Chapter IV

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT
Chapter IV

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Another conflict-situation in Asia which has been of concern to China over the decades, is the Arab-Israeli conflict or what is also referred to as the Question of Palestine.

China has initially been reacting to the problem from the outside. Since it gained its seat at the United Nations in November 1971, Beijing could state its principled stand and actively participate in the proceedings as the issue came up intermittently both before the Security Council and the General Assembly. However, the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 and subsequent developments in the Middle East provided the occasions to demonstrate its solidarity with the Arabs against Israel at the United Nations.

In order to have a comprehensive view of China's stand on the conflict-situation, it is pertinent to recall the development of China's attitude towards the issue since its inception and a brief account of Beijing's relations with Israel, Arab and the Palestinians.

China: Attitudinal Changes

To China, the root cause of the conflict-situation lies in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 in which contradictory promises were given by the British to the Jews and the Arabs concerning their national aspirations in Palestine. Beijing
gave credit to the Soviet Union for ending British rule in Palestine by supporting the Partition Plan in the United Nations. When the war between Arab and Israel broke out in 1948, China, like the Soviet Union, advocated peaceful settlement of the conflict on the basis of the UN Partition Plan and also favoured direct negotiation between the parties involved, without interference from any outside power. At this stage, China was obviously supporting the Israeli position and not that of the Arabs.

Israel was the first state of the Middle East region to extend recognition to China (9 January 1950), while the Arab states initially recognized the Chiang Kai-shek Government as the only legal representative of the Chinese people. Stemming from its desire to gain recognition from as many states as possible, China was keen in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel but Israel could not reciprocate because of the US pressure. However, the contacts between the two continued in the form of trade delegations, meeting of ambassadors and diplomats on the soil of a third country. As Israel aligned

---


2 For detail see, Michael Brecher, Israel, the Korean War and China: Images, Decisions and Consequences (Jerusalem, 1974), pp.44-67.
itself with the United States in the Korean war, the Chinese-Israeli flirtation was frozen for a duration but after 1953 efforts were once again resumed. When Israel actively sought diplomatic relations with China in 1955, it realized that it had missed the opportunity, as by then China had already awakened to the fact that the Arab's hatred of Israel was the dominant force in the Middle East and must be respected if significant gains were to be made. It although reports of Sino-Israeli clandestine contacts still persist, China repeatedly denies them.

On the other hand, China had first direct contact with the Arab states at the Bandung Conference and their relationship improved, especially with Egypt. Its diplomatic thrust in this region during the conference was highly rewarding as subsequently Egypt, Syria and Yemen recognised and established diplomatic relations with China in 1956. Beijing built its relations with the Arab world on the basis of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and the common task of all developing countries to reconstruct their nations. It tried to utilize a wide variety of means and

3 Ibid., p.46. This point was emphasized by an Israeli diplomat during the field-trip on this study in September 1986.

4 During the field-trip, some of the Israeli diplomats acknowledged the existence of trade and cultural relations between the two countries through private institutions and organizations. However, they refused to endorse this in writing.

techniques to penetrate the region. President Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez canal, the Arab's rejection of Western sponsored military pacts and similar anti-imperialist expressions facilitated China to give high priority to Arab states. Its gestures such as offer of volunteers to fight along with the Egyptians, its modest amount of aid, together with Beijing's strong moral support throughout the Suez Canal crisis, won the goodwill not only of the Egyptians, but also of the Arabs as a whole. It strongly condemned Israel's attack on Egypt and for the first time, China named Israel as a "tool of imperialist aggression."

The Chinese main objectives in the Arab and African world had been not only to gain international recognition as the sole legitimate government of China but also to detach them from friendly relations with the West. It also induced them to join "to form a broad united front and to unite all forces that can


7 Ibid., p.30. Nadir Nabulsi, Head of the Syrian cultural mission to Beijing told the Chinese press that China's support of Egypt on the Suez Canal question, "will be engraved forever on the heart and spirit of the Arab people", Survey of China Mainland Press (SCMP), no.1392, 14 October 1956, p.49.

be united" in pursuit of Beijing's goal to undermine the US position in the region and isolate it.\(^9\) The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization in 1957 was the main gain for China as it opened wide the gates of the Middle East to Beijing.

