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United Nations – The Conceptual Issue of Collective Security and the Practical Problems of Its Implementation

Introduction

Collective security is a conceptual framework for maintaining international peace and security through concerted action and agreement of all nations. The concept, even in defiance of Wilsonian principles, institutionalises a state of balance of power, with the entire international community's agreeing to act against military aggression by any member. At the heart of the concept is the idea that no single state alone dares to stand up against all the other members of the system, which will permanently deter aggression by any member of the system. (It should be added that this assumption immediately becomes problematic if the system includes nuclear powers since the operational logic of nuclear weapons is completely different from that of conventional weapons.) In short, collective security is security for individual nations by collective means.

The theoretical model of collective security is based on the avoidance of war and the peaceful resolution of conflicts between states. The failure of the balance of power policy to prevent aggression in general and the outbreak of the First World War in particular, contributed greatly to its creation. The model strongly emphasises consensus-building between states and the role of international law, but any attempt to establish a collective security system is doomed to failure if the following six conditions, set out by Schloming (1990), are not met:

1. There must be broad consensus among states to maintain the status quo.
2. The system must be able to create an overwhelming force that will divert any potential aggressor from its intention to change the status quo.
3. War must be considered a realistic option, but its purpose is to deter the potential aggressor.
4. The concept of aggression and the identity of the aggressor must be clearly defined.
5. States should be guided by the principle of preserving peace as opposed to particular national interests.
6. All major actors in the international system should participate in the collective security system.

The first attempt in history to build such a collective security system was the creation of the League of Nations, which failed because it could not meet these conditions. Having learnt from its mistakes, the United Nations (UN) and its Security Council can now function as a collective security mechanism that is already able to act successfully to maintain international peace and security when necessary (as demonstrated by its

response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991), although the system still faces a number of challenges. The chapter aims to illustrate the functioning of the collective security concept and system through the UN Security Council and to highlight the vulnerabilities, fragility and difficulties of the reform process.

The historical evolution of the concept and the League of Nations

Although the terminology is a product of the 20th century, the idea dates back to antiquity, as elements of the concept can be found in some conglomerations of ancient Greek states.[1] Later, with the founding of the Holy League, we find a similar idea by the introduction of the congress system with the participation of great powers, and afterwards in the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham dreamed of building a similar system with the idea of "eternal peace" through the construction of confederations.

In Europe, in the nineteenth century, the classic era of nationalism, there was no place for collective security, the "peace movement" looked in other directions such as arbitration, disarmament and the development of international law based on voluntary agreement. The long period of peace in Europe (which covered most of the period 1815–1914 and especially the years between 1871 and 1914) did not favour the development of collective security and other similar concepts, as the Western world believed that it had embarked on a path to the end of war.[2] And although the alliance of force was rejected by the leading powers, it is worth referring to Jean Jaurès's proposal, who, as early as 1900, proposed a peace alliance as a counter-pole to the alliance of force, with a commitment to non-aggression and the peaceful settlement of disputes (JAURÈS 1931: 238–241, 242–244). He did so also because the "European concert" as a pan-European congress, which had been convened several times so far, was no more than an extension of traditional diplomatic methods and only a very faint foretaste of a permanent, systematic and institutionalised international cooperation.

Following such a precedent, August 1914 clearly showed that the old methods of diplomacy had failed and that other solutions were needed to avoid the devastating wars of the future. Among the many ideas that came to light, the most striking was the draft drawn up in March 1915 by a group led by James Bercy. The document entitled "Proposals for Avoiding War" was a very detailed constitution for the League of Nations, and stated, among other things, that the League undertook to defend any of its members who were attacked by a state that refused to arbitrate or conciliate (DUBIN 1970: 288–318). The big novelty, then, was the idea of a league to enforce peace, but there was still some uncertainty about it, even among theorists. Some felt that the collective security proposals were not strong enough, as states still had the option of using armed force as a tool, while others thought the opposite: that states would not want to tie their own hands and

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[1] I hereby mention the Association of Delos as an example, founded in 478 BC, which served as a league of 173 Greek city states.
[2] The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 reflected this approach.

commit themselves so heavily. Nor was there agreement on which states could join such an alliance (thinking in particular of powers that had behaved aggressively before and during the war), nor what joint action would take place in the event of aggression. However, the need to create such an organisation was clearly growing. And while the details of many of the plans that came to light differed, what they all shared was a desire to unite the world's states in a permanent organisation with the power to settle disputes and prevent war.

