

The Role of the United Nations in the Settlement of the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-88

by
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INTRODUCTION

On 8 August 1988, in a short meeting of the Security Council, the UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar announced a cease-fire for 20 August 1988 (Disengagement or "D-Day"). It was aimed at ending an eight-year long war between Iraq and Iran, a brutal conflict that cost more than one million lives and over 1000 billion US dollars. The declaration of D-Day was a historic moment not only for Iran and Iraq, but also for the rest of the world.

At first view, the Iran-Iraq cease-fire came into being because of the exhaustion of peoples and economies. But a thorough study has to bear in mind the crucial role played by the United Nations. Many studies, however, neglect this role.¹ Little has been written about the "good offices" of the UN Secretary-General, which provided the first realistic basis for an end to the war, or about the role of the Security Council and its Resolution 598, which laid the groundwork for the cease-fire, and also dealt with the supervision of the cease-fire and the successive withdrawals of troops.

Resolution 598 was not only a masterpiece of diplomacy; it also gave successful proof of a new "old" technique: informal, confidential consultations among the five permanent members of the Council. After 40 years of existence on paper, this group became a highly influential lobby. As Sir Brian Urquhart put it: "For the first time, the Security Council was able to function as envisaged by its founders."² Therefore, Resolution 598 was a new beginning in a double sense: for the parties of the conflict and for the members of the Security Council.

This article presents a critical analysis of the negotiations that led to the cease-fire of 20 August 1988. It is based on information gleaned from several interviews with United Nations officials and diplomats of UN missions in New York. Evidence from UN documents rounds out the description of the role of the UN in settling the Iran-Iraq War 1980-88. It begins with a brief explanation of the UN instruments available for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

UN INSTRUMENTS FOR THE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

The founding document of the United Nations, the UN Charter of 26 June 1945, names the organization's first objective as being "the maintaining of international peace and security and the taking of effective collective measures to that end." Details can be found in Chapters VI and VII of the Charter. These chapters differ fundamentally.

Chapter VI treats the peaceful settlement of disputes, while Chapter VII provides for collective measures against threats to, or breaches of, peace. The

measures that could be undertaken extend as far as the implementation of economic boycotts or even military sanctions.³

The system of collective security envisaged in Chapter VII remained, with few exceptions, a “dead letter” of the UN Charter. The collective use of military force by the Security Council never materialized. Neither the Korean Operation in the 1950s nor the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 were undertaken under Article 42 of the Charter.

Instead of using the Security Council for collective “protection,” the superpowers built up their own collective defences. Only in the case of conflicts that the alliances did not want to, or could not, settle, did they grant the UN limited powers. From this “loophole” the UN developed its peacekeeping instruments, which became habitual in use due to numerous applications.⁴

The goal of UN peacekeeping is the neutralization or defusing of international conflict situations through the use of multinational military personnel under UN command.⁵ From the beginning to the end, the operation needs the consent of all parties involved. This consensus has to be reached on four levels: consent of the Security Council—first of all its five permanent members, the parties of the conflict, the troop-contributing countries, and the financing states. The need for a far reaching consensus underlies any UN peacekeeping operation.

UN peacekeeping is basically practised in two forms: either by UN peacekeeping forces or by so-called UN military observer groups. As a rule, the mandate for UN peacekeeping is issued by the Security Council.⁶ Under its authority, the UN Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day management of the operation. The head of the UN Secretariat is the UN Secretary-General who, according to Article 99 of the Charter, can also mediate between the disputing parties. His good offices may foster the work of the Security Council and may also lay the groundwork for future peacekeeping operations. Finally, the General Assembly is responsible for the financing of UN peacekeeping operations.

The decision-making body for the deployment of UN soldiers, the Security Council, consists of 15 members: five permanent members with special rights (such as the right to veto) and ten non-permanent members who are chosen for a period of two years from among the UN member states according to a regional key.⁷ In purely formal terms, Security Council decisions are reached by members’ votes. In practice, however, particularly in recent years, an informal decision-making process has come to be used, in order to avoid open voting, and to allow considerable scope for diplomacy. By this means, the worsening of conflicts caused by the necessity of publicly taking sides should be avoided. Nowadays, confidential consultations form the backbone of the Council’s work.

Decisions reached through consultations are announced, if at all, by a statement issued by the Council president. Resolution 598 is a prime example of this kind of decision-making in the Security Council. In this case the mechanics of consultation worked more effectively than ever before.

