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## IRAN AND IRAQ IN QUEST OF PEACE

### Introduction

The Gulf war, fought between Iran and Iraq for a long period of eight years, came to a sceptical end with the unconditional acceptance of the UN resolution 598 by Iran on 20 July 1988. The resolution calls for, *inter alia*, a ceasefire, withdrawal of troops to pre-war position and negotiation for a durable peace between Iran and Iraq. Ever since the eruption of war in the Gulf theatre, various peace efforts and initiatives undertaken by the UN, the OIC, the NAM and the GCC to bring a halt to the war were frustrated due to the recalcitrant attitudes of the warring nations. Thus, the war passed through different phases of destruction of incalculable magnitude.

While Iran's denunciation of the UN resolution a year back hardly surprised the world, her acceptance of the same a year later has caused widespread speculation and scepticism among a number of political analysts. Imam Ayatollah Khomeini himself initiated the wave of mystery and suspicion when he said, "Making this decision was more deadly than drinking poison".<sup>1</sup>

Following Iran's decision, Javier Perez de Cuellar, the UN Secretary General embarked on intensive talks in UN Headquarters with the Foreign Ministers of Iran and Iraq. The Secretary General

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1. *Time*, August 1, 1988

succeeded in arranging a ceasefire effective from 20 August 1988 and holding direct talks between the belligerents from 25 August 1988, which subsequently ran into deadlock and were postponed indefinitely.

Now, the questions that seem relevant in this context are what are the compulsions that led Iran to accede to a ceasefire which until recently has shown intransigence in continuing war with Iraq? Do both the nations really mean peace in the exact sense of the term or is it a ploy for buying time as many critiques believe? To what extent the prospect of peace between the two nations is real? These are some of the issues that would be taken up in the paper.

### **Compulsions for the Belligerents**

An attempt to bring out the compulsions leading both the warring nations to talk for peace would require an elaboration of two important points - firstly the objectives of Iran and Iraq behind the war and secondly, a brief survey of a criss-cross of events during the war.

Among a number of Iraq's war goals, to disclaim the rights of Iran over the Shatt-al-Arab established by the Algiers treaty of 1975, and to unseat the shiite government in Iran were the principal ones. By wresting vital strategic parts from Iran, Iraq sought to use these as bargaining chips in any future negotiation with Iran. It was probably in Iraq's calculation that any Iranian defeat would unfold the image of Iraq as a superior power in the region. Saddam Hossain of Iraq declared the war as a battle in defense of the honour, sovereignty, constant historical rights and legitimate vital interests of his country and a decisive battle for the Arabism of the Gulf (and) for deterring the expansionist Persian ambitions.<sup>2</sup>

It seems the Iraqi leadership was quick to realize a shift in the balance of power in the region in their favour facilitated by the

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2. Quoted in J.M. Abdul Ghani, *Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis*, London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1984, p. 204.

decimation of the Iranian military, political and economic power following the revolutionary upheaval. The leadership of the new regime was perceived by Iraq as a fragile one consisting of a handful of religious clerical leaders. Thus, to expose Iran's military weakness, the Iraqi leadership decided to push home its advantage by launching a full scale invasion in September 1980.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, for Iran the war objective in the initial stage could not have been more than to withstand the Iraqi thrust into her territory. Later on with the multi-dimensional developments of the war in various sectors, the revolutionary regime in Iran was successful in dematerializing many of the objectives sought by Iraq. It is relevant here to mention that Iran's response to the war at the initial stage was to be commensurate with a situation marked by a myriad of internal problems. Political anarchy, economic collapse and social upheaval descended on the country following the fall of the Pahlavis, and eventually the country's total system was in shambles.<sup>4</sup> Khomeini and Iran's fundamentalists portrayed the war as one between Islam and blasphemy and between the glorious Koran and Pagans. They viewed the Iraqi invasion as "God's mercy to the Islamic Republic since it whipped up Iranian patriotism bolstered by passionate Shiite faith and focussed attention on an external enemy - factors which strengthened the grip of the clerical forces in Iran".<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the Iraqi leadership failed to visualize such a spontaneous Iranian reaction to their incursion into Iranian territory. Swayed by the fervour of new revolution, the Iranians en-masse responded to the clarion call of Imam Khomeini to join the war. The newly formed Pasadans (revolutionary guards) constituting the bulwark of the revolutionary government was expanded and indoctrinated with a new ideology of warfare—an unshakeable conviction in martyrdom.