Following this precedent, the world's first collective security organisation, the League of Nations, was set up, based mainly on American and British ideas. However, the organisation was already facing fatal problems from the moment it was founded. On the one hand, the Covenant that created the organisation was part of the Treaty of Versailles, drawn up in Paris in 1919 and imposed on the defeated states (and Germany in particular), and its content was an uncoordinated combination of the ideas that had been emerging. On the other hand, powers have not become or could not become members of the organisation, without which it would be inconceivable to build a viable collective security system. Thus, the United States never became a member of the League,[3] nor did the Russian socialist state initially, and states defeated in World War I were initially excluded. Thirdly, one of the most important but also most controversial provision of the Covenant highlighted from its very beginning the problems of solving the most difficult issue facing collective security. By the wording of Article 10, this seemed to require member states to "preserve the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League against external aggression". However, because of inadequate provisions, the League, through the Council, could only ask, but could not force any of the member states to act. So the central question of collective security arose at that time: is it possible to get binding commitments from member states to prevent future violent changes to the status quo? On the other hand, is it desirable at all, as the status quo may not be fair or reasonable, at least not for everyone?

It was after such antecedents that the international community found itself in the 1930s, facing systemic challenges such as Japanese, Italian and then German aggression. It became obvious that the efforts of the Western European states and the Soviet Union – the latter had joined the League in 1934 – to turn the League of Nations into an effective instrument for preventing war through collective action against aggression had failed. The League could only provide a meeting place, but what really mattered was the will to resist, which was conspicuously absent in democracies in those years. All this was compounded by the fact that direct negotiations between the great European powers had bypassed the machinery of the League, and by the growing criticism in America of both the country's withdrawal from the League and its isolationism (i.e. its abdication of American responsibility for protecting the world from aggression).

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[3] Although the United States was at the forefront of the creation of the organisation, the Senate, frightened by the idea of American soldiers being called up to fight on foreign soil at the behest of a foreign organisation, refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles.

The theoretical background of the concept

It is worth analysing the two components of the expression "collective security". The term "collective" expresses the way in which security is to be defended in the event of war or aggression. In other words, all participating states must act collectively to ensure that the preponderance of power thus created will deter and force a state that threatens or violates international peace and security to retreat. And "security" is nothing less than the ultimate goal of every state. It is inextricably linked to the security of all other nations, because national security is part of international security. Thus, any attack on the security of one nation is in fact an attack on the security of all nations, and it is therefore the responsibility of all nations to protect the security of the nation under attack. On this basis, collective security is a crisis management tool, a mechanism by which war or aggression can and should be countered by building global power among all nations. As George Schwarzenberger says: collective security is a "machinery for joint action in order to prevent or counter any attack against an established international order" (Ebegbulem 2011: 23). Another approach emphasises the systemic nature of the concept, stating that collective security is a "system by which states have attempted to prevent or stop wars", and stresses the global nature of the system: "Collective security arrangements have always been conceived as being global in scope; this is in fact a defining characteristic, distinguishing them from regional alliances" (Britannica s. a.).

The initial theoretical model of collective security has undergone a number of changes over time. According to Charles Kupchan and Clifford Kupchan, the concept of ideal collective security should be combined with the given power relations of the international system, which would increase the reality of the concept. After the end of the bipolar world order, a combination of collective security and a power concert was seen as the most effective mechanism. The European Concert is cited as a historical example, which was effective in ensuring the stability of the continent between 1815 and 1853, the outbreak of the Crimean War. The following three basic conditions need to be met:

1. All States in the international system must suffer when collective action is taken against them.
2. The leading powers of the international system must hold compatible views on a stable international order.
3. Political solidarity and a minimum sense of community must prevail in relations between the great powers (Kupchan–Kupchan 1995: 52–61).

Although these conditions were indeed fulfilled in the international system in the 1990s, in the quarter of a century since then the international balance of power has changed significantly, new poles of power have emerged, and these processes often work against the effective enforcement of collective security.