PAST HISTORY OF RESOLUTION 598

The Iran-Iraq conflict has its roots in the rivalry between Persia and Arabia, which goes back to the seventh century. The question of their common border was in the forefront of the dispute. Since 1520, the two sides had come to no fewer than 18 agreements concerning this matter alone.⁸ Iraq brought the conflict before the Security Council, which requested the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative to look into this tense situation.⁹

The Mexican ambassador to West Germany, Luis Weckmann-Munos travelled as a special representative to the area of conflict. He concluded that a great deal of the tension had been caused by inaccurately-defined borders and misunderstandings between the two governments. Both governments had, however, indicated their readiness to look for a comprehensive settlement of their grievances under UN supervision. This would, though, according to Weckmann, demand a larger UN commitment, including the stationing of military observers along the border.¹⁰ The Security Council did not take up these suggestions, and the UN engagement ended without result. Through Algerian and Egyptian mediation, Iraq granted Iran shared sovereignty in the economically important Shatt al-Arab in the Algiers Agreement of March 1975.

After the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran war broke out between the two neighbors. After several border incidents, on 22 September 1980 Iraqi bombers penetrated deep into Iranian airspace, accompanied by a powerful invasion by Iraqi ground troops on 23 September. These operations are generally taken as the start of the war, although Iraq named 9 September as the beginning of the military conflict.¹¹ In a letter to the UN Secretary-General of 25 September Iraq's President Saddam Hussein explained that "Iraq's objective (was) only to gain Iran's irrevocable recognition of Iraq's rights over its lands and sovereignty over its territorial waters."¹²

On 22 September UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim had called upon the conflicting sides to solve their dispute peacefully, and offered them his good offices. On 23 September Waldheim summoned the Security Council, which supported his appeal to the parties of the conflict.¹³ At the request of Mexico and Norway, on 28 September the Council adopted Resolution 479 (1980) which called for an end to the fighting, although not for a withdrawal behind the internationally recognized borders. By this action, the Security Council was taking sides with Iraq.¹⁴

Behind this action may well have been the international outrage directed against Iran for the taking hostage of American diplomats in Teheran. Iranian Prime Minister Radschai's provocative speech before the Council on 17 October did little to arouse sympathy for Iran, as did the aggressive appearances of the Iranian UN Deputy Ardakani.¹⁵

The Council showed itself to be just as biased when it adopted Resolution 514 (1982) on 12 July 1982. This resolution was passed after Iran had gained the upper-hand militarily and had advanced into Iraqi territory. Only then did the Council demand that both sides retreat behind internationally recognized

borders. Furthermore, the Resolution called for an immediate cease-fire and considered sending UN observers.¹⁶

Iran rejected both Council resolutions (479 and 514) as unjust. In a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 14 July 1982, Iran rejected any further Security Council decisions in the Gulf conflict.¹⁷ In its view, the Council had not carried out its obligations towards ending the conflict and had paid no attention whatsoever to Iraqi aggression.¹⁸

This rejection of the Council only applied, however, to its handling of the Gulf conflict. In other areas, such as the Middle East question, Iran played a full role — its speakers even used such opportunities to berate publicly the Council and its members.

Iran's rejection of the Security Council in Gulf matters increased the value of the good offices of the Secretary-General. He served as a channel of communication through his own cautious statements and by acting as a mailbox for official letters sent by Iran and Iraq. As such, his good offices provided the only channel for peaceful communication between the two sides. Good offices communication developed in four particular areas: free shipping access in the Gulf, treatment of prisoners of war, deployment of chemical weapons, and bombardment of civilian targets.

At the beginning the Secretary-General had tried to institutionalize his good offices by the appointment of a prominent special emissary. On 11 November 1980 Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Conflict in the Persian Gulf. He kept this office until his assassination in 1986.

Palme travelled to Iran and Iraq five times. Mediating the question of free shipping in the Persian Gulf became an important task. Twice he tried to free foreign ships caught in the Shatt Al-Arab, proposing to evacuate these ships under a UN flag. However, this, as with other initiatives, proved to be a dead-end, because of Iraq's sovereignty claims.

In the first two years of the Gulf War the Special Representative kept a close eye on the situation on the ground, but his diplomatic missions failed for lack of consensus among the parties of the conflict. On the other hand, both sides agreed that the problem areas defined above required regulation. This was a task the Secretary-General could fulfil. His approach was not to steer towards an end to the military clashes, but to try instead to avoid an escalation of the armed conflict. With this tactic the Secretary-General was successful in gaining the trust of both sides. He could use this trust for the later mediation of a cease-fire. Over and above that, he could achieve temporary successes for the moment. For instance, his negotiations led to a moratorium on attacking civilian targets on 12 June 1984: this put a stop to the war in the cities for several months and enabled two United Nations Inspection Teams to be stationed in Teheran and Baghdad.