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3. *Ibid.*

4. See James A. Bill, "Power and Religion in Revolutionary Iran", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 36. No. 1, Winter 1982, p. 22.

5. Quoted in J. M. Abdul Ghani, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

The spirit of the people is reflected in the very words of Khomeini when he said, "As our people dig out their dear ones from the rubble, they shout war war till victory".<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the battlefield one would account Iraq's territorial gains, specially the occupation of Abadon and Khorramshahr in the first phase of the war (1980-81) as remarkable. But to Iraq's dismay, the upper hand in the war was lost when Iran staged major onslaughts on Iraqi territories, and by 1982 Iraq announced the withdrawal of its troops to the international boundary, and asked for a ceasefire which Iran bluntly rejected. Thus, it appears that Iraq's military objective to end the war shortly and dictate terms and conditions of negotiation was far from being materialized.

The successful repulsion of Iraqi invasion by Iran was used by the latter as a rallying cry to galvanize Iranian public opinion in support of the clerical regime, and later on Iran became ambitious in her war objective. It was not merely to repel Iraqi forces from Iranian territory, but to invade Iraq and punish Saddam Hossain's Baath party regime. This goal was stated by the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Hojat al Islam Hashemi Rafsanjani in the following words, "the removal of Saddam's regime is our strategic goal on which we will not compromise".<sup>7</sup> By 1984 Iran regained control of her lost territories and was successful in launching grand offensives. In 1986 Iran conquered the strategic Fao peninsula—the greatest single territorial loss suffered by Iraq during the entire war. Being in a disadvantageous position militarily on land, Iraq directed the course of war on to the water of the Gulf—the motive being to hit Iranian oil shipments as far as South of the Strait of Hormuz. Perhaps other motives behind Iraq's diversion to sea warfare were to strengthen morale at home in the wake of Iranian military pressure and to try to persuade major oil consuming countries to press Iran

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6. *Newsweek*, March 25, 1985.

7. Quoted in J. M. Abdul Ghani, *op. cit.* p. 207.

to the bargaining table.<sup>8</sup> However, Iraq's objectives were not fulfilled as the major oil importing nations ignored the Iraqi attacks, until Kuwait whose tankers had been victims of a series of Iranian attacks, sought protection from the outside powers.

The year 1987 was a period of utter desperation and despair for Iran as the course of the war started moving in favour of Iraq. This was due to both internal and external conditions prevailing in and outside the two countries. Infact, the main thrust of various compelling factors to divert the preoccupation of the two countries with war is found in a sequence of chronological events taking place in the period from mid-1987 to mid-1988, most notably the increasing UN naval presence in the Gulf, the successive Iranian military setbacks and the gunning down of the Iranian airliner just two weeks before the ceasefire. In between these unfavourable events, there remained other factors, mostly to the disadvantage of Iran.

Prior to the above, as indicated earlier, Iran had an edge over Iraq in the war. Thus, her refusal to accept the resolution of 20 July 1987 was quite natural. Probably such a refusal was conditioned by the following factors:

- (i) Iran was still in possession of large areas of Iraqi territory notably in southern Iraq where it aimed to establish an Islamic Republic of Iraq that would be able to replace Hussain's government.
- (ii) Iran could not foresee the intensification of the US naval presence in the Gulf water.
- (iii) Iran's ambitious plan of capturing the strategically located city of Basrah in the grand offensive launched in the winter of 1986-87.
- (iv) The conflict between the hardliners and the pragmatists over a compromise in the war. Musavi and Khomeini, the noted

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8. Robert E. Hunter, "United States Policy in the Middle East", *Current History*, vol. 87, No. 526, February 1988, p. 50.

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hawks in Iranian leadership seemed to believe that the downfall of the Iraqi Ba'athists was in sight and wanted no compromise. The pragmatists—Rafsanjani and Velayati realized that the superpowers would not allow total victory and were ready for a settlement that could be sold to the Iranian people.<sup>9</sup>

- (v) The war, with the course of events became a bitter personal vendetta between Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and Saddam Hussain of Iraq. Both the leaders are ambitious, witty, violent and intolerant of opposition. Any victory in the war was equated with their personal glory. Thus, there always continued an exchange of inflammatory rhetorics and fiery jargons between them, attacking each other, even at the personal level. Ultimately the war turned out to be a war of ego and chauvinism between the two leaders.

