

In July 1987 the UN Security Council unanimously voted to ask the two belligerents to observe a cease-fire immediately and to withdraw behind their internationally recognised frontiers. The Security Council threatened to take further measures if they refused.

At the beginning of the war several Arab countries supported Iraq, including Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania, Yemen, Egypt and the Gulf States. Their help generally took the form of financial assistance or loans. Only two Arab countries have supported Iran - namely Syria and Libya. In May 1981 the Gulf States formed the Gulf Council for Co-operation, in the hope of enforcing collective security.

From the beginning of the conflict both the United States and the Soviet Union have declared themselves neutral. Moscow, however, is Iraq's principal arms supplier (deliveries were interrupted in 1980 and 1981), followed by France and Brazil. Iran relies on the international arms market, its main suppliers being Israel, North and South Korea and China, as well as Syria and Libya. According to SIPRI at least twenty six countries have by now sold arms to both sides at once, either through their governments or private companies.²

In November 1986 press reports, subsequently confirmed in US congressional hearings and elsewhere, indicated that the United States had supplied Iran with military equipment with the help of Israel. The alleged aim of this operation, which the Reagan Administration had been carrying out for more than a year and a half, was to obtain the freedom of the American hostages in Lebanon and to improve US relations with Iran.

² SIPRI, Armaments and Disarmament Yearbook 1986, London, Oxford University Press, 1987.