In many ways, this modified collective security model is more beneficial than balancing nation states in anarchic conditions. On the one hand, it can prevent war more effectively than the balance of power policy by reducing the uncertainty of coalition-building against the aggressor, because the members of the system are committed to joint action and at the

same time states are able to generate more power than in the balance of power system. On the other hand, a system of collective security increases the willingness of states to cooperate, thereby reducing rivalry between them. Finally, it should be noted that collective security also contributes to reducing the security dilemma, as having more and more information within an institutional framework increases trust between states, reduces the sense of insecurity, which in turn reduces the temptation to demonstrate their strength, and the number of misunderstandings also decreases.

These are the principles on which the UN operates as a collective security organisation. On the one hand, states must renounce the use of force as a means of settling disputes between themselves, but at the same time they must be prepared to use force against members of the collective security system who violate the rules of the system, in accordance with the rules laid down.

The UN's role as a collective security system is to maintain peace within the system, not to protect its members from threats coming from outside. In this way, it can be said that by regulating the relations between the members, the system is directed inwards. The aim is to bring as many states as possible into the system, and the formal and informal relations that are thus established between them in the various areas of security are the appropriate basis for guaranteeing and increasing security.

The conditions necessary for a functioning collective security system can therefore be summarised as follows:
- functioning impartially: for which flexibility of policy and sentiments is needed by both the people and the governments
- the ability of deterrence: it must be able to muster overwhelming strength against the potential aggressor at all time
- same security perception of participating states
- supporting collective action against the aggressor at all costs (also by subordinating their political differences)
- unanimity among states in determining the aggressor in case of any aggression
- must be directed against aggression in general and not against any specific state or group of states
- incompatible with the traditional doctrine of neutrality in war
- necessitates the willingness of the nations to fight for the status quo, not accepting a forcible change in the international order

If any one of these conditions is not met, the system becomes fragile (in extreme cases, inoperable), but I stress the importance of the second and third conditions above all. Because if the system is not able to provide sufficient deterrence and demonstrate its effectiveness in crisis situations, it will give way to further aggressive actions. And if the actors of the system have different views on security, not only does united action become impossible, but in extreme cases the dissenting state may itself become the aggressor. Enough to think of the Russian–Ukrainian war, which broke out in 2022. It is due, among other things, to the failure to meet the basic conditions of the collective security system.

The United Nations

After the outbreak of the Second World War, the great powers began to negotiate the creation of a new international organisation that would eliminate the defects of the League of Nations system and thus be able to guarantee international peace and security. In this new world order, the absence of the United States was inconceivable, as was the need for the participation of the Soviet Union, which was previously expelled from the League of Nations. Thus, the United Nations was formed in 1945, with the strong support of the American public, after earlier conferences and discussions, reflecting the basic philosophy of collective security developed during the first half of the century.

Hans Kelsen describes the Charter that created the world organisation as a strange combination of the U.S. Constitution, an old-fashioned treaty, a utopian manifesto and a set of rules for a private club (Kelsen 1946: 134–159). It is a sign of Kelsen's greatness that in this statement we can also discover the weaknesses, controversies and doubts about the functioning of the collective security system, which the practice of the UN has indeed confirmed decades later.

When we mention the role of the UN as a source of legitimacy, we talk about the UN as a near-universal collectivity of legally equal member states bound together, at least in theory, by common principles, norms and rules of conduct (Berdal 2003: 13). However, the world organisation is not only an "actor" but also an "arena". The United Nations is both a corporate body and a service agency for its members, consisting of five main bodies based in New York (the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council), and another main body, the International Court of Justice, headquartered in the Hague; 72 regional offices around the world; 15 specialised agencies and an international staff headed by a Secretary General dedicated to maintaining international peace and security.

Collective security is embodied in the Security Council from among the main body of the UN. Unique in the international system is the way in which member states have delegated some of their sovereignty to the Council. As stated: they assign the main responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security to the Security Council and recognise that the Security Council acts on their behalf in fulfilling the obligations arising from this responsibility.

Composition of the Security Council

In this chapter, we review the basic issues of the functioning of the Security Council, covering the composition of the main body, the specificities of its decision-making process, and the statutory provisions of the UN Charter that operate the collective security system.