In autumn 1986 the Security Council once more became influential following a very successful Iranian military offensive. The Iranians conquered the Fao peninsula and Iraq began to use massive chemical weapons in its

defence. In this dramatic situation the Security Council altered its pro-Iraqi stance. Resolution 582 (1986) mentioned for the first time in cautious terms the question of war-guilt, addressing Iran's great concern over Iraq's invasion having triggered the war.¹⁹

Iran did indeed recognize positive elements in Resolution 582, but it still insisted upon an explicit condemnation of Iraq as the aggressor. As Iraq was not condemned by the Security Council, the Secretary-General had to repeat in November 1986 that the differences of opinion between the two sides had not lessened.²⁰

The conflict was also becoming increasingly dangerous, as the US brought in more and more military forces to protect civilian ships.²¹ It had been clear since early autumn that a new diplomatic initiative was needed to prevent a further escalation of the war. In autumn 1986 the five permanent members of the Security Council agreed upon a joint confidential action as a new attempt at ending the Gulf War.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURE OF RESOLUTION 598

Resolution 598 was unanimously adopted in July 1987 by the Security Council in the presence of six foreign ministers. It provided the formal framework for the cease-fire and its supervision by the United Nations Iran Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG). The Resolution is a masterpiece of diplomacy, and for this reason has many "fathers."

Generally, the Secretary-General's annual press conference on 13 January 1987 is judged to have been the "starting signal." On this occasion the Secretary-General called officially upon the five permanent Council members to make a more resolute effort to resolve the conflict.²² According to a copy of the press conference, the Secretary-General explained that

what has to be shown is a political determination by members of the Security Council, and mainly the five permanent members, to find a solution to the problem.²³

Because of this press statement the Secretary-General was pushed forward as the "flagship" of an initiative that had developed in early autumn 1986 during discussions between senior British and American UN diplomats. When the Secretary-General put forward "elements" of the future Resolution at a plenary consultation of the Security Council on 23 January 1987, these elements had in fact long been agreed upon among the five permanent Council members.

The first "non-paper"²⁴ was written in September 1986 in the law department of the US Mission to the United Nations. It appeared as a package of three resolutions. The first resolution would order a cease-fire, threatening sanctions if this was not carried out. The second would, if a cease-fire had not come into effect within two weeks, announce the sanctions by the Council. Finally, the third resolution would deal with the details of sanctions, ordering them within a further two weeks.²⁵

This paper formed the basis for the initiative proposed by the British UN ambassador John Thomson, who presented “his” ideas at the informal monthly luncheon of the Security Council members in October 1986 in the presence of the UN Secretary-General.²⁶ Prior to the luncheon, an arrangement had been made with the Soviets who had agreed to the initiative. Upon this proposal the five permanent Council members developed a draft resolution.²⁷

During an intensive consultation process, it became increasingly clear that the US wanted to implement an arms embargo against Iran. The US tried to use the opportunity to improve its strained relationship with the important Arab oil states — strained because of US connections with Israel — through dealings designed to show obvious solidarity with Iraq. The US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Murphy, had promised the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, during his visit to Baghdad on 11 May 1987 that the USA would push forward a resolution in the Security Council which would lead to an arms embargo against Iran.²⁸

When plans were officially drawn up in May 1987, a strange coalition of the former Axis states of the Second World War (West Germany, Italy, Japan), as well as the non-aligned states made substantial suggestions for amendments and modifications of the wording.²⁹ On Ghana’s initiative, the non-aligned states suggested the deployment of a UN military observer group to supervise the peace process. This proposal was agreed upon quickly by all Council members.

The outcome of the consultation process, Resolution 598, was adopted on 20 July 1987. In the Resolution, the Council demanded as a prerequisite for a negotiated solution a cease-fire in the Gulf war and the withdrawal of troops to the internationally recognized borders without delay. It emphasized explicitly the existence of a breach of peace, according to the language used in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In the background was the clear threat of an arms embargo, which was amplified by the mentioning of possible further steps.

The operational second paragraph of the Resolution requested the Secretary-General to dispatch a team of observers to “verify, confirm and supervise” the cease-fire and withdrawal. A third part of the Resolution dealt with the questions of prisoners of war, the responsibility for the conflict (investigation of war-guilt) and reparation.