The Iraqi initiated tanker war has been the most pressing factor for Iran to think of war in a more rational manner. For the first seven years the Gulf war was remarkably limited in its international impact, but the tanker war virtually internationalized the war in the Gulf. The increasing US naval presence in the Gulf in the pretext of reflagging the Kuwaiti tankers, was ominous to Iran which considered the US move as supporting Iraq directly in the war.<sup>10</sup> In essence, this US policy was in pursuance of its overall

9. *The Middle East Review*, Fourth Edition, World of Information, Essex, 1988, p. 27.

10. "In late 1986, Kuwait made a move that was to prove decisive for developments in the Persian Gulf. From time to time, Kuwaiti tankers were attacked by Iran in response to Iraq-initiated 'tanker war'. To protect itself, Kuwait turned to the Superpowers for assistance, proposing that 11 of its tankers be reflagged by the Soviet Union and the US and these be placed under their protection. The Soviet Union countered this with an offer to lend some of its own tankers to Kuwait. The US fearful of any increased Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf, offered to reflag all 11 tankers." See for details Robert E. Hunter, *op. cit.* p. 79 and R.K. Ramazani, "The Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf Crisis", *Current History*, *ibid.* p. 61.



strategy towards the Gulf in view of its immense strategic and geopolitical importance. Perhaps her motives may be stated as, (i) to deny the Soviet Union any political benefit that could accrue from its reflagging Kuwait tankers, (ii) to bolster Iraqi morale in the face of the Iranian military challenge, (iii) safeguard the flow of oil and the security of US friends in the area.<sup>11</sup>

The US naval presence in the Gulf coupled with a response from her Western allies like UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy was a discomfiting factor to Tehran who viewed that the Great Satan (US) along with the smaller Satans (Western allies of the US) were now at their door-step. This, the Iranians felt a direct threat to their security. It is relevant here to mention that both the US and the Soviet Union saw Iran, rather than Iraq as the 'strategic prize' and hence both sought to assure Iran of their neutrality in the conflict. In this sense the Gulf War has its own uniqueness that it barred any superpower involvement in the conflict. Being desperate to woo Iran through several openings—the offer to sell spare parts and the hotly-debated Iran-contra affair—the US finally found Iraq to be more favourable in their political calculation.<sup>12</sup> Iraq, according to US analysts was opening to the West. Her resumption of diplomatic relation with the US and new dependency on Western markets and technology, restoration of friendly relations with the neighbouring countries who are also the trusted friends of the US were sufficient to build confidence in the US policy makers towards a possible tilt toward Iraq. All that the Americans wanted was to check the Iranian ascendancy in the war.

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11. Robert E. Hunter, *op. cit.* p. 50.

12. "The Iran-contra affair came to limelight in early November, 1986 when a pro-Syrian newspaper in Lebanon revealed that the US had been selling arms to Iran. This was in contradiction to the declared US policy of cutting arms supply to the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. See for details Robert E. Hunter, *op. cit.* p. 49.

The dynamics of international politics are such that almost all political events are related to each other, and one cannot be insulated from the other. Thus any event that takes place is inevitably preceded by a series of earlier events. Viewed in this light, Iranian precarious position following the internationalization of the war is, perhaps, the product of earlier Iranian acts. It is essentially the issue of her relation vis-a-vis the neighbours and the outside powers.

The Revolution's rhetoric, neither 'East nor West' could have been a constructive diplomatic move to project Iran as a world in itself. But what appeared to be indignant was an element of contradiction in its diplomatic policy towards the outside countries. Khomeini has always viewed his regime as a model of righteousness for the Muslims, whereas the Muslim nations to him are the disbelievers and sinful mankind. Thus at the regional level Iran's relation with her Sunni dominated neighbouring Muslim countries turned out to be bitter. The bitterness was exacerbated by her continued threat of an export of Islamic fundamentalism (on Shiite line) to such countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon and Egypt where there are large Shiite populations.

Her relations with the superpowers was an offshoot of violent diplomacy as evincible in the following words of Ayatollah Khomeini. "The superpowers are responsible for all world corruption. For this reason, Muslims should mobilize the oppressed and chained nations so that the superpowers can be pushed out of the scene and the governments can be handed over to the oppressed. But this must be done in a way that teaches the superpowers a lesson. They must both be humiliated and punished for the wrongs they have done to the Muslims. They must be slapped in the face or punched on the mouth. Through violence the satanic majority will be made to submit to the [righteous few].<sup>13</sup> With the middle powers like

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13. Alex Von Dornoch, "Iran's Violent Diplomacy", *Survival*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, May/June 1988, p. 255.

