

COLLECTIVE SECURITY SYSTEM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND UNITED NATIONS

PETER SUNDAY EQUERE, Ph.D

Department of History and International Studies

Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Email: peterequere@aksu.edu.ng

Abstract

The principle of balance of power failed in the maintenance of international peace and security in the outbreak of the First World War. This failure prompted the leading statesmen of that era to look for an alternative mechanism in the form of collective security system, first under the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1919 and second in the Charter of the United Nations in 1945. These statesmen examined the weaknesses of the collective security in the League years and made improvement as to convert it into a supportive pillar of global peace in the experiment of the United Nations. This paper takes a look at the concept of collective security system in these epochs and made a comparative analysis of the system under the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Charter of the United Nations. The paper argues that the basic purpose of collective security is to prevent the growth of a formidable conflict or on failing that, to protect the intended victim, by means of collective action of peace-loving members of the international community. Using the analytical method and relying mainly on the available secondary materials, the paper used the cases of the invasion of China by Japan in the League era and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in the United Nations years as case studies. The paper argues that collective security system is founded on the principle that an attack on any state will be regarded as an attack on all states and it finds its measures in the doctrine of 'one for all and all for one'. The paper, based on its findings conclude that the essence of the concept is a mutual insurance among the state actors and for this premium, presumably receive coverage for its own security through the commitment made by the others.

Keywords: Collective Security system, International Relations, Peace-loving States, Consensus, Commitment, Organization.

Introduction

The idea of collective security is based on the premise that any act amounting to the breakdown of international peace and security by a state on account of resorting to the course of violence should be treated as an offence against the international community and all states should be interested in punishing the offender. In the comity of nations, states are not expected ideally to rely on their national power in order to enforce or protect their rights. The use of force singlehandedly by a state for the enforcement of one claim is regarded as a crime against the international community. Against this background, the principle of security implies commitment to resist aggression on behalf of all states regardless whose interests or rights is trampled upon. This called for a united and overwhelming opposition of the international community against the aggressor. [Peter Equere, 2018:26]

There are some theories that explain the concept of collective security. These are the ideal theory which rests on the following assumption:

- In any armed conflict, all states will decide on which party to the conflict is the aggressor;
- All states are expected to be equally interested in averting aggression notwithstanding its source;
- All states are equally free, willing and able to take part in the joint action against the aggressor;
- Combined forces of all- loving states must be mobilized against the aggressor; and
- An overwhelming military force should be put in place against the aggressor.

Secondly, the diplomatic theory of collective security is that which defines the norms, procedures, and objectives of the joint action. In this wise, collective security is a joint concert of major, medium and small powers who; through consensus represents an alliance of action against a belligerent. The theory postulates that conflict among the members of a group affects the entire group and that a unilateral resort to violence constitutes an offence against all members of the group. It also demands a mechanism or structure to preserve peace and security. Also, the operational theory of collective security signifies the role of the bargaining process involving the international distribution of power and convergence of conflicting interests. It follows that collective security is one of the major means for the restoration and preservation of global peace and security [Johann Joharis,2012:335]

This paper is a comparative analysis concept of collective security under two international organisations – the League of Nations and the United Nations. To achieve this objective, the paper is structured in five parts. Part one discusses the nature and implications of collective security while part two examine collective security under the League of Nations using the invasion of Manchuria by Japan as a case study. Part three is an assessment of collective security under the United Nations using the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq as a case study and part four compares the operations of the concept under the two instances. Part five is the concluding remarks.