However, the Sino-Arab relations strained from the late 1950s due to a combination of complex factors.\(^10\) The root cause of the set back in their relations was the clash of national interests. While the Arabs, having achieved national independence, preferred emphasis on national development rather than revolution, China's primary theme of appeal remained the call to revolution.\(^11\) Besides this, the main limiting factor in China's Middle East policy, was its weakness in economic and military powers by which it failed to compete successfully with the Soviet Union for their rivalry of gaining influence in the region.\(^12\)

---


\(^10\) See for further details, Yitzhak Shichor, n.8, pp.74-86. See also, V.P. Dutt, China's Foreign Policy, 1958-62 (London, 1964), pp.157-60.

\(^11\) For details see, Madzini R., "China and the Palistinian: A Developing Relations", New Middle East (London), 32, May 1971, p.34. See also Khalili Joseph, "Sino-Arab Relations", in Asian Survey vol.8, no.8, August 1968, p.689.

\(^12\) For details of the Sino-Soviet conflict on Middle East, see, Donald S. Zagoria. The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961
However, the deterioration of their relations did not led to complete annihilation of China's influence in Arab. as by 1963, it was once again active in the Arab world in soliciting their approval for the Second Afro-Asian Conference. The formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) served as an opportune means for Beijing to please the Arabs by its strong support to their common cause. Beijing's anti-Israel line hardened further as the Chinese leaders recognized the existence of a "Palestinian nation" in 1965, and subsequently became the first major power to accord diplomatic recognition to the PLO.13

China's concept of the Arab-Israeli conflict had been reformulated accordingly. It no longer considered the Israeli state as a part of the Afro-Asian community but rather as an extension of US "imperialism." Hence, the antagonistic contradictions existed between the Arabs on the one hand and Israel together with the United States on the other. Since these contradictions were in its view irreconcilable, the Chinese henceforth rejected any suggestion implying that the Palestine question should be settled peacefully and advocated instead a people's armed struggle as the only way to settle the Arab-

Israeli conflict. This radical view of the conflict coincided with the general radicalisation of both domestic and foreign policies during the Cultural Revolution.

Meanwhile, brewing up of a fresh tension in the Arab-Israeli relation was viewed by Beijing as a reflection of "global power politics". Contrary to its earlier stand, China denounced the Partition Plan. It condemned the United States and Britain for creating Israel through the United Nations machinery in order to hinder Arab unity and dominate the Arab world. It also denounced the Soviet "revisionist clique" for collaborating with the United States in the whole scheme.

China's firm moral and diplomatic support of the Arabs during the 1967 war should be perceived not merely as an attempt to regain the friendship of the Arabs but mainly within the larger context of preventing any hostile power from gaining control over this strategic cross-roads of the intermediate zone. The Security Council resolution of 22 November 1967, which was opposed both by the PLO and China was regarded as "another big conspiracy on the part of US imperialism and Soviet revisionism in colluding to use the United Nations to force the Arab countries to capitulate completely to the aggressor." It

---

14 See, Shichor, n.8, p.116.

15 See, Shichor, n.1, pp.168-69; see also Behbehani, n.13, p.56.

16 Peking Review, vol.10, no.4, 1 December 1967. n.33
condemned the resolution at every available opportunity. Soon it became clear that China was using the occasion to discredit further the Soviet Union in the eyes of the Arabs and also to promote the concept of armed struggle in the Middle East.17

The disarray caused by the 1967 defeat in the Arab world encouraged the PLO to develop its own strategy and adopted new concepts. This was welcomed to China as it wanted to see Mao's theories applied in other countries. This convergence of interests explains why during this period China gave maximum support to the Palestinians.18 By 1969, the drive for a "political solution" of the Arab-Israeli conflict, sponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States was growing stronger. China viewed these attempts as aimed at seizing "oil markets, important strategic points and spheres of influence in the Middle East, suppress the Arab national liberation movement, and meet the needs of their counter-revolutionary strategy in the Middle East and the whole world."19 Thus, China uncompromisingly rejected these attempts.