France and Britain, her relations were tense and hostile. The same was true in case of her relation with West Germany, Italy, Netherlands and other west European countries.

Iran, thus, kept itself practically isolated internationally and soon pessimism arose in Iran about any possible positive diplomatic gesture from any quarter to neutralize the rivalry in the Gulf. She even failed to court any support from such radical countries like Libya and Syria who blessed her with arms and spare parts at the initial stage of the war. Why Iran has taken such a posture may be a point of analysis by the experts. The following reasons may be pointed out at this stage: (i) the regime in Iran has been overtly dogmatic; flexibility and compromise found no place in the policy making of the fundamentalist leaders. Islamic militancy seemed to be the only way open to them, (ii) lack of farsightedness on the part of the leaders, (iii) Iran's over-confidence and pride in its intrinsic value of being placed in world's one of the most strategic location, (iv) Iranian urge to take revenge on the superpowers for their past deeds. In such a situation Iraq took a psychological advantage of Iraq's isolationist and confrontational position and was able to cultivate sympathy of the international community at least by a rhetoric that she wants an end to the war as manifested in her acceptance of the UN resolution 598 of 20 July 1987. By winning friends across the border through tact, diplomacy and deceit, Iraq could overcome many of the constraints both at home and abroad. For Iran the negative effects of her isolationism began to creep up slowly as the war proceeded on in the face of serious constraints and limitations on her part. "One of the many things we did in the revolutionary atmosphere was constantly to make enemies", Speaker Rafsanjani admitted, "we pushed those who could have been neutral into hostility".<sup>14</sup>

The economic consequences of the long dragging war have been appalling both for Iran and Iraq. It is the revenue for oil that financed

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14. *Time*. August 1, 1988.

the war machinery in both the countries. But the fall in oil revenue, together with decline in dollar value, have forced the governments to cut down expenses on development activities. The war consumed about 40% of Iran's annual revenue and 60% of Iraq's. The non-military sectors on both sides have been left weak and underdeveloped as their resources have progressively been drained to sustain armies of upto a million strong. In both the countries, economic instability prevailed marked by soaring unemployment, inflation, lack of consumer's goods, fall in the standard of living, dire shortage of foreign exchange, power shortage, labour disputes. "The deliberate picking of economic targets for strikes through aerial bombing and artillery shelling had mauled ports, oil refineries and upcoming industries and put the clock of modernization back by at least a decade."<sup>15</sup>

In Iran the desperate state of the economy has frequently been the topic of heated debate in Iran's Majlis, and Khomeini's revolution was discredited by many for its mismanagement of the economy.<sup>16</sup> By 1987 it became apparent to the Iranian leader that if the war was to continue, then Iran will need to become involved in foreign debts, presumably by means of credits from western countries. However, Iran's political position as indicated earlier, precluded any such possibility. On the other hand, although similar distressing economic conditions prevailed in Iraq, she unlike Iran suffered neither from domestic political dissension nor from diplomatic isolation or economic sanction. She was gifted with boon of a generous flow of financial support from Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This made possible for the government to pursue the policy of gun and butter together. Moreover, to overcome public unrest, specially in a country where the Shiite forms the majority of the population, many radical reforms were introduced by President Saddam Hussain in an attempt to build a new economic

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15. Sreedhar, *The Gulf : Scramble for Security*, New Delhi: ABC Publishing House, 1983, p. 44.

16. *Newsweek*, August 22, 1988.

and administrative structure. Critical of fluctuations in oil price, he once remarked, "we should secure a constant rate of agriculture and industrial production and a similar rate of performance in public services which will not be seriously affected by the oil market and fluctuations in the world economy."<sup>17</sup> In fact, pragmatism mingled with ruthlessness and violence of Saddam Hussain have played a great role in consolidating his regime.

The shaky and fragile position of Iran at home and abroad, specially due to its isolationism and economic collapse, has deeply impinged on the psychology and morale of the people. As a result, conflicts began to surface out between the army and the revolutionary guards, dissension took place between the pragmatists and the hardliners, and the masses began to question the moral authority of Khomeini-the vanguard of the revolution. War weariness began to grip Iran and military enlistments dropped sharply. The normal contingent of 300,000 baseiji (volunteers) attached to Iran's revolutionary guards finally had fallen off by one third.<sup>18</sup> The military provision ran short of arms and spare parts. It seems all these factors exerted a cumulative pressure on Iran's vitality, and as a result her war drives in the last stage of the war were doomed to successive failures one after another. Thus, if the immediate compulsions for Iran to accept the ceasefire are to be found out, perhaps, one has to search these out from the battlefield during this time.