Nature and Implications of Collective Security

Collective security means a machinery for joint action in order to prevent or counter any attack against an established international order. It simply implies a collective action of peace loving states to avert any act of aggression that may destabilize the world order. The concept suggests the concerns of all states which will collectively takes care of the security of each state as though their own collective security were at stake. The collective action of the peace- loving states for the aversion of war amounts to the preservation of international peace. The concept implies an arrangement by states in which all promises, in the event any member of the international community engages in prohibited act against another member, to come to the aid of the victim of the aggression. [Joharis,2012:336]

In this wise, collective security has the following implications:

- The principle of collective security is founded on the basis that an attack on any state is regarded as an attack on all states; it rests on the doctrine of one for all, all for one;

- Recourse to self-help or neutrality remains the anti-thesis of the arrangement of collective security. The states that take the road of neutrality are expected to be impartial in the event of outbreak of conflict and may be expected to give their blessings to the victim of aggression to fight it out. Recourse to self-help stands against the principle of collective security. The principle expected states to abandon their ways of neutrality and self-help in the light of the globalized and interdependent nature of the world which by inference mean that a conflict that occurs anywhere will have its multiplying effects on the conditions of peace everywhere. A disturbance at one point in the system upsets the equilibrium at all other point in the world. [Peter Equere,2018:27]

Collective security system has two comparable objectives of preventing war, through deterrence to aggression and defends the interests of peace-loving states in war. If war comes, the security system by pooling resources, defend its interests against any state which threatens to undermine it by coming overwhelmingly against the aggressor.ⁱ

Collective security assumes a status quo about which the state with predominant might agree. In practice, the peace which a collective system must defend is the territorial status quo existing at the time the system put in place. Also, collective security demands that states subscribing to the status quo should be willing and able to muster overwhelmingly strength for collective defense at successive point of conflict. By pooling the resources of all states in an organized international force, collective enforcement could be made instantaneous and preponderant. It is essential for collective security in a world of unequal powers that the major powers enjoy a minimum of political solidarity and moral community. [Richard Cohen,1989:66]

Collective Security under the League of Nations

Background

The League of Nations was formed in order to promote cooperation among states and achieve the goals of international peace and security. The League Covenant had some meaningful provisions for collective security. Article 10 argues that all members of the League would respect and preserve as against any aggression, territorial integrity and existing political independence of all, and in the event of any menace, the Council would suggest measures for this purpose. Article 11 asserts that any war or a threat of war was a matter of concern to all members and it could be brought to the notice of the Assembly or the Council by the Secretary General or by any member. Also, Article 16 lay down that the council would recommend to the government concerned what effective military force to be contributed by different states to protect the Covenant in the event of an aggression. It empowered the Council to impose economic sanctions against the aggressor. It could also expel a Covenant breaking state by a majority vote concerned in by the representatives of all other members of the League represented therein.ⁱⁱ The implication of the arrangement was that a state contemplating aggression would have faced the prospect of facing all members of the League would mobilize their resources and fight to avert the aggression. [Kenneth Thompson,1993: 755]

The League of Nations and the Manchurian Case

One of the cases that tested the collective security system under the League of Nations was the invasion of Manchuria by Japan. In 1931, Japan made a claim of Chinese destruction of its railway properties. In response, Japanese forces invaded and occupied Manchuria. China reacted by charging Japan of aggression and appealed to the League of Nations in line with the provisions of Article 11 of the League Covenant. Attempt by the League Council to secure a ceasefire and Japanese withdrawal failed. As the war intensified, the Council appointed a commission of inquiry chaired by Lord Lytton of Britain. By the time the members of Commission arrived the Far East in April 1932, the Japanese forces had occupied Manchuria and transformed it into a fictional independent state, and renamed it Manchuko with a puppet government loyal to Tokyo. [Lawrence Ziring, Robert Riggs & Jack Plano, 2005: 172]

The League's indecision infuriated China which denounced the Council's procrastination and lack of political will to act. China also asked that the case be transferred to the League's Assembly. All the League did was verbal condemnation of Japanese aggression and adopted the American initiated Stimson Doctrine of non recognition of new states or government that was created illegally by the use of force.