---


18 For details see, Behbehani, n.13, pp.52-72.

19 Peking Review, vol.12, no.24, 13 June 1969, p.27.
Its immediate objective of winning over Arabs' political support to its claim of seat at the United Nations seemed to have materialized, with the majority Arab States voting in favour of China.20 The Palestinians were very optimistic of China's entry into the United Nations. A spokesman for the PLO who hailed the event, said, "It provides the first opportunity of its kind for the Arab cause... and above all the Palestine cause... to be represented on Security Council."21 However, China was cautious and used the United Nations as a platform for political pronouncement, rather than a vehicle for change. Its stand on the Palestine question at the United Nations remained unchange. The Chinese consistent support of the Palestinians of their "national rights" and Arab countries of their "lost territories" continued. In his first major speech on the conflict-situation, Qiao Guan-hua dealt at length on China's uncompromising position on Israel and why the conflict remained unresolved for so long. Besides attacking Israel for "continuous expansion and aggression," China alleged that the main trouble-makers in the region were the two Super Powers who were "contending and colluding with each other." He further charged that:

20 The Arab bloc voting on China's admission was favourable: eleven for, four abstentions (Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon and Qatar), while only Saudi Arabia voted against; see General Assembly Official Records (GAOR), 26th session, 1976th plen.mtg., 25 October 1971, p.41.

21 Cited in Harris, n.13, p.142.
They are taking advantage of the temporary difficulties facing the Palestinian and other Arab people to make dirty political deals in their contention for important strategic points, oil resources and the division of spheres of influence in the Middle East at the expense of the national rights and territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Palestinian and other Arab peoples. Herein lies the crux of the matter and that is why the Middle East question has remained unsolved over such a long period. (22)

China perceived that the numerous UN resolutions passed on the conflict were 'in effect encouraged aggression and shielded Israeli zionism in the name of maintaining peace." Based on the premises that the destiny of the Palestinian and other Arab people must be decided by themselves, Qiao stated that:

We hold that all the countries and peoples... have the obligation to support the Palestinian and other Arab people in their struggle... and that no one has the right to make political deals behind their backs at the expense of their right to national existence and their territorial integrity and sovereignty. (23)

He ridiculed the Super Powers' method of dissuading the Arab people from countering Israeli aggression by spreading fear that their armed struggle might lead to a world war.24 Later, the Soviet Union had become the target of attack when Huang Hua accused it of

22_GOR, 26th session, 2006th plen.mtg., 8 December 1971, p.1
23_Ibid.
24_Ibid.
... taking advantage of the temporary difficulties of the Arab countries to carry out large-scale infiltration and expansion in the Middle East under the sign board of 'help eliminate the consequence of aggression' and 'assist the Arab peoples'. This is more deceptive and more dangerous than old-time imperialism. (25)

Despite its continuing support to the Palestinians, the Chinese have never identified themselves with the Palestinian demand of annihilation of Israel. There is little doubt that fundamentally, the Chinese regard Israel as a fait accompli. In his first speech on the issue at the United Nations, the Chinese representative said that China was not opposing the Jewish people or the people of Israel but only "Israeli Zionist policies of aggression and expansion." However, it is not likely for Beijing to recognize Israel before the settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict. China's posture of hostility and non-recognition of Israel paid rich dividend in its politics among the Third World in general and Arab states in particular.

