
Memorandum

TO: *POSC 3300 International Security Studies*
FROM: *Allexus Bain*
SUBJECT: *Collective Security: League of Nations to United Nations*
DATE: *October 3rd, 2022*

Executive Summary:

Collective security is a complex form that challenges the sovereign rights of nation-states. The United Nations, as well as the former League of Nations, provided states the opportunity to work in cohesion to adjudicate disputes amongst themselves. Though the United Nations rose to prominence in areas which the League of Nations was lacking, mostly in its solidarity. The intermingled efforts of the international community are vital for a united front against aggression, but the scope of the framework is sometimes limited, due to de facto states and contradictory forms of realpolitik.

Collective Security Obligations in the Twentieth Century

Complicated in nature, pursuing security, as a global collective, is considered a laborious challenge for ensuring peace within the international community. Collective security requires an effective means of coercion, capable of persuading states to view acts of aggression as distasteful. In some ways similar to its predecessor, the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN) uses more-refined forms of hard power; that is if the situation demands it. “In June, a UN Security Council resolution authorized ‘all necessary measures,’ including the use of force, to end the violence in that province [conflict between separatist ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and the Yugoslav government]. The United States and the European Union imposed sanctions that banned new investment in Yugoslavia and froze Yugoslav assets in the United States and Europe.” (pp. 322) The UN, as a collective, does prove an effective front against controlling ‘smaller-scaled’ forms of aggression. Nonetheless, viewing a modern issue such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UN only has so much power in keeping a great-power state, such as Russia—the assailant, in check. This is due to the Russian Federation having enough assets, and influence, to seek out its objectives, even with increased tariffs and bans. Of course there are other factors which limit the UN’s involvement, with the number one being that the Russian Federation is equipped with a stockpile of nuclear armaments and have threatened to use them if the need arose. But the main idea here is the conflicting interests a self-sustainable state has on the international community.

The United Nations utilizes peacekeeping as a means of ensuring order “But peacekeeping has always been conceived as outside the framework of Chapter VI.” (pp. 320) Even so, when peaceful measures are being pursued, it is important that all nations pursue this goal as a united front—for there not to be a sole benefactor. “The interpositionary technique of peacekeeping is nonjudgmental and works by assuming the sovereign autonomy of affected subjects; the second technique—enforcement—overrides that sovereignty in the name of enforcing some preeminently important community norm.” (pp. 321)

The UN has great potential in maintaining collective security around the globe. Though it displays a steady form of progress, security obligations ensure that nation-states remain checked, as well as understood. “From the involvement of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Tajikistan's civil war and in the breakaway effort of Abkhazia from Georgia, to that of the Minsk Group of the OSCE in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, regional bodies have generally enhanced their dispute-settling authority (if not always their effectiveness) by accepting, sometimes requesting, a grant of competence from the Security Council.” (pp. 323) Complex issues continuously arise, but the UN proves efficacious at providing time through dialogue, and forceful action, to resolve disputes.

Analysis

Miller described ‘*the theory of collective security*’ as political. Miller also stated that “To the extent it is possible to consider this narrower question in isolation, the evidence is compelling that collective security has not become a fully institutionalized capability of the UN at the end of the twentieth century.” (pp. 321) This is indeed true when considering how ambiguous security actually is. In terms of security being about protecting the ‘referent object’ from any source of threat, this can complicate the reliability of collective security between nation-states. Since the United Nations is ruled through anarchy, it can be interpreted that there will always be some form of loss or gain for those states involved in the process. Though, once the prescribed terms are feasible, the positive possibilities ‘should’ outweigh the negative ones, in observance to the main mission being to deter aggression, and to promote peace. But great-power states, external, and sometimes internal factors, have a way of ‘shaking the pot’.

Reference

Miller, Lynn H. 1999. "The Idea and the Reality of Collective Security." *Global Governance* 5, no. 3: 303–32.