

Collective Security: Meaning, Nature, Features and Criticisms

Collective Security system guarantees the security of each state of the world against any war or aggression which may be committed by any state against any other state. It is like an insurance system in which all the nations are bound to protect the victim of an aggression or war by neutralizing the aggression or war against the victim.

Collective Security is currently regarded as the most promising approach to international peace. It is regarded as a valuable device of crisis management in international relations. It is designed to protect international peace and security against war and aggression in any part of the world.

UN Charter includes a system of collective security which is designed to meet an international crisis resulting from war or aggression or a threat of war or aggression in any part of the international system. Balance of Power has lost its relevance as a device of power management and Collective Security has gained recognition as a modern device of power management which can enable the international community to meet a crisis situations.

What is Collectivity Security?

Collective Security is a device of crisis management which postulates a commitment on the part of all the nations to collectively meet an aggression that may be committed by any state against another. War

or aggression is viewed as a breach of international peace and security and collective security stands for collective action by all the nations in defence of peace. Collective security stands for meeting any war or aggression by the creation of a global preponderance of power of all nations against the aggression.

Collective Security is also regarded as a deterrent against aggression in so far as it lays down that the collective power of all nations will be used to repel aggression or war against any state. It is based on the principle, 'Aggression against any one member of the international community is an aggression against international peace and security. As such it has to be met by the collective efforts of all the nations'

Definition of Collective Security:

(1) "Collective Security is machinery for joint action in order to prevent or counter any attack against an established international order." —George Schwarzenberger

(2) "Collective Security clearly implies collective measures for dealing with threats to peace." —Palmer and Perkins

(3) "In essence, Collective Security is an arrangement among states in which all promise, in the event any member of the system engages in certain prohibited acts (war and aggression) against another member, to come to latter's assistance." —Schleicher

In simple words, Collective Security system guarantees the security of each state of the world against any war or aggression which may be committed by any state against any other state. It is like an insurance

system in which all the nations are bound to protect the victim of an aggression or war by neutralizing the aggression or war against the victim.

Nature of Collective Security:

Collective Security stands for preserving security through collective actions. Its two key elements are:

(1) Security is the chief goal of all the nations. Presently the security of each nation stands inseparably linked up with the security of all other nations. National security is a part of the international security. Any attack on the security of a nation is in fact an attack on the security of all the nations. Hence, it is the responsibility of all the nations to defend the security of the victim nation.

(2) The term 'collective', as a part of the concept of collective security, refers to the method by which security is to be defended in the event of any war or aggression against the security of any nation. The power of the aggressor has to be met with by the collective power of all the nations. All the nations are required to create an international preponderance of power for negating the aggression or for ending a war.

The underlying principle of Collective Security has been 'One for All and All for One'. Aggression or war against any one nation is a war against all the nations. Therefore all the nations are to act collectively against every War/Aggression.

Main Features/Characteristics of Collective Security:

(1) A Device of Power Management:

Collective Security is a device of power management or crisis management. It seeks to preserve international peace through crisis management in the event of any war or aggression in the world.

(2) It accepts Universality of Aggression:

Collective Security accepts that violations of the security of a nation are bound to occur and that wars and aggressions cannot be totally eliminated from international relations.

(3) All Nations are committed to pool their power for ending Aggression:

Collective Security believes that in the event of a violation of international peace by any aggression in any part of the world, all the nations are committed to pool their power and resources for taking effective steps against every aggression for restoring international peace.

(4) Global Preponderance of Power:

Collective Security stands for the creation of a universal or global preponderance of power involving all the nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. Under it all the nations are ready to defend international peace and security through collective military action against aggression.

(5) Admits the presence of an International Organisation:

Collective Security presupposes the existence of an international organisation under whose flag a global preponderance of power is created for ending the aggression.

(6) Collective Security System is a Deterrent against War:

Collective Security can be an effective deterrent against a state with aggressive designs. Under this system each nation knows that any aggression against another nation shall be met by the collective power of all other nations. As such no nation tries to commit aggression and war because it knows that such an action will invite collective security action against it. This realization acts as a deterrent against any war or aggression.