The composition of the Council is a perfect reflection of the political structure of the world organisation, which privileged the special status states when the UN was created, and 78 years on, this has not changed. The Council is composed of permanent and non-permanent members. The five great powers that emerged victorious from the

Second World War, who at the time claimed additional powers in accordance with their considerable political, economic and military power, became permanent members. These five great powers are the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China. These five great powers retain their privileged status to this day, with some 'turnover' over time. First, in 1971, it was decided that the People's Republic of China would replace the Taiwanese delegation as the successor to the Republic of China, and then, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation would take part in the Council as the successor state.

The five permanent members are joined by ten non-permanent members.[4] They are elected by the Assembly by a two-thirds majority for a two-year term, with half of them being replaced each year. Voting is always secret, although if there are several rounds of voting, breaks in between give states the opportunity to consult. The ten seats are distributed on a geographical basis as follows:
  – 3 countries from the African Group
  – 2 countries from the Asia-Pacific Group
  – 2 countries from the Western European and Others Group
  – 2 countries from the Latin American and Caribbean Group
  – 1 country from the Eastern Europe Group

Non-permanent member status is a very valuable political position for the members-elect, so it is no coincidence that states are keen to obtain it. To this end, the candidate countries are preparing a comprehensive campaign and strategies to ensure that they can take the lead within their group. Hungary has twice been a non-permanent member of the Security Council, in 1968–1969 and 1992–1993, and was a candidate for the 2012–2013 term, but finally Azerbaijan was chosen.[5]

We can sense that almost 80 years later the power poles have shifted and it would be timely to reform the composition of the Security Council, but the diverging state interests and legal obstacles make it seem impossible to find a compromise solution. (This issue is discussed in more detail in chapter on European Union – Defence Community.)

Responsibilities of the Security Council

The responsibilities of the Security Council can be divided according to whether it carries out its tasks in order to achieve its own internal goals or to conduct international relations. Accordingly, we distinguish between inward and outward powers (LATTMANN 2019: 46).

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[4]   The number of non-permanent members was initially 6 and was increased to 10 in 1965.
[5]   The 2011 election was more than interesting. After Hungary withdrew in favour of Slovenia, which received more votes, the Assembly voted in 15 rounds to decide whether Azerbaijan or Slovenia should be elected as a non-permanent member. As neither country managed to achieve the two-thirds majority required for election, Slovenia decided to withdraw and Azerbaijan was elected as the sole candidate in the 17th round. It is thought-provoking that after their withdrawal, Hungary and Slovenia still received votes, as did Estonia, which did not even stand as a candidate.

Inward powers are mainly related to the election of members of the main bodies. Firstly, the non-permanent members of the Security Council, who are proposed by the Council itself to the General Assembly, which only then takes up its position. This preliminary screening role is very important, as it means that the Council is essentially taking a position on policy issues in advance, and with the agreement of the five major powers. The Security Council also has a role in the election of the UN Secretary General, as it also has the right to make proposals and the General Assembly then decides. Finally, the 10 judges of the International Court of Justice are elected in a special way, involving voting both by the Security Council and by the General Assembly. We must not forget about yet another important power of the Council: an emergency or emergency special session of the General Assembly can be convened at the request of the Security Council.[6] This is a very important initiating role, as an extraordinary meeting always attracts strong political attention, regardless of its effectiveness.

From a collective security perspective, the Council's *outward powers* are the most significant ones. The Security Council's declared primary objective is the maintenance of international peace and security, to which end member states are obliged to consider Council requests or, in more serious cases, comply with its obligations, and not to regard them as interventions in internal affairs.

Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter summarise the Council's outward powers. Chapter VI lays down a framework for the possibility of peaceful settlement of disputes in cases where the prolongation of an international conflict has the potential to threaten peace. The instruments used by the Council do not go beyond mediation and conciliation, and Council decisions adopted under Chapter VI are always recommendatory documents and therefore not legally binding.[7] Chapter VII stands on a completely different basis, in which the instruments contained therein may only be used if there is an undoubted threat to international peace and security or if the peace must be restored. In such cases, following the declaration of a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, it is already possible to adopt binding decisions and impose coercive measures. Given that these are the cases where the collective security system actually comes into operation, the mechanism of collective security will be described below.