25 CAOR, 27th session, 2099th plen. mtg., 5 December 1972, p.5.

26 CAOR, 26th session, 2006th mtg., 8 December 1971, p.10. The then Chinese Foreign Minister, Chou Kuan Hou, reported to have said in 1975 that Israel was a concrete fact. See, Michael Eppel, "China and the Middle East", New Outlook (Tel Aviv), vol.22, no.2, March 1978, p.41. Again in December 1982, there is a report of Chinese Communist Party leader Hu Yaobang urging Arab nations to recognize Israel's right to exist. See, New York Times, 7 December 1982.
The Arab-Israeli war of 1973 gave an opportune moment not only to show China's solidarity with the Arabs but also to emphasize the necessity of Third World unity to fight against the two Super Powers domination. The first Chinese reaction to the war was meeting of Chinese Foreign Minister Ji Bengfei with the Egyptian, Syrian and PLO envoys in Beijing and expressed "we will, as always, stand firmly on your side in the struggle of the Egyptian, Syrian, Palestinian and other Arab people against Israeli aggression." The People's Daily blamed "US imperialism" for making the war possible by providing a great deal of military aid to Israel and also criticized the Soviet Union for permitting a large number of Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel, thereby supporting the latter with manpower.

While speaking at the first meeting of the Security Council after the outbreak of the war, Huang Hua hailed the Arabs attempt to break the "no war, no peace" situation maintained by the Super Powers. He condemned "Israeli Zionists" who were engaged in "aggression and expansion in collusion" with the United States and the Soviet Union. However, four formal

27 Cited in Behbehani, n.13, p.111.

28 Ibid., pp.111-12.

29 Security Council Official Records (SCOR), 28th year, 1743rd mtg., 8 October, pp.5-6.
meetings of the Security Council held on 8, 9, 11 and 12 October remained inconclusive and no draft resolution was presented. Meanwhile, the war continued unabated.

After initial setbacks, Israel had again gained military superiority over the Arabs. On 16 October, in a dramatic counter attack, Israel pushed its tank forces to the West Bank of the Suez Canal and cut off the Egyptian Third Army's communication line with its base. On the northern front also the Israelis had successfully pushed back the Syrians from the Golan Heights and were moving up to make new territorial gains in the area.

In view of the grave situation, the two Super Powers decided to pool in their efforts to bring about an end to the fighting. They jointly presented a draft resolution only a few hours before the Security Council night session, without the customary prior "consultation" between the sponsors and other members. The two Super Powers asked for the early adoption of the resolution. This gave rise to a sharp criticism from China who considered this behind the scene consensus as a tailor-made case to prove its charge that the Super Powers were contending and colluding with each other for global hegemony. Beijing regarded this resolution as a dirty deal between the two Super Powers, which not only ignored and thereby offended the other members of the Security Council but also aimed to
reimpose on the Middle East the "no war, no peace" situation temporarily terminated by the war.\textsuperscript{30} Its representative saw the Super Powers' motive of producing this resolution at the Security Council as an "attempt to use the United Nations and Security Council as their hired tool to rubber-stamp the dirty deal."\textsuperscript{31} Despite this, China did not veto the resolution. Later, the representative clarified "... it was only taking into consideration the desire of certain countries concerned that the Chinese delegation refrained from voting against it."\textsuperscript{32}

Though this incident did not disturb the normal procedure, it brought forth the impact of China's membership to the United Nations. Till now the Soviet Union and the United States invariably played a leading role at the United Nations whenever conflict flared up in the Middle East. Other powers remained in the periphery while making decisions but this norm was challenged by China. The resolution, however, did not have any impact on the conflict.

Once again, on 23 October a cease-fire resolution was passed which provided the UN observers to supervise the


\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, 1748th mtg., 23 October 1973, p.5.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}. 
observance of cease-fire. During the debate on this resolution Qiao Guan-hua, once again accused the Super Powers of collusion against the Arabs and rejected the resolution as a "mere scrap of paper which makes no condemnation of Israel's expanded aggression..." But, it again refrained from vetoing it. This resolution too was of no avail. China, in fact, said that these resolutions on cease-fire "have had the actual effect of sapping the fighting will of the Arab people and shielding Israel's further expansion of aggression." Kremlin, angered at Washington's failure of bringing Israel to observe the cease-fire, threatened to send its own troops to the Middle East to end the fighting. To this President Nixon responded by ordering American troops around the world into precautionary alert.