(7) Aggression/war is the enemy and not the State which commits it:

Finally, Collective Security regards 'aggression' or 'war' as the enemy and not the state which may resort to war or aggression. A collective security action is limited to the elimination of war, aggression or threat of war or aggression. It does not stand for the elimination of the state which commits aggression. Its sole concern is to get the aggression vacated, to prevent the aggressor to gain out of its aggression, to restore the health of the victim of aggression, and to restore international peace and security.

As such Collective Security stands for securing international peace and security through collective efforts of all the nations. Security is the common objective of all the nations and it has to be secured through collective efforts of all.

Ideal Conditions for the Success of Collective Security:

Collective Security system can successfully operate when the following conditions are present in the international system:

1. Agreement on the definition of Aggression.
2. More broad based and more powerful United Nations.
3. More powerful role of UN Security Council and strong commitment of its permanent members in favour of collective security of international peace and security.
4. Existence of a permanent international peace keeping force.
5. An established procedure for termination of every collective security action.
6. Popularization of peaceful means of conflict resolution.
7. Sustainable socio-economic development of all the nations.
8. Strengthening of peaceful means of crisis-management and international peacekeeping.

Difference between Collective Security and Collective Defence in International System:

Collective Defence refers to the organisation of collective machinery for meeting any aggression by the enemy against any member of the collective defence system. A collective defence arrangement is made by a group of nations who have a common perception of threat to their security from a common enemy.

Usually, a collective defence system is organised as an alliance involving a regional defence system. It covers only the members of the collective defence system. As against this, Collective Security stands for a universal system in which all states of the world, without any discrimination, undertake to meet any aggression anywhere in the system, and against any aggressor. It is designed to act as a deterrent against any aggression against any nation.

Dissimilarities between Collective Security and Collective Defence:

(1) Collective Defence is a limited or group system, whereas Collective Security is a global system. Collective Defence is a limited arrangement. It involves only some states who come forward to join hands against a common enemy. Collective Security is a global system. It involves all the states of the world.

(2) In Collective Defence possible threat is known not in Collective Security. In Collective Defence threat to security is known, in Collective Security threat to security is sudden. Any war or aggression by any one state against any other state is covered under the system of collective security

(3) In Collective Defence enemy is known in advance, Collective Security the enemy is every aggressor. In Collective Defence enemy is known in advance, but not in Collective Security.

(4) Collective Defence admits Advance Planning, Collective Security does not.

Advance planning is possible in Collective Defence because the enemy is known in advance. In Collective Security it is not possible because no state is the target. It comes into operation when any aggression or war or threat of war and aggression is committed by any member of the international community. As such Collective Defence is something very different from Collective security.

Collective Security and Balance of Power:

Collective Security and Balance of Power are two popular devices of power management which have some similarities, and a large number of dissimilarities.

A. Similarities:

1. Both are defensive in nature:

Both Balance of Power and Collective Security are quite similar in so far as these are defensive in nature. Both aim at the protection of the states within the system.

2. Similarity in Method:

Both stand for the creation of a preponderance of power as a means for preventing or for defeating aggression against any member of the system.

3. Both accept War as a Means:

Balance of Power and Collective Security accept war as a means for checking the violation of the system by an aggressor.

4. Both accept the presence of Will to end Aggression:

Both assume the continued existence of sovereign states who are willing and who can coordinate their actions against aggression.

5. Both accept States as Actors against War:

Both envisage the possibility that states which are not themselves attacked will be willing and ready to go to war for defending the security of the victim of an aggression.

6. Similar Perceptions of Peace:

Both have a similar perception of peace. Balance of Power regards peace an equilibrium or balance among the powers of a number of major powers. Collective Security accepts the presence of peace i.e., a balance or equilibrium among all the nations.

