

Is the United Nations successful in filling its goals as a collective security agent?

Since its development in 1945, the United Nations has had the goals of maintaining peace and security, promoting global cooperation, encouraging equality and social and economic progress, and improving living standards. The ability of the organisation to promote these positive changes in the global community depends on the ability of the organisation to maintain a secure, stable global environment through its position as agent of collective security, which is the system of preserving world peace. Without the function of the UN in this capacity, the goals of the UN are attainable, so the effectiveness of the UN as a collective security agent is being examined. Proponents of the UN suggest that the organisation is able to provide assistance in volatile situations as a third-party participant and that the organization's ability to meet regularly allows the organisation to continuously address issues of global security. However, opponents of the UN suggest that conflicts and alliances between member nations influence UN actions, that strict rules limit the capabilities of UN and its troop, and that UN peacekeepers are ineffective. The question of how successful the UN is at facilitating collective security becomes of paramount importance.

Proponents of the United Nations suggest that the UN continues to provide assistance as a third-party participant, therefore allowing the UN to sufficiently function as a collective security agent. The Conflict Research Consortium of the University of Colorado (1998) explains that through the UN's influence in the global community, the UN can provide "good offices" to resolve international conflicts and promote peace. The "United Nations" article (2012) expands upon this by explaining that their international position allows them to provide peacekeeping operations that provide multidimensional stabilization by protecting civilians, encouraging economic growth, and reducing armed conflict. A United Nations webpage provides evidence of these benefits. Although the UN is international and established, the reliability of the information is questionable. The ability of the UN to maintain its credence depends largely on public opinion, so the organisation may present preferential information that only addresses the successes of UN actions, thus ignoring significant factors. The webpage states that when the conflict between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the government of Sudan was identified as a risk to international security, the United Nations Mission in the Sudan was established in 2005 to ensure the cessation of war and allow the formation of South Sudan, and the support of the UN peacekeepers was later extended to guarantee the abatement of any additional threats. ("UNMIS closes as South Sudan becomes world's newest country," 2012) From this example, one can infer that the resolution of conflicts is more likely to occur with the assistance of a third-party, and this role was filled by the UN. However, success of the UN through "good offices" and peacekeeping directly depends upon the impartiality of the organisation, which is composed of various nations. With international affairs of this magnitude, subjectivity by default becomes an intrinsic, unfortunate factor of most decisions, and objectivity cannot always be guaranteed. Although logical, factual evidence of UN effectiveness as a collective security agent in these situations is

provided by the aforementioned three sources, the ability of the UN to promote collective security in all situations is limited.

An alternate perspective on this issue is that the conflicts, concerns, and alliances between UN member nations prevent the organisation from acting for the purpose of maintaining collective security, and in some cases, the power of the UN Security Council may be used for the personal gains of member nations. This compromises the UN's effectiveness as a collective security agent. Richard N. Haass (2012), a reporter for the Arabic news service *Aljazeera*, provides this perspective. The predisposed opinion about Western activity is being reflected in the content, which negatively affects the reliability of the information, especially since the article is primarily composed of postulations and predictions. The credibility of Haass is improved by his position as president of the American Council of Foreign Relations, since he can provide a valid, well-verses perspective of these issues. Haass (2012) explains that recently, Russia and the Democratic Republic of China vetoed the UN proposal to instate military action against the current Syrian regime, and this plan was supported by Western Nations, such as the United States. Although not definitively stated, it can be presumed that the conflict between the Western and Far Eastern nations encouraged the veto of the plan that theoretically would have promoted Syrian stability. Haass argues that Russia and China fear that their involvement in what they perceive as the domestic concerns of Syria, especially affairs that involve the revolt of people against a government, will set precedents that will trigger unrest within their national borders and invite international involvement. These conflicts within the UN prevented the organisation from effectively promoting collective security. These issues have existed for some time.

Divisions of opinions and the formation of alliances in the UN Security Council were especially strong during the Cold War, and the Council was paralyzed by the conflicting views of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the nations that supported each. With military actions restricted by the veto power and the decisive restraint of select member nations, resolutions were enacted, some of which were used to place pressure upon rivals. In the 1970s, Arab member nations supported a resolution that established Zionism as racism; they sought to further separate Israel from the international community and could do so by utilizing the power of UN membership. The UN membership included more Arab than Jewish representatives, so the vote was a foregone conclusion. ("The United Nations," 2012)

These examples illustrate that the political reality of the UN mirrors the issues of the international community and does not rise above these conflicts. When the personal issues of member nations, not the collective desire for security, are the ultimate forces that drive UN action, UN actions cannot accurately reflect the needs of the global community and the steps required to promote collective security. This also illustrates that the UN has not reached the level of impartiality that is necessary for it to successfully promote peace from a third-party perspective, thus negating the claims that the UN can promote collective security through those facilities.