In the wake of such a dangerous situation tending to lead towards direct confrontation between the two Super Powers, the eight nonaligned members of the Security Council submitted, on 25 October, a draft resolution, envisaging a UN emergency force in the area to maintain cease-fire. China was opposed to the stationing of UN force as it believed that "it will leave infinite evil consequences" of turning the sovereign Arab states

---

34 SCOR, n.31, p.5.
into an area of "international intervention and control with the Super Powers as the behind-the-scene boss." This posture indicates that China's thinking on any supranational military operation was still plagued by the trauma of the Korean war and the UN police action that followed it. China tried to prove the validity of its apprehension when the Super Powers fiercely contended during the composition of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF). However, China dissociated itself from the decision of forming the UNEF-II and refused to contribute to meet the expense of the force. When some member states pointed out that the finance of the UNEF was a part of the expense of the United Nations, Beijing refuted it as "... tantamount to request all Member States to pull the chestnut out of the fire for the two Super Powers." 

Despite the acceptance of a cease-fire by both Syria and Israel, fighting continued until the two warring parties finally signed the disengagement agreement on 31 May 1974. At the same

---

37 SCOR, n.35.

38 SCOR, 28th year, 1754th mtg., 2 November 1973, p.2. Huang Hua said, "They try by all means to squeeze in the forces which they can influence so as to exercise indirect control."


41 Text of the agreement in the Report of the Secretary-General, S/11302/Add.1, 30 May 1974.
time, the Security Council adopted a draft resolution unanimously calling to set up immediately under the United Nations a Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps to this effect.\(^4\) During the debate on this issue, Chuang Yi once again reiterated Beijing's view of the necessary steps that should be taken to bring about a fundamental solution to the Middle East question. Since it was opposed to the dispatch of troops in the name of the United Nations, China disapproved of the UNDOF. However, its representative stated that, "...only out of consideration for the present attitude of the victim (Syria) the Chinese delegation had decided not to participate in the vote on the draft resolution."\(^4\) Since then China had dissociated itself from all subsequent Council proceedings of UNEF, UNDOF and their financing. In fact, Beijing's total dissociation from UNEF II and UNDOF means its total non-interference in the continuing authorization process, as the mandates of these operations required periodic renewal by the Council.

When a fresh attempt was made to bring about a negotiated settlement on the long standing problems of the Middle East by


\(^4\) UN Doc. S/PV.1774, 31 May 1974, pp.3-4.
convening a Geneva conference in 1973, Beijing opposed it.\textsuperscript{44} In fact, Beijing was left alone to oppose it as even Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO, agreed to attend it despite opposition from other constituent extremist groups of the PLO.\textsuperscript{45} This opposition was in accord with its usual stand of negating any peaceful settlement or political negotiations proposed or supported by the Super Powers. The explanation usually proffered for this attitude was that these "plans" or "proposals" had been designed by the Super Powers, not in order to settle the conflict but rather to sustain it and thereby prolong the stalemate to maintain their presence and influence.\textsuperscript{46}

However, since the Sino-American rapprochement of the early 1970s, the onus for the "no war, no peace" stalemate in the Arab-Israeli conflict had been shifted to the Soviet Union exclusively.\textsuperscript{47} It showed its discontent towards the Fatah


\textsuperscript{45}For details see, Behbehani, n.13, pp.125-26.

\textsuperscript{46}Peking Review, vol.15, no.23, 9 June 1972, p.10; see also SCOR, 27th year, 1769th mtg., 24 April 1972, pp.5-6; ibid., 30th year, 1821st mtg., 17 April 1975, p.7.

group of the PLO for their close relations with the Soviet Union. It also welcomed any setback in the Soviet relations with the Arab countries as an Arab attempt to free themselves from Soviet patronage. Both all out war and a state of "no war, no peace", according to China, allowed the Soviet Union to augment its influence in the region. For these reasons, Beijing drastically reduced its opposition to the United States initiatives in the Middle East and welcomed the Israeli-Egyptian dialogue.