Chapter VII of the UN Charter

Chapter VII, entitled *Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression,* consists of 13 articles, the first of which, Article 39, gives the Council a general mandate:

[6]   Under Article 20 of the UN Charter, an emergency session may be convened upon the request of the Security Council or a majority of its member states, while the Uniting for Peace resolution provides for the convening of an emergency special session upon the request of any of the 7 Security Council members or a majority of its member states. In both cases, sessions are convoked by the Secretary General.
[7]   It is important to underline that in a Chapter VI vote, the state concerned is always obliged to abstain (no such obligation exists for Chapter VII).

"The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security."

The Security Council has very broad discretion under this Article 39 to determine what it considers to be a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace or an act of aggression. Since these concepts are not defined in the Charter, it is up to the Council to decide in each case how to classify the acts of the State. It is not a legal decision at all, but rather a political and factual one, constrained only by rules such as the Council's own rules of procedure and international legal principles.

Of the three categories, threat to the peace is the broadest and therefore covers the most possible acts. First, the Arab attack on the state of Israel, which had declared its creation, was classified as an international conflict posing a threat to peace, and later this category was often used for humanitarian crises and terrorist acts.

According to UN practice, a breach of the peace can only be the consequence of an act of state that results in armed hostilities. The first case of a breach of the peace was the Korean War in 1950. Later examples include the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982 and the Iraq–Iran war in the 1980s.

Only regarding the third category, aggression, is there a guiding document available: the General Assembly Resolution 3314,[8] which summarises the essence of aggression and gives an illustrative list of what can be considered acts of aggression, but, being a General Assembly resolution, it is not binding on the Security Council. (The very nature of the recommendation is stated in the document itself.)

Once the Security Council has established the fact that one of these three situations exists, it has three options: it can make a recommendation to remedy the situation, adopt provisional measures (Articles 40–41) or take coercive measures in the form of a decision to maintain or restore international peace and security by the use of armed force (Article 42). The latter offers the Security Council a concrete instrument, which in the most serious cases could involve the use of armed force. This is set out in the Charter as follows:

"Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations." (Article 42)

In order to be able to take a coercive measure involving the use of armed force lawfully ordered under Articles 39 and 42, Member States must conclude an agreement (Article 43).[9] If no such agreement is reached, the Council will not be able to oblige Member States to make their armed forces available, and thus will not be able to take coercive measures

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[8]   A/RES/3314 (XXIX). *Definition of Aggression.*
[9]   (1) All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.

involving the use of armed force. Therefore, in practice, the Security Council only gives a prior and explicit authorisation in the adopted resolution to take such measures, which may be addressed to a UN Member State or an international organisation, but the recipients of the authorisation are responsible for the implementation of the resolution.

The other provisions of the chapter deal with the command and deployment of military forces (Articles 43–47), the obligation of Member States to adopt binding decisions of the Council and to provide mutual assistance in their implementation (Articles 48–49), the effects of preventive or enforcement measures of the Council against third States (Article 50) and the right of individual or collective self-defence (Article 51).

Functioning of the Security Council

The voting system established in 1945 is crucial to the functioning and viability of the Security Council. As stated in Article 27(1) and (2) of the Statute, each of the 15 States has one vote in the Council, and a minimum of 9 votes in favour is required for a decision to be adopted. However, there are two main groups of issues that come up for discussion in the Council, and the voting procedure is different for both. On so-called procedural matters, the Council shall take a valid decision if any 9 of the permanent and non-permanent members support the proposal. Contrary to this, for so-called substantive issues, the minimum of 9 votes in favour must include the affirmative votes of the five permanent members. If this is not the case, the great power voting against the proposal will block the decision. This is called the right of veto, although this term is not used in the Charter itself. The power of the veto is further strengthened by the fact that the very question of what constitutes a procedural question and what constitutes a substantive question is itself already subject to veto.