The Lytton Commission wrote a report that condemned Japanese aggression in Manchuria, a report that was unanimously adopted by the Assembly. Practically, this measure fell short of the principle of collective security system, and had no impact on the outcome of the Japanese conquest and occupation of Manchuria. In the end, the League's action condemning Japan of aggression only led to Japan's withdrawal of its membership in the League of Nations. [Mohammed Ayoo, 1994:76]

The Manchurian case brought to the fore the reality of overt aggression that the League could not avert. The League's procedure for peaceful settlement of disputes was inadequate and demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the League's collective action. In this case, collective security system failed under the League because the leadership of major powers did not do the needful to contain the Japanese aggression, coupled with the absence of the United Nations as a member of the League. Washington only sent an observer to Geneva and condemned Japan's action on moral grounds. Thus, the collective security system failed under the League of Nations and thus portrayed the League in a bad light as a weak and ineffective and indecisive organization. Japan invasion and occupation of Manchuria was a mission accomplished. In the end, the League's Assembly's action condemning Japan of aggression only led to Tokyo's formal withdrawal from the League of Nations. [William Durch & Barry Blechman, 1992:16]

The Manchurian case demonstrated the fact that an open aggression could not be adequately handled by using the organs of the League for peaceful resolution of conflict therefore bring to the fore the ineffectiveness of the collective security. Also, lack of political will on the part of the major powers who were members of the League to enforce the principles of collective security system. In this case, the League failed the first litmus test mainly because leadership from the major powers was lacking and because America who was not a member of the League nor concerned with Japanese aggression on Manchuria. [Joharis, 2012:337]

Collective Security under the United Nations

The horrors of the Second World War provided another tragic lesson to mankind which prompted the founders of the United Nations to express their determination not to allow mankind experience another tragedy of that magnitude. Winston Churchill, the then British Prime Minister argued that:

Let all the nations and states be invited to bend themselves together upon a simple single principle: who touches one, touches all, who attack anyone will be resisted by all, restricted with such wrath and apparatus with which comradeship and heart zeal that the very prospect by its formidable majesty, perhaps avert the crime. [Leland Goodrich & Anne Simons, 1995:40]

The above statement demonstrated the disposition of the founders of the United Nations on the principle of collective security. This principle was embedded in the Covenant of the League but failed. Not because this principle of mutual aid and support was wrong but because the political will to enforce it was lacking. The lesson learnt from it was that adequate steps must be taken to avoid the reoccurrence of such anomaly next time.. Against this backdrop, the United Nations Charter came to have an important provision on collective security system with the first provision in Article I which provides measures on the maintenance of international peace and security and chapter six of the charter enjoins state parties to settle their disputes through enquiry, mediation, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement and the use of good offices [the pacific means of settlement of disputes.]

Chapter seven mandated the Security Council as the watchman of international peace and security. Article 39 states that:

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations or decide what measures shall be taken to maintain or restore international peace and security..[Garvin Boyed,1994:206]

The provisions of the UN Charter on the principle of collective security marked an improvement upon the provisions of the Covenant of the League on the same principle and made the Security Council a powerful organ of the United Nations. The founding fathers of the United Nations accepted the principle of collective security and devised adequate measures for the cooperative coercion of the peace-breaking state by the peace- loving states. They took into consideration that any collective coercion of a great power might mean another world war. Thus, the principle of collective security stipulates the notion of unanimity among major power. The Charter also provides that other than procedural matters, the decision of the Council must ensure an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members. It implies that the Security Council may take any decision only when it is not vetoed by any of the five permanent members. [Peter Equere,2018:29]

Having analysed the provisions of the Charter on collective security system, the remaining part of this paper focuses on a practical case of the enforcement of collective security under the United Nations.

United Nations and the First Gulf War

On August 2, 1990, an Iraqi army crossed the border into the kingdom of Kuwait, quickly subdued its defenders, forced its leaders into exile and left the small country at the mercy of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader. Kuwait was not only conquered by the Iraqi forces but it was regarded as the 19th province of Iraq, thereby eliminating its independence and sovereignty. Most states condemned the blatant aggression and called on Iraq to withdraw its troops or risk the overwhelming forces of the international community. Given the strength of the Iraqi armed forces, the only recourse was to bring the matter to the UN Security Council which for the first time since the Korean War of 1950 was ready to apply the principle of collective security under chapter seven of the UN Charter.

