out by adopting tactical move of "non-participating" at the time of voting which signified both its passive opposition based on its "principled stand" and passive cooperation based on its reluctance to obstruct proposal having overwhelming support. As such, the Security Council could establish UNEF II and UNDOF, and since then their mandates were renewed periodically without any hurdle. However, China made good use of its passive opposition by refusing to pay its contribution to these operations.9

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9 See, supra, pp.76-79.
In the context of changing international environment in mid-1970s and readjustments of its relations with the Super Powers, China found it necessary to modify its approach to the question of Palestine. Till then, Beijing had rejected all proposals for political negotiations on the issue, as it regarded such proposals as design to perpetuate Super Powers' presence in the region and to throttle the liberation movement of Palestinians.

By the end of 1970s, China's obsession of Soviet influence in this region had prompted China to approve the US policy, initiated by Kissinger, which resulted in the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt. It is obvious that China was motivated, not by any progress made towards paving a path for settlement, but primarily because of the dent it made on the Soviet position in the Middle East. Whether this policy succeeded or not remains a moot point in the fluid situation in the region. 10

Another diversion from its usual stand is discernable in the case of UN Peace Keeping Operations. China abandoned its long standing "non-participating" diplomacy on the questions of UN Peace Keeping Operations. For the first time in 1982, it voted for the extension of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

10See, supra, pp.80-81.
and UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Since then, it has not only continued to vote for the extension but also paid its apportionment towards the expenditure on the UN Peace Keeping Operations. Beijing has not given any explicit reason for the change in regard to what it used to call "principled stand". The plausible explanation seems to be that China has come to appreciate the usefulness of the Peace Keeping Operations as interim measures for maintaining international peace and security.

IV

The conflict-situation in the Southeast Asia, which has been referred to at the United Nations as the Kampuchean Question, was the first conflict in which Beijing was directly involved since it joined the United Nations.

As discussed earlier, the crisis developed in the wake of major re-alignment in world politics since the mid-1970s, particularly after the end of the Vietnam war in 1975. In the domestic scene, since Deng Xiaoping gained ascendancy in late 1970s, the four modernization programme has been given high priority. The geopolitical consideration as well as need of investment and advance technology has apparently motivated

11See, supra, pp.83-84.
China to form a "parallel strategy" with the West and Japan mainly on the anti-Soviet plank. This has created far reaching implications in the strategic calculations of other states, especially of the Soviet Union. The repercussion of these developments has been manifested in the Vietnam-Kampuchean crisis.\(^\text{12}\)

Beijing perceived Vietnam's independent role in shaping its regional policy as aided and abetted by the Soviet Union to make it as an "Asian Cuba". To counteract this development, China not only backed Kampuchea in its discord with Vietnam but also warned the Soviet Union to desist from meddling in its traditional sphere of influence.

Subsequently, the two major developments in the region prompted China's direct involvement in the conflict-situation. One of them was the massive exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. The other was the ouster of China's ally, the Pol Pot regime of Kampuchea, on 7 January 1979 by the Kampuchean dissidents with the support of Vietnam. These developments had considerably reduced China's influence in the region. For the security of its southern flank and the need to restore its credibility in the region, China resorted to military

\(^{12}\)See, supra, pp.90-98.
instrument against Vietnam (1979) and in the process got its nose bruised. Since then, it has relied more on diplomacy through the United Nations and less on its military might.

China, however, presented its military venture in Vietnam as its contribution to thwart threats to the world peace and stability in the region. This is a typical case of Beijing's attempt to present an issue involving its strategic interests as issue of international peace and security, therefore, a concern of international community as whole. 13

Beijing has hitherto obtained political advantage since its stance on Kampuchean question coincided with the position taken by the majority of the member states. Further, China along with other member nations have so far been able to deny the Heng Samrin regime the much-coveted international legitimacy by repeatedly obtaining rejection of its representation at the United Nations. Its efforts to contain Soviet influence in the region coincided with the US strategy and the two together with the ASEAN states, particularly Thailand, have resorted to the strategy of supporting the forces fighting against the Heng Samrin regime.

V

The event unfolding in Afghanistan since the Saur Revolution (1978) posited additional challenge to China's

13See, supra, pp.105-8.
basic foreign policy and security strategy. China's fear of Soviet encirclement from this part of the world was exacerbated by signing of the Soviet-Afghanistan Friendship Treaty in December 1978. Beijing perceived this as another link in the chain of treaties forged by Moscow with countries bordering China (like India, Vietnam, Mongolia which have already signed similar treaties with Moscow).

When the Soviet Union directly intervened in the Afghanistan crisis, China took it as a matter of "direct national concern." Henceforth, China often cited the developments in Afghanistan and Kampuchea as co-ordinated Soviet attempts not only to subjugate these countries but also use them as springboards for further expansion.