It is revealed by the facts that during the last few months preceding the ceasefire, Iran has suffered one military reversal after another in the war. The turning point may have been the Islamic Republic's failure to seize the strategic port city of Basrah through a human wave tactics.<sup>19</sup> In this, Iran causing a death toll of some

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17. *The Middle East Review*, *op. cit.* p. 75.

18. *Time*, August 1, 1988.

19. *Ibid.*

15,000 Iranians, many of whom were teenagers, generated open unrest from within Iran's armed forces over what was described as a ridiculous tactic of human waves.<sup>20</sup> The leaflets circulated protested at the futility of continuing this stupid and painful war.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in the so called war of cities many Iranian cities came under Iraq's Soviet made Scud-B ground to ground missiles. It is estimated that between February and April 1988, 160 missile attacks were made on urban areas where there is the concentration of civilian population. The reasons behind the switch in Iraq's strategy from devastating attacks on industrial targets to ruthless air raids over civilian areas and the cities are unknown. But the impact on Iran's public opinion was certainly counter-productive.<sup>22</sup> Another cataclysmic experience for Iran has been the Iraq's use in March (1988) of chemical weapons at Halabja in northern Iraq which had severely demoralised Iranian troops and shocked the world at large. Finally the last trump card in the hand of Iran was lost when Iraq in a recent offensive regained the lost Fao peninsula. So long Fao peninsula was in possession of Iran, Iran claimed to have edge over Iraq in the war. At one time the loss of this territory diverted the attention of Iraq from land to sea warfare and had a paralysing effect on the Iraqi war machinery. Besides, areas east of Basrah and the oil rich Majnoun islands at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates were recaptured by Iraq. Thus, Iraq virtually regained all of her lost territories leaving not an inch of her land in the hands of the Iranians that could have been used as bargaining chip in any future negotiation.

Some analysts consider the downing of an Iranian airliner (03 July 1988) that claimed 290 lives on board to have figured indirectly in Iran's policy switch.<sup>23</sup> The incident, it seems, clarified openly the US stance that its interests in the Gulf would be

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20. *The Middle East Review*, *op. cit.* p. 65.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Time*, August 1, 1988.

protected at any cost. It showed to Iran that if needs arise, the US can flex its muscles well. Moreover, the shutdown gave relatively moderate political figures in Tehran a chance to highlight the futility of continuing a war, and to appreciate that US would probably never allow Iraq to lose.

In view of the situation of colossal human and economic loss, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the powerful and relatively pragmatic speaker of Parliament (who was made the commander of the armed forces following the Iranian loss of Fao peninsula) came to a reasoning that war can no longer be continued by Iran. Later on, the green signal came from Iranian President Ali Khomeini to the UN Secretary General that Iran was now ready to abide by the UN resolution. This historic and important decision of the Iranian leader dropped the curtain of the Gulf drama staged for a long period of eight years. To the great Imam, Ayatollah Khomeini, "the war has been good for those whose children were martyred and the ceasefire was in the interest of the revolution"<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing analysis reveals that the war has stopped neither for the reason that a practical solution to the main bone of contention has been achieved nor due to the reason that it was out of a gesture of goodwill and understanding between the warring nations. The compulsions which were heavy for Iran in the last six months of the war and on which Iraq capitalized, were the factors leading Iran to come to a bargaining table, fearful that its own revolution might be in jeopardy if the war continued. After plunging the nation into a war for a continuous period of eight years, Iraq for its part has not been able to achieve any of the objectives aimed at by Saddam Hussain, rather he has ended up shedding the blood of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and compiling a debt of more than Us \$ 100 billion. It was, perhaps, difficult for him to tell his people triumphantly that he has reestablished the status quo ante.

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24. *Ibid*,

Out of war weariness, the Iraqi leadership also perceived a state of peace the only possible alternative to save the nation from further entanglement with the war. Even if Iraq denied the ceasefire and showed zeal, imagination and resourcefulness to continue the war, compulsions would be levied on her if not internally, atleast externally by those who fathered the war from the beginning. It was probably to Iraq's realization that her friends and allies across the border would not allow her to have a decisive victory in the war. All they wanted was to scrub the Iranian ascendancy on her. Thus the moment was ripe for them to support unequivocally the Iranian move at a time when the maps of both the nations needed no redrawing.