The United States of America did not have substantial military force in the Gulf. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq was adjudged as a violation of the prohibition of the use of force as stated in Article 2 of the UN Charter. The act was seen not as a clandestine activity of subversion or intervention in aid of domestic rebellion. [Peter Masaldan, 1992: 296]

On that day of invasion, the UN Security Council reacted immediately to condemn the invasion and occupation and demanded an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, citing Articles 39 (determining the existence of a breach of international peace) and 40 which provides for (provisional measures). On August 6, 1990, the UN Security Council ordered mandatory sanctions as provided in Article 41 of the UN Charter barring all trade with Iraq except supplies meant for medical and humanitarian purposes. Within a period of five months, the UN Security Council – eleven resolutions to deal with the crisis including a request for the Secretary General to seek a diplomatic solution. The UN Security Council reached its crescendo with the adoption of Resolution 678 of November 29, 1990, setting January 15, 1991 as a deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait and authorized member states to use all necessary means to force compliance if Iraq refuses to withdraw.

While the Security Council was waiting for the deadline, the United States started to build its ground, air and naval strength in the Gulf, initially for the defense of Saudi Arabia and eventually for the assault of Iraqi forces in Kuwait. In the same spirit, the United States forged a military coalition against Iraq especially among states in the Persian Gulf. All attempts at a negotiated withdrawal failed. On January 16, 1991, the coalition forces led by the United States began massive aerial and naval bombardment of Iraqi military targets in Kuwait and Iraq. An all-out ground offensive was so effective such that on March 6, 1991, the American President George Bush called for a provisional cease fire. The United States had about 540,000 military forces added to contributions of military contingents from about twenty- seven countries – Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kuwait, Morocco, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Syria, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom. [William Hogan, 1995:121]

Ousting the armies of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait within 42 days vindicated the United Nations in its stand against Iraqi aggression. A UN Iraq – Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) was established to monitor a de-militarized zone along the boundary between Iraq and Kuwait. As a condition of a permanent cease-fire, the Security Council demanded the destruction of Iraqi chemical and biological weapons, long-range missiles and facilities for producing nuclear weapons. Also, the United Nations inspection teams condemned UNSCOM were sent to Iraq to monitor compliance.

The Gulf War countered open and brute aggression. The Iraqi forces that invaded Kuwait were defeated and Iraqi military capability for further aggression was substantially reduced. The Security Council of the UN was resolute, united and effective. The First Gulf War demonstrated the effectiveness of collective security under the UN system. Given the collective response, Iraqi experience was to deter others from aggression and encouraged potential aggressions to desist from aggression. [James Sisco,1998:217]

A Comparative Analysis of Collective Security System under the League of Nations and United Nations

The League of Nations was established in order to promote cooperation among states and achieve the goals of international peace and security. The Covenant had very meaningful provisions for the promotion and maintenance of collective security system. For example, the provisions of Article 10 stated clearly that members of the League would respect and preserve the territorial integrity and political independence of all. Article 11 added that any war or threat of war was a matter of interest to all members. Also, Article 16 stipulated that the League Council would recommend what effective military measures to be taken against any breach of peace. It also empowered the Council to impose sanctions against the aggressor. The implication of these arrangements was that a state which embarks on an act of aggression would have faced the prospect of containing not only with one state but with all members of the League of Nations.

However, the League of Nations did not satisfy the first two conditions of effective collective security system – consensus and commitment, but perhaps the third condition – organization. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, no state was militarily enough to defy all the others if the others were united. The League members were not strongly convinced that any war anywhere was a threat to them satisfying the first condition ‘consensus’. Also, they lacked the commitment to use their combined forces against any act of aggression – thus failing to satisfy the second condition – ‘commitment’. Though the League Covenant permitted aggressive and collective action against a state that refused to comply with the recommendations unanimously endorsed by Council and against any party to a dispute on which the Council was divided. One of the weakest points was the absence of obligations to act when unauthorized aggression occurred. [Inis Claude,1991:37] The League was also hampered by its role requiring a unanimous vote for most decisions. Whenever the league was prompted to action against threats to peace during the turbulent inter – war- years of 1930s, such as the rape of Manchuria and the invasion of Ethiopia, it was always too weak or too late to take the necessary action.