The veto is a privileged instrument granted to the great powers to prevent the adoption of any binding decision under Chapter VII of the Charter if their interests are threatened. This political option has been used unevenly by the major powers over the 77-year history of the world organisation. Initially, until 1955, only the Soviet Union used the veto (57 times), and then a further 33 times during the Cold War. During the bipolar world order, the United States exercised its veto 65 times (from 1970 onwards), the United Kingdom 27 times (from 1963 onwards) and France 14 times (from 1974 onwards), while China only once, in 1972 (on Bangladesh's application for membership). Since the end of the bipolar world order, the Russian Federation has vetoed proposals 32 times, China 26 times and the United States 17 times, while the U.K. and France have not used their veto since 1990. Altogether, taking into account the 77-year-old history of the veto, the list is headed by Russia with 112 vetoes, followed by the United States with 82, China and the United Kingdom with 27–27, and France with 14. What is worth highlighting as a trend is that on the one hand, since 1990 China has been making spectacular use of this great power potential and, on the other hand, that it frequently does so with Russian veto. This is no coincidence, since the new world order is clearly taking shape, and China is clearly one of the most important factors in this (UN Security Council 2022).

The question arises as to what happens if a permanent member abstains or is absent from the meeting. Article 27(3) of the Charter states that "decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members", i.e. an affirmative vote of all five major powers is required for the adoption of decisions on substantive matters. However, practice has changed this provision and requires that the negative vote be explicit. This means that the abstention or absence of a permanent member does not automatically imply the use of the veto right and the decision so adopted will be valid.[10] In such cases, the non-voting permanent member thus expresses its opinion and makes it known to the world that, although it does not agree with the proposed decision, it does not wish to block its adoption. This is a clear political statement on its part. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the Charter provides for an obligation of abstention for the member of the Security Council concerned in the case under discussion only in cases falling under Chapter VI, not in Chapter VII. This shows that in 1945 great powers clearly wanted to have the decisive voice in the really sensitive political questions.

There is also a difference between Chapters VI and VII as regards the binding force of the decision adopted. While it is not possible to adopt a binding decision in the context of the peaceful settlement of disputes, a binding decision imposing coercive measures is already possible under Chapter VII in cases deemed to be at least a threat to international peace and security. It is problematic in Security Council practice that in many cases the adopted resolution does not contain a clear indication (or at least a reference) as to which chapter the Council based its decision on. In such cases, the terms of the adopted decision can provide guidance. The use of terms such as "situation posing a threat to international peace and security" or "authorization" clearly refers to the application of Chapter VII, while the use of the terms "recommends", "calls for" or " affirms", which refer to a broader field of action, clearly indicates the non-legally binding nature of the decision.

The Uniting for Peace resolution

Article 24(1) of the Statute states that "its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security". The wording implies that if there is a main responsibility, there must also be a "secondary responsibility", so the Council's responsibility in this respect is not exclusive, other bodies may also be involved in dealing with such issues. This thinking led to the adoption of the Uniting for Peace resolution on 3 November 1950 [A/RES/377 (V). Uniting for Peace]. By then, the Soviet Union had exercised its veto power 41 (!) times in just over 5 years, making it clear that the Security Council was unable to take decisions in many

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[10] This practice was also recognised by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion in the Namibia case.

cases because of the veto of the great powers, and therefore could not fulfil its main task of maintaining international peace and security.

Resolution 377 identifies the General Assembly, the most democratic principal body of the United Nations, as the body with underlying responsibility for the exercise of the Council's powers. As the resolution states: the General Assembly

> "Resolves that if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in any case where there appears to be a threat to the pace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately with a view to make appropriate recommendations to Members for collective measures, including in the case of a breach of the peace of act of aggression the use of armed force when necessary, to maintain or restore international peace and security. If not in session at the time, the General Assembly may meet in emergency special session within twenty-four hours of the request therefor. Such emergency special session shall be called if requested by the Security Council on the vote of any seven members, or by the majority of members of the United Nations."

The resolution therefore authorises the Assembly to discuss the situation in the event of a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace or an act of aggression, and in the latter two cases to decide on collective action, including the use of armed force (by a two-thirds majority). In such crisis situations, the decision enables the Assembly, as a new provision, to convene an emergency special session within 24 hours. It is important to stress, however, that even if the Assembly adopts a resolution, it is not legally binding, it is only a recommendation, but it can nevertheless be of great importance in crisis situations. To date, Member States have used this option only 11 times in history, but the expected political success or outcome has been delayed in most cases.