### Peace Talks in Doldrums

The compulsions as outlined earlier and mostly heavy for Iran ultimately led Iran to accept the UN resolution 598 calling for a ceasefire (annexure). The significance of the resolution lies not only in the fact that it was the first mandatory resolution of the Gulf war, but in the fact that it was the first time in the history of the UN that all five permanent members agreed unanimously on a course of action and then presented to the full body. The demand for immediate land, sea and air ceasefire, a withdrawal of forces to international frontiers verified by UN observers, an exchange of prisoners of war and negotiation for a just and honourable settlement acceptable to both sides had all featured in earlier resolutions. Item 6, designed to meet one of Iran's previous demands called for an international commission to establish responsibility of the war and item 10 which said delegates would meet again to consider further steps to ensure compliance the ceasefire call was for the first time backed up with the implicit threat of sanctions.<sup>25</sup>

The ceasefire has come with effect from 20 August 1988 and the direct talks in Geneva between the two combatants began on 25

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25. *The Middle East Review*, *op. cit.* p. 27.



August 1988 inspite of accusations and counter accusations of violation of truce from both sides. All negotiations are to take place within the framework of UN resolution 598. Whether the ceasefire which has halted the war would lead to a durable and stable peace in the region is a question, too difficult to be answered in view of the many unpredictable events through the fog of time.

However, at present the most positive and tangible outcome of the ceasefire as a process of peace seems to be the cessation of hostilities. The UN truce observer force called UNIMOG (United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Group ) has been instituted to observe, supervise and monitor ceasefire.<sup>26</sup>

While the fires of guns at the battlefield have stopped, the peace talkers seem to remain embroiled in issues likely to obfuscate the whole peace process. In Iraq's calculation Iran would be more benefitted by the ceasefire than herself, and thus her pressing demand to get her total sovereignty over Shatt al-Arab recognized by Iran, has been a major stumbling blow to the on-going peace process. This sharply contradicts the Iranian position as Tehran wants negotiation on the basis of UN resolution 598 strictly. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati countered the Iraqi position by saying that " all border treaties are permanent, unchangeable and decisive and that the treaty of 1975 was a comprehensive treaty, and could not be abrogated unilaterally."<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the Iraqi President expressed that any peace settlement with Iran should include a new

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26. The force called UNIMOG consists of 350 members drawn from 24 countries on the basis of geographical distribution. The countries which have offered military observers are Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, the Irish Republic, Italy, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Senegal, Sweden, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Zambia. The group is supported by an air unit, military and civilian staff and possibly a small naval unit to patrol the Shatt-al-Arab waterway between Iran and Iraq.

27. *The Bangladesh Observer*, August 30, 1988.

treaty to replace one he tore up days before the two countries went to war eight years ago. To him, "the 1975 Algiers agreement is practically non-existent and logic says any accord must include a new agreement".<sup>28</sup>

It seems the issue of Shatt-al-Arab is equated with the prestige of Saddam Hussain on which he practically geared the whole nation towards a meaningless war. Thus it is hard to predict with exactness what would be the ultimate fate of the belligerents over this bone of contention. If the peace talks fail to produce an outcome conforming Iraq's demand, a new gargantuan plan to direct the water of the Shatt-al-Arab to a new site at least 20 kilometers away from the frontiers with Iran, will be unilaterally implemented by Iraq. Iraq claims that the project is economically feasible and will cost her \$ 5 to \$ 10 billion.<sup>29</sup> The plan has just recently been floated to which Iranian reaction has not been favourable. Although specific Iranian position is yet to be known, optimists may hope for a future consultation over the issue for a practical solution of the problem.

Another issue related to the Shatt-al-Arab is freedom of navigation in the Gulf. Iran insists that she has the right to stop and search ships until a comprehensive peace is at hand, whereas Iraq insists on clearing of the Shatt-al-Arab and freedom of navigation. As Iraq sees, no arrangement of ceasefire at sea can be complete without freedom of navigation of all types of vessels of the parties and other nations though the strait of Hormuz and international water going to and coming out from the ports of coastal seas of the Arab Gulf, including Iraq, without visit and search and without hindrance and obstruction.<sup>30</sup> Iran has wittingly linked the issue with Iraq's recogni-

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28. *Khaleej Times*, September 8, 1988.

29. *Khaleej Times*, September 18, 1988.