The draft Resolution, presented as a “presidential paper,”³⁰ was put to a vote in the presence of six foreign ministers.³¹ Their public statements following the adoption of the Resolution indicated different positions and differing interpretations of Resolution 598.³² China asked the other permanent Council members to take into account the opinions of the non-permanent members as well as those of other interested parties. China furthermore declared that the UN Secretary-General must have sufficient time for negotiations, making clear its uneasiness regarding sanctions against Iran. China also requested “that other countries concerned, the major Powers in particular, will exercise restraint,” a comment directed at the Western naval presence in the Gulf, and the sale of weapons by, above all, the Soviet Union and France.³³

Great Britain declared itself proud to have played a prominent role in the consultations from the outset. The British Foreign Minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe, clearly as a sign of good-will towards Iran, explicitly underlined the war-guilt question saying, "Yes we should ask how the conflict started and how we should apportion blame." On the other hand, he implicitly warned Iran of a possible arms embargo, a warning that was repeated, also implicitly, by US Secretary of State, George Shultz.

West Germany's Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher stressed the involvement of the non-permanent Council members in the matters of war-guilt, reparations and regional security mentioned by the Resolution. The original wording of the Resolution called for an "immediate cease-fire" and "withdrawal without delay," but Genscher interpreted the first paragraph as being a two-stage requirement: first cease-fire, then withdrawal.

The Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, while addressing the five permanent members of the Council, said that, although the methods which had led to Resolution 598 were justified in this special case, it should not become the rule to proceed in the same manner.³⁴ Italy was thereby raising the fears of the smaller Council members that a new form of secret diplomacy could develop in the Security Council. Toward the end of his statement, Andreotti revealed that he was reckoning on a further resolution, and agreed to this in advance: "My delegation will support the existing draft resolution as well as the follow-up action."

The Soviet UN Ambassador declared that the consensus of the five permanent Council members had set an outstanding precedent for dealing with other crisis areas.

Ghana criticized — indirectly, but clearly — the arms dealings of the superpowers, the presence of the Western fleets in the Gulf, and Anglo-American plans for an arms embargo against Iran based on the regulations in Charter VII of the UN Charter:

Those countries that are best placed to influence the two parties in the direction of peace have openly taken sides and provided resources for the continuation of the war, in spite of the Security Council resolutions . . . It would be unfortunate if the present exercise of the Council's powers were to be interpreted as giving licence to the dispatch of punitive expeditions by one or another of the Members of the United Nations to pacify the area. There should be no room for unilaterally imposed solutions nor any mandate for concerted action by a few States.

In spite of these differing views, the dispute never appeared in the public record during the consultations of the Security Council. The members managed to reach consensus on an informal, confidential basis.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 598

Iraq welcomed Resolution 598 and declared itself ready to carry out all of its obligations.³⁵ In contrast, Iran criticized the Resolution as suffering from “fundamental defects and incongruities” without, however, explicitly rejecting it (as the US had foreseen).³⁶ For Iran, still superior militarily on the ground, the Resolution was unacceptable because it demanded a cease-fire and the withdrawal as pre-conditions for negotiations.

In order to accommodate Iran, the Secretary-General in September 1987 came up with his own outline for an implementation plan. Before he presented the outline, he had won the support of the five permanent Council members at special consultations on a very high level.³⁷ This outline implementation plan separated the withdrawal from the cease-fire, and unlike the Resolution itself, dealt with both of these questions in separate sections of the paper. It also declared that it would be possible from the day of cease-fire onwards to set up an impartial body to inquire into responsibility for the conflict.³⁸ To some extent, this plan contradicted Resolution 598, creating a paradoxical situation. Whilst Iran accepted the Secretary-General’s outline as a basis for further negotiations, Iraq insisted on the original wording of Resolution 598.

The Secretary-General’s suggestions were, indeed, more realistic as they were based on the actual power of the two conflicting sides at the time. The disadvantage of his realistic approach was that to some extent it was dictated by the Iranian interest. Altogether, the advantage of his initiative was greater than the disadvantage because it provided the only chance for a minimum of consensus. It is natural that the loser should make greater concessions in a compromise than the victor.

After long hesitation, the Security Council officially approved the Secretary-General’s outline plan. Diplomats in New York suddenly had to deal with a second (co-operative) option contrary to the US-sponsored option of sanctions against Iran. The US followed the development of the co-operative alternative — sponsored above all by West Germany — with great mistrust, the American diplomats suspecting diversionary maneuvers to be behind the Iranian negotiating tactics.