Critique of the concept

Above all, critics of collective security argue that collective security is nothing more than a war prevention plan that assumes the problem is already solved, when it is far from being that simple and is not always the case. The very premise of the concept is inherently flawed, as it assumes that the vast majority of world powers are peace-loving by nature, and that war is caused only by the occasional misdeeds of a bad nation driven to commit evil acts by some strange and unusual circumstances. Therefore, there are two alternatives: if the great powers were able to remain friendly and cooperate for world peace, all would be under control; if they were not, no collective security system could work. In contrast, we refer to the main point of the realist school, namely that the main actors in the international system, nation states, are by nature struggling for survival and power, and that their basic characteristic is of competition and confrontation, which can easily involve the use of force. And in such a system, the theoretical concept of collective security should have (or should have had) to find a compromise between national and world sovereignty, since sovereignty is by nature indivisible. Yet it is not difficult to see that world politics to this day is shaped by the actions of sovereign nation

states in defence of their own interests, in which the great powers have never been willing to neither subordinate their national interests to those of the world organisation, nor to commit themselves unconditionally to implementing the organisation's orders – the most visible manifestation of which is their veto power in the Security Council. Thus, not only sovereignty is indivisible, but also security, and according to the concept, peace, too, because if the peace and/or security of one nation is threatened, the peace and/or security of all other states is threatened. We can also say that "whoever commits aggression is the enemy of all; whoever resists aggression is the friend of all" (CLAUDE 1965: 233).

Critics describe the collective security system as an *idealistic* and *limited* system. It is idealistic on the one hand as it assumes that there can be full international agreement on the nature of any threat or aggression to international peace and security. On the other hand, the meaning of the collective in the system is that everyone acts for themselves and for the collective as a whole, which ignores the fact that not all nations are equally active in international relations and not all nations want to participate in a collective security action.

The limited nature of the system is underpinned by several features. Criticisms of the system often focus on the problem of how to judge and eliminate aggression. Indeed, the theory misleadingly assumes that in case of aggression against any nation, the aggressor and the nature of the aggression can be truly and easily identified. In practice, this is very difficult, and the aggressor often acts in the name of self-defence and justifies its aggression as defensive (as was the case with the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022). In addition, the concept makes it an international obligation for all nations to take collective action in the event of aggression, thus excluding neutrality. In contrast, practice has shown the opposite to be true, with the majority of states preferring to stay away from war.

There is a consensus among critics that the lack of a permanent peacekeeping force is a major shortcoming of the concept. This leads to a situation where, once a decision has been taken (assuming that there is no great power veto exercised) to take military action against an aggressor, it takes a very long time to send the blue helmet team to the scene, which can create a very favourable situation for the aggressor. Moreover, the UN Charter does not even contain a provision on how collective action is to be terminated when it is no longer necessary to take further collective action.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that one of the basic principles of collective security is that all states have an equal voice in collective security decisions. However, the functioning of the UN system has proven the opposite: the Security Council, which has the power to take collective security measures, only involves 15 of the 193 member states of the world organisation, and only the five major powers have a real influence on the decisions on the most important issues.

Collective security – indivisible security – human security

Criticisms of the collective security system are not groundless, as collective security alone cannot make the international system work. However, in combination with another theoretical concept, indivisible security, it could be viable.

The principle of indivisible security was first articulated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and has since been included in a number of international treaties and national strategy documents, but has nevertheless received much less attention and been much less researched. The concept provides equal security for all nations, regardless of their political, economic or ideological affiliations, as opposed to the more exclusionary nature of collective security. However, neither of these two concepts can be the sole basis for a smoothly functioning world order, because collective security leads to exclusion and inequality, while indivisible security lacks effective problem-solving mechanisms (Kvartalnov 2021: 5). The concept of indivisible security is also perfectly complementary in the sense that the UN also relies on the indivisibility of security and aims to maintain peaceful conditions in all sectors of security. It does this through the General Assembly and the Security Council in the areas of political and military security, but has chosen to "outsource" these tasks to the so-called specialised agencies, with which it interacts through the Economic and Social Council.