7. Both believe in Military Cooperation among States for ending Aggression:

Finally, both have faith that mutual cooperation including military cooperation among the members of the system can be turned into a military action against aggression. Thus, there are a number of similarities between Balance of Power and Collective Security.

B. Dissimilarities:

1. Balance of Power is a Competitive System Collective Security is a Cooperative System:

The concept of Balance of Power involves the existence of competitive alignments. It assumes a division of states into more or less hostile camps. As against this, Collective Security stands for a universal or

global cooperative system for action in which all the members of the international community are equal members.

2. In Balance of Power only Major States are Actors, in Collective Security all States are Actors:

Balance of Power gets operationalized through the policies of major powers who are the key actors. Collective Security, gets operationalized through the commitment of all nations of the world to act collectively for defending International Security against war.

3. Balance of Power Alliances are Definite, Collective Security Cooperation is General:

The alliances which go with the balance of power are aimed at a specific potential enemy. Collective Security system is aimed at any aggressor state that may be in any part of the world. It is a system of general agreement and cooperation.

4. In Balance of Power enemy is either from within or from outside, in Collective Security the enemy is always from within:

In a Balance of Power system the enemy is a major state which becomes unduly powerful and threatens the balance. In Collective Security an enemy state which commits aggression is always from within the international community. It is always a member of the system acting against another member.

5. Balance of Power is a Group System, Collective Security is Global System:

In a Balance of Power system only five or even major powers are involved. They are in agreement to defend certain selected frontiers and not to defend against every aggression or war. As against this, in a Collective Security system all the nations are committed to fight aggression against any state. They are in agreement to defend every state against any aggression.

6. Balance of Power admits Neutrality, Collective Security rules out neutrality:

A Balance of Power system permits neutrality and the localization of war, as a state can remain neutral. Collective Security system precludes neutrality and requires all the states to join the collective security action against every aggression.

7. Balance of Power involves a general alliance among some states, Collective Security system is a general agreement covering all States:

The states seeking a Balance of Power through alliances assume that their vital interests are common with some selected states, but not with all the states. Collective Security system is based upon a general agreement among all nations. All the nations have a common interest in preserving international peace and security.

8. Basis of Balance of Power is Mutual Fear, while that of Collective Security is Mutual Cooperation:

In a Balance of Power system, the environment of fear is there. Against this, in Collective Security the basis is the existence of mutual goodwill

and cooperation among all states for meeting all violations of the security of every state.

9. Balance of Power operates in the Absence of a Global Organisation, Collective Security essentially involves the existence of an International Organisation:

The operation of Collective Security necessitates the existence of an international institution, like the United Nations, for organizing the creation of a global preponderance of power necessary to meet an aggression in any part of the system. In contrast, a state can pursue a Balance of Power unilaterally, and if it makes alliance, relatively simple rules and institutional arrangements are likely to suffice.

Balance of power works in the absence of an international organisation. Thus Collective Security and Balance of Power are two different devices of power management.

UN Collective Security System:

During this last decade of the 20th century, the Collective Security System began acting as a popular and useful device for the preservation of international peace and security.

The Charter of the United Nations regards the preservation of international peace and security as its most major objective. In this Charter “International Peace and Security” have been used 32 times. In its very first article, while stating the purposes of the United Nations, it makes the preservation of international peace and security as the first priority. It lays down a collective security system for this purpose.

Collective Security system has been laid down in Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter and its title reads: “Action with respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression.” It contains 13 Articles, from Art. 39 to 51, which together provide for a collective system for preserving international peace and security. The UN Security Council has been assigned the responsibility and power to initiate collective security action for meeting any threat to international peace by a war or aggression.

Art. 39 makes it the responsibility of the Security Council to determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression and to decide about measures that are to be taken for managing crisis for restoring international peace and security.

Art 40 lays down that as the first step towards preventing the aggravation of the situation involving a threat to or breach of international peace and security, the Security Council can take provisional measures like cease fire, and call upon the concerned parties to comply with these.