Iranian diplomats had contributed to this mistrust by having repeatedly declared since March 1988 within small diplomatic circles that Iran was on the point of accepting Resolution 598. Their declarations were never made public. Obviously, they were part of the Iranian tactic to prevent the threatened arms embargo. In the end, this tactic succeeded. Even in July 1988, the usually well-informed UN correspondent of the *New York Times* was unable to understand the Iranian diplomatic springtime maneuver.³⁹

Certainly, the risk to Iran should not be underestimated either. The American push for an arms embargo was never contradicted in principal by the other permanent Council members. Their views differed merely as to the timing of a follow-up resolution. China, above all, in this circle was in favor of using all co-operative means before taking the path of confrontation in the form of an arms embargo.

The US, on the other hand, attempted at the highest level to win over the Soviet Union to a joint action against Iran. Several times, the US Secretary of State spoke with his counterpart in Moscow. In February 1988 US Secretary of State Shultz presented a draft resolution for an arms embargo that would come into effect after another thirty-day negotiation deadline.⁴⁰ The Soviet Union, so far, did not agree, even during the intensive lobbying period in February 1988, when the US held the presidency in the Security Council. American sources commented, however, that Soviet patience with Iran ought to have been rather exhausted by late spring 1988.⁴¹

Finally, the co-operative measure won out, thanks to the patient mediation of the other powers, West Germany in particular.⁴² Germany and Iran have a long tradition of close relations, especially in economic fields. This traditional friendship outlasted such tense times as the Iranian hostage crisis. West Germany could advocate Iranian positions in the Security Council relatively easily because the nonpermanent members of the West formed a homogenous lobby group.

Iran's readiness to give way diplomatically grew with her increasing problems at the wartime front in early 1988, although the deciding diplomatic step occurred only after an American warship shot down an Iranian civilian aircraft.⁴³

This occurrence, regretted by the US as a tragic mistake, gave Iran the opportunity of returning to the negotiating table without loss of face, but with the expectation of a friendly reception and in the hope of a condemnation of the US in the Council. At the request of Iran the Security Council convened on 14 July 1988, and, after several days of consultation, on 20 July the Council expressed its "deep distress" over the incident, without, however, condemning the US.⁴⁴

While the Council was still discussing the downing of the airliner, Iran declared its acceptance of Resolution 598.⁴⁵ On 18 July the speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani, communicated this acceptance to the Iranian people. This explicit acceptance of Resolution 598 must surely have been preceded by a brief, but hard struggle between the radical and moderate powers in Iran. On 20 July 1988, the Ayatollah Khomeini declared that the acceptance of the Resolution was a "very bitter and tragic issue for everyone, particularly for me."⁴⁶ It was no sudden coincidence that the Iranian UN Ambassador insisted upon bringing the formal news of acceptance to the UN Secretary-General in person at midnight.⁴⁷

In its haste Iran might have sacrificed the possibility of a more strongly-worded Council resolution over the airliner incident. In the opinions of several diplomats, after two or three more days of negotiations a resolution more friendly towards Iran would have been passed.

Although Iraq accepted the Resolution, with its favorable military position, delayed implementing the cease-fire in order to gain more territory and prisoners. After unsuccessful talks with the Iranian and Iraqi foreign ministers in New York, the Secretary-General threatened to call the cease-fire on his own

initiative after an agreement with the Security Council: "D-Day does not depend on the parties."⁴⁸

Supported by the Security Council, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait pressed the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, to accept the cease-fire. On 6 August 1988, the Iraqi UN Ambassador Kittani declared to the Secretary-General, in the presence of the Saudi-Arabian foreign minister, that his country accepted the cease-fire.⁴⁹

After consultations in the Security Council on 8 August, the Secretary-General called a cease-fire for 20 August 1988, and urged restraint on the conflicting parties.⁵⁰ He also announced the start of direct talks between Iran and Iraq on 25 August in Geneva. The Security Council supported his appeal and on 9 August set up UNIIMOG for an initial period of six months.⁵¹

UNIIMOG (UNITED NATIONS IRAN IRAQ MILITARY OBSERVER GROUP)

UNIIMOG was a *conditio sine qua non* of the cease-fire in the Gulf conflict. It became a clear success for the United Nations thanks to the Security Council, which decided to take action rather than just remain passive. The mandate of UNIIMOG is contained in Resolution 598. On 7 August 1988, one day before the announcement of the cease-fire, the Secretary-General published details of the operation.⁵² The tasks of UNIIMOG were:

- (a) to establish with the conflicting parties agreed upon cease-fire lines, based on the forward defended localities occupied by the two sides on D-Day, and to adjust these, as may be agreed upon, when the positions of the two sides were judged to be dangerously close to each other;
- (b) to monitor compliance with the cease-fire;
- (c) to investigate any alleged violations of the cease-fire and restore the situation if a violation had taken place;
- (d) to prevent, through negotiation, any other change in the status quo, pending withdrawal of all forces to the internationally recognized boundaries;
- (e) to supervise, verify and confirm the withdrawal of all forces to the internationally recognized boundaries;
- (f) thereafter, to monitor the cease-fire on the internationally recognized boundaries, investigate alleged violations and prevent, through negotiations, any other change in the status quo pending negotiation of a comprehensive settlement;
- (g) to obtain the agreement of the parties to other arrangements which, pending negotiation of a comprehensive settlement, could help to reduce tension and build confidence between them, such as the establishment of areas of separation for forces on either side of the international border, limitations on the number and calibre of

weapons to be deployed in areas close to the international border, and patrolling by UN naval personnel of certain sensitive areas on or near the Shatt-al-Arab.

The Secretary-General set UNIIMOG's strength at 350 UN military observers. Twenty-six states provided soldiers. On the day of the cease-fire, 307 of the 350 military observers were in the area of operations, carrying out 51 patrols, designed above all to mark out the positions of the advance lines.

Due to the difficult terrain in the northern area, UNIIMOG could not set an exact positioning of the front there until November. The later disagreement of the parties to the conflict over the front line on D-Day, had, however, less to do with these northern areas than with the strategically more important areas in the southern plain.

The UN units in Iran were in direct radio contact with those in Iraq, and the observers met regularly in no-mans-land. Although both sides had early agreed upon an opening of three border crossings for UN personnel and vehicles, they did not allow the necessary freedom of movement to the UN military observers.

UNIIMOG operated along a relatively stabilized front whose positions were continually being reinforced by both sides. UN soldiers even reported the strengthening of defence lines with the placing of mines, and in one instance by the flooding of no-mans-land, which caused a brief loss of control of the situation.⁵³ In total during the first six months UNIIMOG received 1,960 complaints over alleged violations of the cease-fire; of these the observers confirmed around 25 per cent.⁵⁴ In almost every case UNIIMOG was able to reduce aggression on the spot.

As is usual with peacekeeping operations, UNIIMOG was mandated for a preliminary period of six months.⁵⁵ After that time, the mandate was regularly extended by the Security Council for about the same length of time. It expired on 28 February 1991 and was not extended any longer on the recommendation of the Secretary-General.⁵⁶ Instead, the military observer group was replaced by small civilian UN offices.

In conclusion, UNIIMOG fulfilled the main provision of its mandate: to supervise and stabilize a cease-fire in a volatile area of disengagement. During the first months after the eight-year long war many aggressive and potentially dangerous situations arose, which could have escalated into war again. However, thanks to UNIIMOG, these tensions were reduced immediately on the spot. In the last mandate periods of the operation the situation on the ground remained calm.

The other tasks of the observer group set out by Resolution 598 could not be implemented, including establishing an area of separation and limiting armaments, pending negotiation of a comprehensive settlement. Since UNIIMOG's means of fostering this settlement were very limited — it had no political mandate to mediate on its own — the Secretary General's decision to withdraw UNIIMOG, in spite of open questions, was a wise choice. It saved

UNIMOG from gliding automatically towards an open-ended operation following the sad examples of some other UN peacekeeping operations.⁵⁷ But it also showed the limits of UN peacekeeping operations. As soon as the consensus had been broken, their mandates ended — whether the situation on the spot demanded an extension of the mandate or not.

Was Iraq more co-operative toward Iran at the end of UNIMOG's term of duty than at the beginning? Iraq did appear to be more accommodating toward Iran when the UNIMOG observers left their positions. One rationale for this could have been Iraq's need to avoid a second-front during its attack on Kuwait. Indeed, Iran remained neutral during the Kuwait War, but the reason for Iran's neutrality is not completely clear yet. It may be assumed that it had very little to do with the settlement of the first Gulf War.

CONCLUSION

The role of the UN in the settlement of the Iran-Iraq War highlights several major features of this conflict resolution process. The consensus-building for and the making of Resolution 598 is a brilliant example of positive interaction among states. Success and failure in the negotiating process illustrates the different roles played by states as monopolists, lobbyists, and gap-bridgers. Finally, the growing international consensus also reveals hitherto unknown dynamics in the negotiating process.