At the same time, new areas of security are emerging where the presence of the world organisation is also essential. One example is cybersecurity, where the UN has been a global forum for almost twenty years, or human security, the concept of which was laid down by the Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Programme in 1994.

The concept has thus innovated in several areas. Firstly, unlike the previous sectors of security, human security no longer considers the existence of security at the level of nation states, but in the context of individuals, so the concept focuses on individuals. On the other hand, the concept already seeks to protect individuals against widespread threats such as global pollution or epidemics, and is not limited to the classical notion of security designed to protect the state against external aggression. The range of actors involved in guaranteeing the security of the individual is also expanding, with international organisations, local communities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) joining the state in not only reacting to events but also in preventing and averting threats to the individual (Molnár 2019: 22). These features point to new directions that raise the question of the adaptability and readiness of the world organisation, which is also on the agenda in the context of collective security.

The future of the concept of collective security

The global organisation was founded 78 years ago and reflected the power relations of the time. This was the reason why the United States, China and the Soviet Union joined by the United Kingdom and France were among the great powers, the most striking man-

ifestation of which was the veto power of these five states. During the last 8 decades, however, the world has changed a lot, and there have been three major power shifts. First, the era of the bipolar world order emerged, which was succeeded by a brief period of unipolarism led by the United States, and now, under the banner of multipolarity, a number of power poles are emerging. These emerging powers are also seeking greater influence in the management of international relations, based on their economic and demographic potential, as well as their excellence in a number of other areas. In parallel to the rise of these new powers, France and the United Kingdom, once great powers, have lost much of their influence and are now only regional powers on the great chessboard (even if they are as active geopolitical players as before). It is not surprising, therefore, that they continue to stress the indispensability of the UN and the Security Council in international affairs, in an attempt to demonstrate their coveted great power status.

The narrowing of power differentials at the global level is a real and lasting phenomenon, even if the more fragile international system has not yet consolidated into a fixed new multipolar order (Cunliffe–Kenkel 2016: 809). Alongside the old–new poles such as the BRICS, the rise of the MINT states[11] is also clearly visible, but alongside them the 'old' powers continue to retain their dominant status. At the same time, while Russia's permanent membership of the Security Council became an essential element of its claim to great power status (like France and the U.K.), it also allowed it to extract concessions from other great powers, especially the United States. China, on the other hand, has always been much more relaxed about its status as a great power, something it has never doubted (Berdal 2003: 13). And it has always seen its Security Council membership as a key means of making clear what it opposes: essentially anything that could be interpreted as undermining the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, and anything that could be interpreted as support for Taiwan's full independence.[12] And finally, the fifth permanent member is the United States, whose leading political, economic and military power is unquestionable, and therefore domestic politics often raises the question of whether the U.S. needs the world organisation. The answer is yes, because we have seen over the decades that the Security Council has also been used effectively by the U.S. To address, contain or simply marginalise difficult issues and challenges that its military power is limited to but which it cannot ignore as a truly global power (Berdal 2003: 14).

The UN should find its place in this new world order. The future of the UN and of collective security will depend heavily on the extent to which the world body is able to take truly collective and united action in any sector of security. However, this would require, on the one hand, a renewed effort to involve the new "great powers" in the decision-making processes on the most important issues affecting international peace and security, and also a change in the non-fair rules of the veto is needed (see Caron 1993: 552–588). This, however, is unthinkable without amending the UN Charter, which

[11] BRICS countries include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, while MINT countries include Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey.
[12] This objective is perfectly reflected in China's voting behaviour in the Security Council.

would require the agreement of the five major powers, in addition to a two-thirds majority. Although attempts have been made over the last 20 years, they have unfortunately all failed. On the other hand, the future of collective security also depends crucially on the organisation's ability to provide a viable response to acute challenges. The ongoing Russia–Ukraine war could well be such a watershed test for the organisation, especially since the aggressor state under international law is Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council. But let us not forget that trust is essential for collective security to succeed. If states have full confidence in the system, they will do everything in their power to make it work and operate successfully. Otherwise, they themselves will pursue policies that undermine the success of the system (Claude 1965: 233–234). Perhaps it is not without reason that the German sociologist Karl Mannheim calls collective security a relative utopia that tries to be realistic but retains elements of fantasy (Paul 2018: 192).

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