One reason as to why proponents believe the UN is an established agent of collective security is that the UN Security Council has the ability to meet regularly to discuss issues that affect global security. Since the beginning of 2012, the Security Council has convened on 106 separate days to discuss approximately 165 different issues, and over 80 resolutions have been proposed or enacted. (Department of Public Information & Dag Hammarskjöld Library, 2012) Due to regular meetings, the UN has the resources to facilitate international cooperation and the exchange of information and global opinions that are necessary to eradicate conflict. However, from the above statistical information, it is difficult to infer the true productivity of the UN during these meetings, so one cannot determine the overall benefit of regular conferences. As explained in previous perspectives, the effectiveness of the UN at promoting collective security through these conferences depends on the ability of the organisation to remain objective and uninfluenced by the political, economic, and societal conflicts of member nations. If these necessary goals are reached by the UN, then the regular meetings may effectively promote collective security. However, the previous perspectives have established that the UN is still plagued by partiality that precludes the possibility of it using regular conferences as a means of being an agent of collective security.

An additional perspective is that the UN Security Council and UN peacekeepers must abide by strict rules, thus limiting the effectiveness of the UN as a collective security agent. The Council is restricted by the veto power, in which a proposal must be unanimously agreed upon by all five of the permanent member nations. Due to conflicts of opinion, few UN propositions come to fruition. (“The United Nations,” 2012) If no action is taken, global progress cannot be made, and without progress, collective security cannot be achieved.

An example of effects of the UN’s strict rules is provided by an article in the *Irish Times* (2012), which states that the vetoes of permanent UN Security Council members Russia and China halted UN involvement in the Syrian civil war, thus exposing Syria and Turkey to further conflict. The article is primarily focused on Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s response to the veto. Since he holds a prominent position in a country that is directly affected by this decision, his judgment of the UN’s effectiveness of a collective security agent is likely influenced, therefore decreasing the objectivity and reliability of his argument. However, there is reason to suggest that he is considering this issue from more than a personal perspective. As a Prime Minister, he is exposed to national and global issues, so he is able to present a valid perspective developed from firsthand experience. Prime Minister Erdogan explains that the exclusion of countries from permanent UN Security Council membership, as per the strict rules, prevents the UN from being aware and responsive to the needs of the global community, especially during times of economic, political, or societal crisis. Until the UN actions can represent the needs of the global community, the UN cannot promote collective security, since collective security requires the representation of the entire global community. Thus, the structure and self-imposed restrictions of the UN prevent it from promoting collective security.

An additional criticism is of the poor quality of UN peacekeepers, whose operations to promote political, economic, and societal security in conflicted regions are necessary for the goal of collective security through the UN. Some UN peacekeepers have spread disease and participated in unwarranted sexual activity with civilians, thus destabilizing regions. Deborah Sontag (2012), of the *New York Times*, states that Nepalese peacekeepers brought cholera to Haiti in 2010, thereby sickening more than 531,000 Haitians. Additionally, in 2007, 114 Sri Lankan peacekeepers, who were stationed in Haiti to maintain peace and security while Haiti established secure sovereignty, were removed from the country after being charged with sexually abusing women and girls, who received money or food as compensation. (Williams, 2007) According to Balachandran (2007), of the *Hindustan Times*, UN peacekeepers in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have also been accused of such sexual acts. (Balachandran, 2007) Sontag, Williams, and Balachandran report for the *New York*, *Los Angeles*, and *Hindustan Times*, so the sources reflect the international populous of the cities. These factual examples demonstrate repeated UN peacekeeping malpractices. From this, one can easily infer that the criteria to select and train peacekeepers are inefficient, and therefore the quality of peacekeeping aid is compromised. Peacekeeping operations are one of the principal means of the UN to promote socially and economically stable environments, which are necessary to encourage security on a national, regional, and global scale. When peacekeeping operations are interrupted by UN sex scandals and the proliferation of disease, societal stabilization is halted, and collective security becomes unattainable. Through these ineffective peacekeeping practices, the UN has generated problems instead of promoting the solution of collective security.

In analysis, the United Nations is unsuccessful at promoting collective security. Although in theory the UN has the potential to facilitate global peace through regular conferences and ideal objective assistance, the UN's current structure selectively represents sections of the global community and generates partiality. The pursuit of collective security requires the representation of each nation and region, because only then will the UN be able to act in accordance with the balanced needs of the global community. Despite the UN's continued involvement in global affairs, the UN's partiality and inept peacekeeping operations have generated social disturbances that are counterproductive to the goal of collective security. Until the UN can act succinctly and without these hindrances, the UN will not be able to facilitate collective security.

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