The good offices of the Secretary-General built the first realistic groundwork for a settlement of the eight-year long war. Whenever the Security Council was blocked by one of the permanent members the Secretary-General became instrumental in maintaining channels of communication between all parties to the conflict. His judgement was viewed by both sides as being neutral and helpful. His effectiveness was not affected even when the Security Council took on its proactive role as envisioned in the UN Charter. In this situation the Secretary-General was formally given the mandate to initiate new approaches for mediation.

For the Secretary-General to have a strong role, it is necessary that the five permanent members agree on a certain approach toward an international problem. This must not be formalized. It is much more effective if it is informally decided upon as a so-called "gentlemen's agreement." Informal consultations have taken place ever since the UN was founded, but they were not used very often for joint action. Only with the end of the ideological impasse did the Security Council begin to function as it was intended by its founders. After 40 years of existence the five permanent members became a highly influential international lobby group. With Resolution 598 they, the other Council members and their advisers in the UN secretariat created a masterpiece of diplomacy. The decision-making experience of Resolution 598 was later used to deal with other conflicts in Namibia, Central America, Kuwait, Cambodia and Yugoslavia.

Endnotes

1. For example, see Shahram Chubin, "The last phase of the Iran-Iraq war: from stalemate to ceasefire," *Third World Quarterly*, 11, no. 2 (April 1989), pp. 1-14.
2. Interview with the author. See also, Brian Urquhart "Beyond the 'sheriff's posse'," *Survival*, 32, no. 3 (May/June 1990), p. 196.
3. Resolution 661 of 6 August 1990 ordered economic sanctions against Iraq. The military operation following the sanctions from January to April 1991 was not "ordered," but only "authorized" by the Security Council in Resolution 678 of 29 November 1990.
4. See, *The Blue Helmets: A Review of United Nations Peace-keeping*, 2nd edition, (New York: United Nations Publication, 1990); Alan James, *Peacekeeping in International Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Peter Bardehle, "German Blue Helmets? Chances and Limits of UN Peacekeeping," *Foreign Policy* (Außenpolitik, Hamburg) 4(1989), p. 382.
5. Carl-August Fleischhauer, "Reflections on Legal Aspects of United Nations Peacekeeping," Gilberto Amado Memorial Lecture, delivered on 14 June 1989 at Geneva, published by the United Nations in 1990, p. 1.
6. The General Assembly has also initiated UN peacekeeping operations according to its resolution "Uniting-for-Peace" of 1950. This option is allowed only when the Security Council is unable to fulfil its obligations under the Charter, i.e. blocked by a veto of a permanent member.
7. Sydney D. Bailey, *The procedure of the U.N. Security Council*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
8. Diane Lieb, "Iran and Iraq at Algiers 1975," in S. Touval and I.W. Zartman, eds., *International Mediation in Theory and Practice*, SAIS Papers, no.6, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985), pp. 67-90. Iraq came into being only after the First World War, before that the Persians were in dispute with the Ottoman Empire.
9. UN Document S/11229, 28 February 1974.
10. UN Document S/11229, 28 February 1974.
11. See, UN Document S/PV.2750, 20 July 1987; also Ralph King, *The United Nations and the Iran-Iraq War* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1987), p. 7.
12. UN Document S/14199, 26 September 1980.
13. UN Document SG/SM/2967, and S/14190, 23 September 1980.
14. Brian Urquhart, Gary Sick, and Ralph King, *The United Nations and the Iran-Iraq War*, Ford Foundation Conference Report, (New York: Ford Foundation, 1987).
15. UN Document S/PV. 2250 and 2251, 17 October 1980.
16. The General Assembly passed a similar-sounding resolution without reference to UN military observers, entitled GA-Resolution 37/3 of 22 October 1982.
17. UN Document S/15292, 14 July 1982.
18. A similar letter was sent to the Secretary-General.
19. Herbert Honsowitz, "Markt und Makler der Interessen," *Vereinte Nationen*, 1(1987), p. 6.
20. UN Document S/18480, 26 November 1986.
21. The Carter Doctrine, which was also adopted by President Reagan, defined the unhindered transport of oil through the Strait of Hormuz as being a vital American interest. To safeguard the West's oil supplies, tanker convoys were provided with the protection of Western warships.