30. *Khaleej Times*, September 10, 1988.

tion of her right over the Shatt-al-Arab as a precondition for her allowing free and unsearched navigation. The stalemate continues.

There are certain other issues that more directly impede the peace process. The most burning among these is the question, who would be termed as the aggressor? Till now no committee to fix the 'war guilt' has been made even though it was supposed to be formed immediately after a ceasefire. Iranian President Ali Khomeini gave notice that the question of who started the war must be taken seriously. He remarked "we insist on this question with all our might and will resist if the enemy does not submit to justice".<sup>31</sup> For Iran, the impartial body to look into the cause of the war is very important. If it delivers the expected verdict by laying blame on Iraq while noting Iranian provocation, the Iranians would claim for compensation worth 530 billion dollars in war reparations. Moreover, Iran will derive a psychological benefit from this some sort of moral victory. How Iraq will acquiesce to any such verdict if given at all, still remains to be seen, since she also needs a moral victory to make the eight years fighting justifiable and worth to her masses.

The problem that has arisen over the exchange of prisoners of the two sides relates to their disagreement on how many they hold. Perez de Cueller has put the total at 80,000. As Iran holds more prisoners of war, it is speculated that she might exploit this advantage over Iraq. The POW exchange issue has been linked up with the Shatt-al-Arab issue by Iran. The issue of prisoners of war should be considered by the both on strictly humanitarian ground. It demands their sincerity and goodwill which are probably absent now.

As the pressing issues have made the current peace process almost murky, the question naturally arises where lies the prospects of peace? Can scepticism among a number of analysts that ceasefire is a prelude to another war hold true? Such scepticism is based *inter*

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31. *The Bangladesh Observer*, September 2, 1988.

*alia* on indications of both sides embarking on a spending spree and being offered liberal credits to commit their national resources to the acquisition of arms.<sup>32</sup> However, considering the factors that compelled both the warring nations to lay down arms, there seems to be little possibility of the fresh outbreak of a full scale war. The following reasons may be mentioned.

Firstly, the eight year war between Iran and Iraq has resolved nothing except causing immense loss to human lives and property. The war is estimated to have left one million dead, 1.7 million wounded, 1.5 million homeless and some hundred thousands maimed. The cost of the destruction of industrial plant, cities, infrastructures is estimated at upto US \$600 billion. It would cost Iran alone a minimum of US \$400 billion to rebuild to prewar level.<sup>33</sup> Both the countries are war exhausted looking for ways to come out of the debris of war.

Secondly, the agonising economic conditions in both the countries now entail a need for reconstructing the war economy. Iran faces peace with her infrastructures in shambles. It's immediate priority is the rehabilitation of the oil industry, three quarters of which has been damaged by the war. Among a number of priorities, improving the quality of life for the masses stands first. Besides, Iran would need \$80 billion to rebuild transportation, housing, factories, schools and hospitals destroyed by the war. To overcome economic bankruptcy, unemployment, inflation and debt burden Iran has to beef up its oil production and gear up production in non-oil sector. Iraq, on the other hand, has already prepared its economy for the post war period. Post war Iraq is implementing a short-term strategy to produce and export to earn the foreign exchange needed to reconstruct the oil industry neglected during the war. Significant investment in agriculture and non-oil industry is likely to take in order to rebuild schemes abandoned during the war. As indicated earlier Saddam

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32. *South*, September, 1988.

33. *Ibid.*

Hossain introduced many social and economic reforms during the war, the continuation of which is still the demand of time.

Thirdly, Iran, which virtually remained isolated during the whole course of war now wants to come out of the shell of isolationism to seek a new political position vis-a-vis the outside world. By this time, relations have been normalized with Britain and France. Signs of cooperation and assistance from the neighbouring countries are forthcoming. While Iraq, which cultivated a number of friends irrespective of difference in ideology, political and social orientation, hopes to maintain this position of advantage and benefits.

Fourthly, perhaps the war in the future would be of no appeal to the masses. It is clearly seen that neither party has accrued any tangible benefit from the war, thus their leadership is not in a position to reinvigorate the masses and direct their unquestionable participation in the war. The Iranian leaders no longer can afford to use war as a means of self perpetuation and an instrument of statecraft. They now feel the necessity to revive the original purpose of the revolution which was to promote the happiness and welfare of the masses and to establish a just and equitable social order. The revolution marked the triumph of the will of the people must now prevail. By exaggerating the threat of Iraq, the Iranian government can only frustrate the will of the people and exposes them to an uncertain future.<sup>34</sup> The same remains true for Iraq. She cannot be optimistic about the unquestionable loyalty of 60% Shia population which has provided the bulk of the army's cannon fodder and is Iraq's poorest community. Moreover, in the wake of her flagrant violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1929 by using poisonous chemicals against the Kurds, she remains in the midst of world wide condemnation and consternation.