These developments also adversely affected the US-USSR detente and prompted Washington to forge a closer strategic relationship with China on wide range of issues. However, Beijing was, so it seems, not in favour of participating in a closely co-ordinated defense strategy with the United States and Pakistan. It preferred to carry on its own programme of assistance to Afghan guerrillas. It did not expected the guerrillas to drive out Soviet military forces, which would be a very costly affair, but to pin down the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.  

14 See, supra, p.141.
China made use of the UN forum to malign the Soviet Union and called for concerted efforts by the international community to thwart Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and to contain further Soviet "expansionism". As in the case of Kampuchean question, China has obtained political advantages for being on the side of the majority during debates and voting on the issue at the United Nations.

However, its verbal belligerency has not been matched by its material support to Afghan guerrillas. Its support, in terms of arms and material aids, was minimal and even that seems to have been halted by 1985.

VI

The Iran-Iraq war has emanated largely because of the regional politics and the traditional rivalry between the two warring nations. The Super Powers, by and large have observed "hands off" attitude towards it. China too adopted a neutral stand and continued to maintain friendly relations with both the belligerent nations.

During the debates and voting on the issue at the United Nations, Beijing found itself on the side of the majority which consistently called for settlement of the dispute through peaceful means. However, the war has continued unabated, largely because the several governments and arms traders are
carrying on to fuel the war by supplying arms to both the combatants. China too, engaged in profitable arms deal with both the side of the war; particularly Iran.\footnote{See, supra, pp.166, 172-73.}

Thus, China, like other arms dealers, has continued to reap substantial dividend in form of leverage over the recipient governments and earning much needed foreign exchange.

VII

From the preceding analyses, following general observations could be deduced.

The study reveals that the main determinant of China's stand on various conflict-situations in Asia has been its security and strategic interests of preventing any power hostile to it from gaining access to or control of its vicinity from which it could posit threat to China itself.

Since late 1960s, China has perceived the main threat to its security as emanating from the Soviet Union. This perception permeated all aspects of China's policy and strategic pursuits. That is why China "detected" Soviet's hand in almost all the conflict-situations analysed in the study and regarded Soviet involvement in them as the pursuit of its design for encirclement
of Beijing. Lacking both the economic and military strength to counter the alleged Soviet design, the evidence presented in the study suggests that the United Nations provided China a convenient forum to mobilize international opposition to Soviet "involvement" in the conflict-situations in Asia. Incidentally, China found itself in the majority side in the debate and voting on most of the conflict-situations discussed here. It seems that China has gained some political advantage over the Soviet Union.

It should further be noted that China camouflaged its own security concern by presenting the Soviet moves in Asia as a threat to the whole region and world peace, therefore a concern of international community as whole. This posture served dual purpose. It covered up its own weakness of meeting the Soviet challenge, at the same time, it served as instrument of acquiring key role on the stage of world affairs by projecting its actions, especially in the case of Kampuchean question, as its contribution to global struggle to foil Soviet's "expansionism".

The study also shows that, notwithstanding China's exhortative declarations at the United Nations, it has adhered to pragmatic and cautious approach. Thus, it avoided getting directly involved in these conflict-situations, except in the case of Kampuchean question, where it was compelled to use its force to re-establish its credibility in the region. Here again,
after the initial border skirmishes with Vietnam, which resulted in bruising its own nose, Beijing had largely relied on indirect support and political pressure on Vietnam through the forum of United Nations.

By and large, it resorted to merely urging the governments and people of the belligerent countries to carry on their struggle against interference and domination of external powers. It has also drawn the attention of the UN members for a need of concerted efforts by the international community to counter Soviet "hegemonism".

This way, China has used the UN forum to build up its image, particularly, among the Third World countries and at the same time attempted to keep out from the direct involvement in the conflict-situations.

Besides its strategic concern, the study confirms that China’s statements on the conflict-situations at the United Nations were directed towards presenting itself as a champion of the Third World interests. China emphasised the commonality of interests among the Third World countries on many of the issues that confronted the World Organization. The attempt obviously has been to assume a role of leadership of the Third World.

The analyses presented reveal yet another aspect of the subtle attitudinal changes in China’s foreign policy strategy
since the early 1980s. While initially China appeared to be ideologicistic, belligerent and confrontationist, but by early 1980s, China's foreign policy postures indicated self-confidence, resilience and less belligerence in its utterance. This might be due to experience it gained in dealing with international issues. It also seems that the post-Mao leadership in Beijing appears to be responsible for this attitudinal change. They seem to have an outlook of less rigidity and more receptiveness to outside influence.

These changes are reflected in the following: China has extended, for the first time, its support to an international peace conference on Middle East to search for a settlement to Palestinian issue; to under-play the Afghanistan question as one of the main obstacles in Sino-Soviet relations; and also to support the ASEAN proposal of "indirect talk" to find a settlement to Kampuchean question. Further, after three decades of criticism and denouncement, China by early 1980s, favoured UN Peace Keeping Operations and contributed its share to meet the expenses of the operations since 1982.