22. "Backgrounder" to the Iran-Iraq conflict by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI Backgrounder). In *The Blue Helmets*, the official initiative is said to have started with the plenary consultation on 23 January 1987. *The Blue Helmets*, p. 324.
23. UN Press Release SG/SM/3956, 13 January 1987.
24. A "non-paper" in diplomatic terms is a document without any date or letter-head. This is done to protect the author.
25. Interview by the author with a member of the permanent US Mission to the UN in New York.
26. Also sitting at the table of the permanent Council members was the UN Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates. Sir John is said to have been met with icy disapproval for his advances by the foreign ministry in London at this time.
27. The statement of the otherwise accurate DPI Backgrounder that the first of these meetings took place in February 1987, is incorrect and was disputed in all interviews of the author on that matter.
28. Gary Sick, "Trial by Error: Reflections on the Iran-Iraq War," *Middle East Journal*, 43, no. 2 (Spring 1989), p. 240, with reference to a report in the *Washington Post*, 30 May 1987.
29. The combination of the former "Axis states" for the West's entitlement of non-permanent Council members caused much mockery in Council circles. But it was also recognized that they formed a homogenous group, eager for cooperation, on the side of the non-aligned states. They could use their similar interests to "put the brakes on agitators."
30. In order to avoid open polarizations, a resolution that has been decided upon informally is often brought neutrally to the Security Council, as a rule by the Council President. In such a case, it is termed a "Presidential Paper."
31. Foreign Ministers from Argentina, France, Great Britain, United Arab Emirates, United States, West Germany, and the deputy Foreign Minister of Japan.
32. All following quotes and statements are taken from UN document S/PV. 2750, 20 July 1987.
33. The deliveries of Chinese weapons to Iraq and, later, to Iran, remained at that time, as today, unexplained and unconfirmed. It was said that China provided Iran with "silk-worm" missiles.
34. This refers to the forming of a consensus within the circle of the five permanent Council members.
35. UN Document S/19045, 14 August 1987.
36. UN Documents S/18993, 24 July 1987, and S/19031, 11 August 1987.
37. On this occasion the US Secretary of State also lobbied for a sanctions resolution against Iran.
38. The outline implementation plan was never made public by the UN secretariat. However, the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) published it as part of a report of the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council members. *Foreign Broadcast Information Service - Near East and South Asia*, 22 September 1987, p. 45. (Hereafter cited as *FBIS-NES*).
39. *New York Times*, 19 July 1988.
40. *Washington Post*, 2 February 1988.
41. Interview by the author with a member of the US Mission to the UN.
42. The then Iranian UN Ambassador Mahallati praised the role of West Germany in an interview with the author as being "crucial."

43. On 3 July 1988, the USS *Vincennes*, a warship from the US Gulf escort fleet, shot down a civilian Airbus belonging to *Iran Air*, after a battle with Iranian speedboats. All 290 passengers lost their lives.
44. UN Document S/19981, 5 July 1988; also *New York Times*, 15 July 1988. Resolution 616 (1988), 20 July 1988. The US could not accept the condemnation hoped for by Iran and supported by the non-aligned states. To avoid an American veto, the Brazilian Council President proposed a consensus resolution that could be passed unanimously.
45. UN Document S/20020, 19 July 1988, with appendix (letters from Iranian President Khomeini to the UN Secretary-General dated 17 and 18 July 1988). An English copy of his press conference in Teheran, shown on national television, was published by *FBIS-NES*, 19 July 1988, p. 63.
46. The moderates needed the approval of the seriously-ill Ayatollah, who could be "convinced" by Rafsanjani, by pointing out Iran's desolate military position, which had been clear to the world since the first days of July. On 20 July 1988, the Ayatollah Khomeini declared that the acceptance of the Resolution was a "very bitter and tragic issue for everyone, particularly for me." The Ayatollah continued, "... in view of the opinion of all the high-ranking political and military experts of the country, whose commitment, sympathy and sincerity I trust, I agreed with the acceptance of the resolution and the cease-fire." *FBIS-NES*, 21 July 1988, p. 49.
47. Interview by the author with an assistant to the UN Secretary-General.
48. UN Press Release DH/218; also *New York Times*, 2 August 1988. The announcement appeared a few hours after the report of a UN investigation team, which confirmed that in June Iraq had deployed chemical weapons on a large scale.
49. The Iraqi foreign minister Tarik Azis had returned to Baghdad the day before.
50. *New York Times*, 9 August 1988.
51. Security Council Resolution 619, 9 August 1988. During the indirect negotiations of both foreign ministers in New York, a technical advance team prepared for the deployment of the observers. Regarding UNIIMOG, see also Chapter XV of the semi-official review on UN peacekeeping, *The Blue Helmets*.
52. UN Document S/20093, 7 August 1988.
53. UN Document S/20242, 25 October 1988.
54. UN Document S/20442, 2 February 1989.
55. SC-Resolution 619, 9 August 1988.
56. UN Document S/22263, 26 February 1991.
57. An example is the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). See, *The Blue Helmets*, p.281.