On the whole, China highly appreciated degree of unity achieved among the Arabs to make the concerted effort to confront their common enemy. Their use of the oil embargo as a weapon in the war was applauded by Beijing which regarded it as an indicator of the Third World desire to be masters of their fate. The conflict-situation also brought forth the developing trend towards a new orientation in Chinese foreign policy with a stringent anti-Soviet posture.

48 For details see, Behbehani, n.13, p.109.

49 For example, China hailed the Egyptian Government's abrogation of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. Beijing regarded it as a brilliant example of the Third World struggle against hegemonism. See, GAOR, 31st session, 27th plen. mtg., 19 November 1976, p.1099.

Lebanon Crisis

Meanwhile, the civil war in Lebanon since 1975 once again drew the focus of world attention to the region. The genesis of the crisis is due to the fact that the demographic change in favour of the Muslim community in Lebanon led the Muslims to demand a reorientation of the prevailing political system which till then was favourable to the Christian maronite. The clash of interests between these two communities eventually led to the civil war which provided fertile ground for the external powers like Syria and Israel to muddle in pursuit of their own interests. Israel indulged in expansionism in Lebanon much more blantantly in March 1978 and June 1982 with the ostensible purpose of destroying the PLO's infrastructure in southern Lebanon.51

Despite strong condemnation by the comity of nations, repeated calls by the Security Council and the General Assembly to withdraw, the Israeli army continued to push northward and finally sieged the PLO forces in West Beirut for ten weeks which ended with the agreement on evacuation of the PLO. Even in such a grievous situation, the Security Council could not evoke Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

51Their real goal seem to be far more ambitious than what appears to be. For details see, Itmar Rabinovich, The War for Lebanon 1970-83 (London, 1984), p.122.
China was prolific in vehement condemnation of the Israeli invasion. It viewed this act not only as an "insolent challenge to the Lebanese and Palestinian people and the whole Arab world, but also a deliberate step to exacerbate the Middle East situation, thereby endangering world peace and security." Its representative urged:

Since the Israeli authorities refuse to implement the Security Council resolutions, the Council should, in accordance with the provisions of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, take the necessary measures of sanctions to deal with Israeli act of aggression. (53)

The Israeli demand of simultaneous withdrawal of the PLO and Syrian troops along with Israeli troops from Lebanon had been viewed by the Chinese representative as a pretext to continue their presence in Lebanon as he saw no co-relation between the two different issues. The massacre of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatilla on 17 September 1982, which shocked the whole world, was termed by the Chinese representative as "fascist atrocity" who expressed the urgency of stopping "the hands of the aggressor." Unlike its previous stand on the

---

UN peace-keeping operations in general and the formation of a UN Interim Force (UNIFIL) in March 1978 in particular, China not only voted for the extension of UNIFIL and increase of UN observers, but also urged Israel to "accept the presence of UN observers to implement the cease-fire." China seems to have endorsed the Israeli-Lebanese troops withdrawal accord of May 1983. This accord was opposed by the opposition forces in Lebanon, according to China, at the instigation of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union opposed this accord, in Beijing's view, to "strengthen its weakened foothold and snap back its lost interests in the area."

At this writing, Israel has withdrawn from Southern Lebanon but intermittently bombing of the border areas is still continuing. The National Unity Government in Lebanon has been formed in April 1984, but the internal conflicts among various communities have intensified. China consistently urged the warring factions to resolve their differences through dialogues and consultations which would serve their fundamental interest of shaking off foreign influence and truly unify their country. China warned

56 See, Security Council Resolutions 511, 521, 523 (1982), for which China voted positively.


58 Survey of World Broadcasting -- Far East (SWB/FE), 7357/A4/1, 11 June 1983.

59 SWB/FE, 7440/A4/1, 16 September 1983; ibid., 7449/A4/1, 27 September 1983.
against the Soviet Union's attempts to come back in the Middle East in the wake of a major setback of US policy towards Lebanon. In a marked departure from its earlier stand, China, for the first time, lent support to a proposal to convene an international peace conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations to discuss the Palestinian issue.