Art. 41 refers to the enforcement actions, other than the collective military action. The Security Council can recommend to the members of the United Nations for compelling the concerned parties to end the violation of peace and security. It can recommend sanctions against the state involved in aggression.

Art. 42 empowers the Security Council to take military action for securing or maintaining international peace and security.

Art. 43 makes it the responsibility of all the members of the United Nations to contribute their support, efforts, resources and forces for raising the Collective Security force that may have to be raised when Security Council decides to undertake action under Article 42.

The next four Articles of the U.N. Charter (44-47) lay down the procedure for raising, maintaining and using the U.N. Peace Keeping Force for Collective Security force.

Art. 48 states, “The action required to carry out the decision of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security shall be taken by all the members of the United Nations, or by some of them, as the Security Council may determine.”

Article 49 asserts that: “The members of the United Nations shall join in affording mutual assistance in-carrying out measures decided upon by the Security Council.”

Arts 50 lays down the ways in which non-member states can adjust their policies and actions towards the decision that may be taken up by the Security Council under Articles 41 and 42.

Art. 51, however, accepts the right of the states “to individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member, until the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”

With all these provisions, Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter lays down the Collective Security system for preservation of international peace and security.

Since 1945, the Collective Security system has been tried in a number of cases. It was used for the first time for meeting the Korean Crisis of 1950.

Collective Security in Korean War:

North Korea invaded South Korea on the night of 24-25th June 1950. The Security Council, in the absence of the USSR, decided on June 25 and 27, 1950 to take enforcement action against the aggressor, North Korea. It held that North Korean attack on South Korea constituted a breach of peace and called for an immediate withdrawal of North Korean forces from South Korea.

However, when North Korea failed to comply with these directives and the Security Council found it essential to order collective security military action under the UN Charter Chapter VII. The response of the members to the Security Council resolutions was quite favourable as 53 countries expressed their willingness to support the Collective Security action.

On July 7, 1950, the Security Council set up a unified command under the UN flag and requested the member states to provide military assistance. In the first instance the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia, New Zealand came forward to induct small naval and air units into the “peace operation” in Korea. Later on, by early 1951, sixteen more countries came forward to offer their armed forces which were placed

under the UN unified UN command. Thus the U.N.O. was successful in raising a U.N. collective force for repelling aggression.

However, the U.N. Collective Security operations in Korea became highly complicated when Communist China intervened in the Korean war for protecting the interests of North Korea. This development made the Collective Security operations in Korea very problematic because many states expressed their hesitation towards continued collective security operations in Korea as they felt that these could lead to an escalation of war.

The decision of the commander of the UN forces in Korea, to cross the 38th Parallel (Boundary between South Korea and North Korea) for repelling the aggression was sharply criticized by several states as a decision designed to punish communist China. This led to complications which made the Korean crisis almost a dispute between the communist and capitalist countries. The Chinese decision to pursue its intervention and the US decision to halt the march of communism into South Korea made things worst. Consequently, attempts were made to secure a peaceful resolution of conflict.

On 3rd November 1950, the UN General Assembly adopted the Uniting for Peace Resolution which was designed to give over-riding powers to the UN General Assembly. The resolution empowered the General Assembly to over-ride by 2/3rd majority any failure on the part of veto bound Security Council in respect of determining the aggressor, the nature of aggression against peace and the enforcement

action that might be taken for preserving or retiring international peace and security.

The Uniting for Peace resolution was intended to give additional teeth to the Collective Security system. However, in actual practice it failed to produce the desired effect. The (erstwhile) Soviet Union became more apprehensive about a possible anti-communist stance of the General Assembly. It also made the USA apprehensive about the outcome of the Korean crisis. However, several members felt that this resolution constituted a bold attempt to strengthen the UN attempts at crisis management in the event of a war or aggression for restoring international peace and security.

Its immediate result on the Korean war was almost negligible. By January 1951, the Korean war got stabilized. Under considerable pressure from the United States, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on 1st February 1951, charging China of engaging in aggression in Korea. A committee was set up as a matter of urgency “to consider additional measures to be employed to meet this aggression and to report thereupon to the General Assembly.”