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34. *Ibid.*

### **The Prospect of Peace**

Peace is a wide term and may include ceasefire, calling for cessation of hostilities, signing of armistice and a return to barracks or a definitive settlement of the disputed issues. Although they are distinct, nevertheless they are related to each other, leaving an onus on the peace makers to decide which must come first. A ceasefire may take place leaving the disputed issues to be taken up later for solution or a solution of the disputed issues may precede a ceasefire. In case of the Gulf war, the former has taken place in the region as evidenced by the cessation of hostilities supported by a near impossibility of a full-scale war in immediate future. But the crux lies in the question of its durability and stability. It is a matter of frustration that differences between Iran and Iraq on various issues of peace are so sharp and diverse that it would take much time to have a durable and stable peace visibly materialized in this region.

With most of the crucial issues remaining unresolved, the relation between the two will probably remain marked by strains and tensions exhibiting low level of animosity. UN Secretary General has rightly pointed out that the conflict between Iran and Iraq has existed for centuries and one cannot expect it to disappear overnight.

Thus, in the midst of an uneasy and fragile peace, both the countries are likely to be bogged down in a cold war that might relinquish harmony, friendliness and prosperity in the region. While the prospect of gradually moving towards a working atmosphere is not ruled out, it needs to be stressed that hostilities among the two are in-built in the respective national psychosis and are likely to be subdued, if at all, only in a long process. The role of other regional powers and the polarisation within the region and extra-regional implications of both can also be hardly understressed. Thus the prospect of real peace, although not an unreality, appears to be too complex to be achieved too soon.

### Annexure

The following is the text of the UN Resolution, 598 :

#### The Security Council

1. Demands that as a first step towards a negotiated settlement, Iran and Iraq observe an immediate ceasefire, discontinue all military actions on land, at sea and in the air, and withdraw all forces to the internationally recognised boundaries without delay.
2. Requests the Secretary General to dispatch a team of United Nations observers to verify, confirm and supervise the ceasefire and withdrawal and further requests the Secretary General to make the necessary arrangements in consultation with the parties and to submit the report thereon to the Security Council.
3. Urges that prisoners of war be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of active hostilities in accordance with the third Geneva convention of August 12, 1949.
4. Calls upon Iran and Iraq to cooperate with the Secretary General in implementing this resolution and in mediation efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and honourable settlement, acceptable to both sides, of all outstanding issues, in accordance with the principles contained in the charter of the United Nations.
5. Calls upon all other states to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any act which may lead to further escalation and widening of the conflict and thus to facilitate the implementation of the present resolution.
6. Requests the Secretary General to explore, in consultation with Iran and Iraq the question of entrusting an impartial body with enquiring into responsibility for the conflict and to report to the Security Council as soon as possible.
7. Recognises the magnitude of the damage inflicted during the conflict and the need for reconstruction efforts, with appropriate international assistance, once the conflict is ended and in this regard

requests the Secretary General to assign a team of experts to study the question of reconstruction and to report to the Security Council.

8. Further requests the Secretary General to examine in consultation with Iran and Iraq and with other states of the region, measures to enhance the security of the region.

9. Requests the Secretary General to keep the Security Council informed of the implementation of this resolution.

10. Decides to meet again as necessary to consider further steps to ensure compliance with this resolution.

Source: *The Bangladesh observer*, 10 August, 1983

#### Introduction

The problem of water resources in Bangladesh is that it is a cross water of this kind. It is not a river, when the country does not need that much and there is too little when it needs more than is available. This problem is pervasive affecting almost all the life and economic life. The problem is that of excess water to cover the whole of the country whatever the season. There are also dry spells wherever the water is held in the channels. The 1987 flood and the 1988 drought have been the most recent examples throughout the country of these problems. Physical infrastructure and well built urban areas are equally vulnerable to the problem.

In the dry season, acute shortage of surface water hinders crops, human and animal life, navigation, commerce and industry, fisheries and ecology alike. Reduced flow of surface waters hinders sanitary irrigation affecting agriculture, industry and ecological balance. The trend is shifting in irrigation sector. For example,

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