**Summary Observations**

From the above analyses, it is evident that China's stand on the Arab-Israeli conflict at the initial stage was ambiguous but subsequently with the changing pattern of political forces in the Middle East, especially with the formation of the PLO as an effective force, China extended its support to Palestine. This has been largely due to a convergence of interests of the Arab states and China in preventing any hostile power from gaining ground in this strategically crucial region which lies at the cross-road of Asia, Africa and Europe. Nevertheless, China has resorted to merely urging the local governments and people to resist the interference and domination of external powers without getting itself involved in the conflict situation.

---

60. *Foreign Broadcast Information Service -- China (FBIS/Chi)* 84-087, 3 May 1984, p.3.

Until the late 1960s, China's apprehensions were mainly directed against the United States for making use of the Middle East as an attempt of hostile encirclement of China. Subsequently, it guarded against a similar possibility by the Soviet Union as part of a Soviet attempt to outflank China. The latter perception was influenced by the Soviet military build up along China's northern frontiers. This concern as well as China's changing perception of the world situation, is reflected in Beijing's approach to the solution of the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict in recent years, at the United Nations. Initially, China rejected all proposals either sponsored or supported by the Super Powers, on the ground that they were pretexts for continuation of Super Powers' "hegemony" in the region and to thwart the legitimate claim of the PLO. However, as China's relations improved with the United States, Beijing endorsed Kissinger's step-by-step approach to the problem as also the Camp David agreement and the Egypt-Israeli peace treaty that followed. Its attitudinal change is obviously due to China's tilt towards the United States. Nonetheless, it has been hesitant to give credit to the United States for peace negotiation between Egypt and Israel and instead represented these developments as vindication of its exhortation to the Third World nations to solve their dispute through direct negotiation (without outside interference). Besides, the
debates on the Arab-Israeli conflict provided China the occasion for hurling a thunderbolt against the Soviet Union and also maligning it. 62

Although China refused to endorse UNEF-II and other peace-keeping operations on the ground of its "principled stand", it did not obstruct either the establishment of a new peace-keeping operations or the continuation of the existing ones. Instead of exercising its veto power, it merely expressed its criticism and at the time of voting, it used the familiar "non-participation" device. 63 To act otherwise would have hurt its own image among the comity of nations and would have given substance to the Soviet allegation that China was "war-monger." 64 Later, when the world organization was confronted with the Lebanon crisis (1982), China not only endorsed the extension of UNIFIL and the increase of UN observers but also went to the extent of urging Israel to accept the presence of UN observers to implement the cease-fire. 65 Interestingly, it has also agreed

62 For details see, Harris, n.13, pp.145-50.

63 During my field-trip, most of the Arab diplomats appreciated the utility of the peace-keeping operations. Even the Israeli diplomat lauded the role of the UNIFIL. However, they refused to endorse their statements in writing.

64 UN Doc. S/PV. 2391, 6 August 1982, p.12; see also S/PV. 2392, 12 August 1982, p.42.

65 UN Doc., n.57.
in December 1981 to pay its apportionment towards the expenditure on peace-keeping operations which it had refused to pay since joining the United Nations (1971).

Thus, initially, there was a dichotomy between words and deeds in regard to China's stand on the conflict-situation. While resorting to high sounding revolutionary phraseology in its political pronouncement, it was clearly pursuing a cautious and restrained policy. However, China's reaction to the subsequent developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict reflect its new perspective on the global situation. Instead of advocating revolutionary change, it has adjusted itself to the established international system and has assumed the role of a skillful actor in the game of power-politics.

---