The same resolution authorized the President of the Assembly to establish Good Offices Committee to explore further the possibilities of a peaceful settlement. Consequently, Collective Security action and other activities aimed at securing peace in Korea were initiated after the passing of these resolutions. The face of Korean war now changed rapidly and by June 1951, the frontier was stabilized at the 38th Parallel.

Ultimately, an armistice was arranged on a Soviet proposal of June 23, 1951. Thus the Korean war ended and with this, the first attempt of the United Nations to end aggression against peace through collective security action got completed. However, the success in Korean crisis came not only due to the efforts of the UN but also due to the efforts of various nations who came forward to keep the Korean War limited.

After the Korean experience, Collective Security system underwent a second major test at the time of Suez crisis of 1956. But the results were secured less due to the action of the United Nations and more due to the Soviet threat to Britain, France and Israel.

However, in Congo, the U.N. Peace Force did a good job in restoring peace in this strife torn country. Even at the time of Hungarian crisis of 1956, (Erstwhile) USSR was compelled to respond favorably to the pressure from the U.N. against its interferences in the internal affairs of Hungary.

However, during the period 1956-90 Collective Security system under the United Nations failed to work successfully in securing international peace and security because of several factors. The cold war between the two super powers, the bipolarity in international relations, the inability of the General Assembly to act under the Uniting for Peace Resolution, and the changed nature of aggression and war, all combined to prevent the operationalization of Collective Security system during this period. The Lebanon crisis, the Iran-Iraq War and several other local wars kept on going and the UN failed to act.

However, during this last decade of the 20th century, the Collective Security System began acting as a popular and useful device for the preservation of international peace and security. It was successfully operationalized to meet the Iraqi aggression and occupation of Kuwait.

To meet the violations of international peace and security resulting from the Iraqi act of aggression, the UN Security Council first called upon Iraq to vacate aggression, and when it failed to comply with, enforced economic sanctions against Iraq. UN Security Council later on decided to take military action, i.e. Collective Security action against Iraq. A UN peace keeping force was raised under the US leadership and to which 42 countries contributed their armed contingents.

On 17th January 1991, Collective Security war against Iraq was initiated and within few days Iraq's resistance was neutralized and liberation of Kuwait was secured. Collective Security war was successfully made to secure international peace and security and to negate Iraq's aggression.

However, this exercise was successful primarily due to the keen interest taken by the USA and the inability or unwillingness on the part of the other four permanent members of Security Council to oppose the former. The internal troubles of the (erstwhile) the USSR compelled it to support the US sponsored decisions and policies. Further the decision to continue sanctions against, Iraq even after the end of its aggression against Kuwait reflected the problems involved in keeping a collective security war limited and confined.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became its successor state. Its economic dependence upon the USA and some other Western countries began compelling it to accommodate the US view point in the UNO and other international fora. China also began feeling isolated after the collapse of socialist regimes in the USSR and other socialist-states of Europe.

The changed international scenario of the post-cold war, the post-USSR and the Post-Warsaw bloc international system, made the decision-making by the US security Council easier.

New development gave a new strength of the operationalization of Collective Security. In one form or another, the UN Collective Security operations for preserving peace and security began operating in as many as 20 different places. In 2001 war against Afghanistan's Al Qaeda's terrorist regime was made under the UN Charter.

However in 2003 the USA decided to go to a war against Iraq in the name of eliminating weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Such a US action came as a source of erosion of the UN Security Council's role in international relations as the UN has not given its sanctions to such a war. This should have been prevented.

Presently, Collective Security system is being operationalized in more than 20 different places. The Collective Security System has been gaining a new credibility in contemporary international relations. Preservation of international peace and security as well as securing of development through cooperation at all levels of international

relations can be described as the two major objectives of our generation. Collective Security of peace and collective efforts for development stand accepted as the two means for attaining these objectives.