In sum, the collective security system did not work well under the League of Nations not for any real fault of the Covenant but because of the member states sang in discordant tunes. They saw their own security as separate from that of others, thereby failing in the first condition of effective collective security system. What was considered the greatest undoing of the League members was the lack of commitment and ineffective decision making procedures. [Thompson,1993:756]

On the other hand, the framers of the United Nations charter were not willing to abandon the concept of collective security as a measure to promote global peace and security. Influenced by the Pact of Paris of 1928 that outlawed war as an instrument of national policy, the United Nations Charter commits member states to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, with four caveat: self- defense, action against the enemy state of the Second World War, joint military action of the five permanent members of the Security Council pending the availability of troops under Articles 43 and 10, and any other use of force authorized force by the Security Council. Also, the UN Charter provides more effective measures in pursuance to collective security. In the place of economic sanction that were automatic in theory and discretionary in practice, the UN Charter gave the Security Council the right to impose both military and non military sanctions, with all members under a serious obligation to accept and implement the decisions of the Security Council. [Donald Daniel,2001:67]

In place of the League Council's right to recommend military actions, the UN Security Council was to have designated troops contributed by member states awaiting the Security Council's call to action. Abandoning the principle of unanimity of the League years, the UN Security Council was empowered to take military action by vote of nine to fifteen members, including the concurring vote of the five permanent members. The retention of the major power veto under the UN was a deliberate compromise with the principle of collective security. Some scholars have argued that collective security system treats all wars as a prelude to World Wars with the possibility of turning a local war to a global war if the major powers are ranged on both sides. The veto was intended to prevent such eventuality. With the major powers all committed to collective security, the prospect of nibbing in the bud an outburst of violence or act of aggression remains high.

In principle, the UN Charter is a more reasonable approach to collective security, subject to the limitation of the veto. The UN Charter provides broad consensus that peace is indivisible and that any threat to international peace and security is the concern of all thereby meeting the first condition of effective collective security system. Under the UN, all members are legally committed to accept and implement Security Council decisions and the Council could make binding decisions on members. Under the United Nations, the elements of consensus, commitment and central decision machinery are present and are merged in a coherent collective security system. These measures played out in the Korean War of the 1950s and the Gulf War of the 1990s.

Concluding Remarks

Collective security system is a machinery for joint action in order to prevent or counter any attack against an established international order. It implies a collective action of peace loving states to check an act of aggression that might become a source of menace to all. The system suggests the concern of all states which take care collectively of the security of each of them as though their own collective security were at risk. 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 against another member, to come to the latter's assistance. It is a system that stipulates the doctrine of "One for all, all for one."

In practice, collective security system has some limitations or weaknesses, but there is a greater need to appreciate the whole system on two salient considerations. One, the mechanism of collective security draws sustenance from the moral commitments of the human race. It could have been created by the growth of practical morality. Based on historical evidence, one can argue that the main feature of social behavior has been the increasing attention paid to all forms of humanitarian matters. For states to act in concert solely when their core interest are at stake is not good enough. Rather, the body, the mind and the soul of the international community have called for a universal and effective system of collective security, seeing it as an effective measure to contain major powers conflict and in ensuring enduring peace. Two, since the dawn of human history, the question of why the implementation of a system logically flawless and enjoying impressive official devotion, commitment and popular support should have been accompanied by a period of unprecedented collective insecurity (between 1914 and 1918, and 1938 and 1945)

In conclusion, it is safe to submit that the perils of pursuing the principle of collective security to its logical conclusion are adequately matched by the hazard involved in abandoning it. Between the principle of blind acceptance and logical rejection, mankind must establish the intellectual and moral basis required for a pragmatic approach to the concept of collective security.

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