As a device of crisis management through power-management and as a means of securing international peace and security, Collective Security has been the object of severe criticism.

Criticism Against Collective Security:

1. It is Idealistic in Nature and Scope:

The concept of Collective Security is based upon certain idealistic assumptions which make its operationalization difficult.

For example:

(1) It assumes that there can be a complete international understanding regarding the nature of all threats or aggressions against international peace and security.

(2) It is assumed that all nations could and would come forward to name the aggressor and to take up collective security actions against the aggressor.

(3) The concept of “collectivity” meaning, “All acting for one and all” is basically an idealistic concept since it ignores the fact; all nations are not active in international relations. Nor can all the nations be expected to join a collective security action.

2. At times it is not possible to identify the Aggressor:

Another major defect of the Collective Security system is that it wrongly assumes that in the event of an aggression against any nation, the aggressor and the nature of its aggression can be really and easily identified. In practice, it is very difficult to determine and name the aggressor as well as to identify the nature of aggression. Often the aggressor acts in the name of self-defence and justifies its aggression as a defensive action.

3. Admits War as a means:

Collective Security is self-negating in so far as it first denounces war or aggression as an illegal activity and then indirectly accepts that wars and aggressions are bound to remain present in international relations. It wrongly believes the most effective way to deal with such situations is to undertake a collective security war.

4. Rules out 'Neutrality' in times of War:

The concept of Collective Security makes it an international obligation of all the nations to pool their resources and undertake collective action in the event of an aggression. It, as such, rules out neutrality. Many nations often prefer to remain away from war. It makes Collective Security war an international obligation and wrongly assumes that all nations are willing to participate in such a war.

5. A Limited Concept:

The concept of Collective Security, as laid down in the U.N. Charter, has two inherent limitations. It accepts the right of the states to undertake war as a measure of self-defence against any aggression. In

practice this provision gives a legal basis to an aggression or war in the name of action in self-defence.

Secondly, it admits the right of the nations to establish regional defence pacts and organisations for protecting their security. It admits regional security systems as devices for preserving peace and security. The working of regional security systems has in-fact been a source of strain upon international peace and security.

6. Absence of a Permanent International Peace Keeping Force:

Another major limitation of the Collective Security system is the absence of a permanent peace keeping force. It is only after a decision of the Security Council to take military action against an aggressor is taken that the constitution of a collective security military force is initiated. This process is so slow and difficult that it takes a long time to raise the force and press it into service. The time-gap between the date of aggression and the date on which the United Nations is actually able to send its peace keeping force for restoring peace is very big, and the aggressor gets all the time needed for reaping the fruits of aggression.

7. Lack of provisions for the termination of Collective Security Action:

Another drawback of the U.N. Collective Security System is that whereas elaborate provisions have been laid down for implementing the system, no provision has been made regarding the method of terminating the Collective Security action.

8. Dependence on Powerful States:

One of the basic principles of Collective Security is that all the states should have an equal say in arriving at collective security decisions. In actual operation, it fails to work on the principle of equality. Powerful states always dominate collective security decisions and actions. In fact, only the powerful states can play an effective role in executing a collective security action. At times the powerful state are reluctant to put their power behind a collective security action which does not strictly conform to their national interests.

9. Dangerous:

Some critics hold the view the Collective Security system is a dangerous system as it can transform a local war into a global war involving all the nations. On the basis of these points critics describe the collective security system as an idealistic and limited system.

Justification of Collective Security System:

However, despite these points of criticism and recognized weaknesses of the Collective Security system, it cannot be denied that the system has not been totally meaningless and without positive features. It has brought into vision the idea and possibility of collective steps for the preservation of world peace through crisis management in the event of a war. The chances for a more purposeful and successful use of Collective Security in this post-cold war world have brightened. Currently it is being operationalized in several different parts of the world.

Collective Security constitutes a modern device of crisis management. All the members of community of nations are expected to act and save the humankind from the scourge of war and aggression and to use the collective security system for this purpose.