

# Is collective security viable politics essay



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Collective security can be defined as an order anchored on a preponderance of power rather than a balance of power among states, capable of managing and defending security challenges for the mutual gain of the parties to it.

(Bull 1995, p231).

Collective security has been on the front burner of debate over the years. The argument has been oriented on the extent to which collective security can be ascribed as a viable tool for global peace and security; it does seem to me that there is no hard and fast response to this giving the complexities in global formation especially in the 21st century.

It is however disturbing when the ability of states in solely tackling contemporary issues on terrorism, climate change and security is evaluated, as it has become apparent that no Nation can survive in isolation. Therefore central to this essay is the fact that a collective action on security is more capable of delivering a peaceful international system, nonetheless domestic action remains a pre-condition for an ideal collective network hence the reason for concern.

The much desired near perfect violent free international system cannot exist in vacuum, therefore the need to rethink collective security along policy and structural line is timely and appropriate. An all inclusive and positive collective action is attainable where domestic network is canvassed and linked to International Institutions which have the legitimacy to act.

The actions or inaction of an international organization, in a collective security web as in the case of United Nations in recent years is a shadow of the political milieus in conflict management in post war era; hence the

debate in collective security and the resultant search for what best describes a viable security arrangement. However I find very instructive the assertion of Inis Claude on the ideals of collective security when he pointed out that:

The scheme is collective in the fullest sense; it purports to provide security for all states, by the action of all states, against all states which might challenge the existing order by the arbitrary unleashing of their power....

Ideal collective security ..... Offer(s) the certainty, backed by legal obligation, that any aggressor would be confronted with collective sanctions (1962, 110-168)

This clearly illustrates that ideal collective arrangement, irrespective of its institutional form, should be devoid of power politics and rivalry. Rather it should entail a viable degree of unanimity of interest among member states.

## **Collective Security: An Overview**

Collective Security represents a post World War I consciousness to prevent international violence and uphold international peace and security. It was conceived with a slogan that expresses 'An attack on one is an attack on all' thus the League of Nations epitomized the conceptualization of collective security in 1919 (Zacher 1979, p1). As an international arrangement amongst member states, the League of Nations replaced a hitherto violent international system therefore the institution was seen to promote the ideals of global peace and security.

However the League of Nations did not stand the test of time as evident in the series of aggressions that metamorphosed into the World War II, although the exclusion of the Great powerful Nations from the League is

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often excused on account of its failure, there was a strong sense of enthusiasm and optimism that collective security consensus is capable of institutionalizing international peace and security. Therefore as a fallout from WW2, negotiations came on top gear to erect a new collective security network not with the exclusion of great powers this time, thus the establishment of the United Nations in June 1945 as a collective security body.

The United Nations at inception was mandated within member states to promote and uphold security collaboration at the international scene, interestingly most member states to the United Nations shared a believe that regional collaboration in exercising collective security would be more efficacious in eliciting security concerns due to lesson from the past. States therefore seek to incorporate their views into the charter establishing the UN, successful in their plight article 51-54 allows for regional engagement in addressing violence, thus the creation of regional organizations like the European Economic Community (European Union) in 1957, the Organisation of American States in 1948, the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union) in 1963 are outcomes of the quest to pursue regional security collaboration.

Despite the establishment of global and regional collective security networks, it is however amazing that large scale violence and military threat still pervade member states, therefore an overview of the factors that negate the capacity of collective security arrangements to halt these threats is pivotal in understanding the viability of collective security.

## **The United Nations as a Collective Security Umbrella.**

Giving the philosophical premise upon which collective security was borne, the United Nations depicts the organizational monument in which the aspiration of collective security was built, as a corollary its activities and performance has been enormously towards managing interstate crises and wars. The termination of World War II and the new found member state negotiations that followed reinforced and gave the United Nations the legitimacy as a world body to act on a number of relatively broad conflicts and in the process established its purpose of ensuring international peace and security. The United Nations charter which represents its doctrine shows very clearly the institutional framework upon which it operates in line with collective security objectives. Within this structure the security council is apparently in charge of security functions ranging from the prevention of conflicts to the settlement of disputes, the security council clearly has supremacy over the general assembly as such the council investigates and determine situations that might occasion violence and where it deem collective action necessary it mobilizes members to impose appropriate sanctions on an aggressive state or aggressor. However the resolutions that comes from the general assembly reflects a picture of a truly international community, the 1950 uniting for peace resolution bestows the legitimacy of the general assembly to recommend collective action against an aggressor.

The empirical reality of the world today has dramatically evolved in a manner that pre 21st century collective security approach may seem obsolete, hence the need to adjust to the exigencies of time. The world is faced with globalization which explains the interconnectedness of the world

in virtually all facets, therefore security in contemporary era is so inter-linked that it is difficult to discuss the vulnerability to threat exclusively to one state this days, this means that the dynamics of security and threat in the 21st century transcends mere attack by an aggressor to include; civil war, genocide, ethnic cleansing, state failure, interstate conflict as well as terrorism. No nation can single handedly handle this threats without mutual collaboration with other states, thus the essence of a viable collective security network. The spillover effect of civil war creates the necessity for collective action, the refugees' syndrome and economic tensions which are common trait of contemporary civil war was rarely foreseen to be a phenomenon by the framer of the United Nations charter, as such the United Nations in the words of Adams Roberts ' was not designed to cope with the problems of communal conflict which it is now confronted in so many countries'

(1994, p7).

Although the multi operational function of the UN has seen United Nations involvement in a number of civil war, the operational details of how the organization mediates leaves little to be desired as keen observers have describe its operation as reflecting unilateral hegemony that seeks to promote the values and institutions of the liberal democratic norms. Critics however opine that the diffusion of a single norm model of conformity to prevailing democratic system as evidenced in the UN peace keeping strategy is not necessarily multilateral. Contemporary peace keeping has been perceived to be ideological giving a broader historical and analytical context, United Nations peace keeping operations has been seen to strive to re-

establish functioning and efficacious government institutions in war torn states based on liberal principles. The involvement of the United Nation in civil wars in Rwanda, Angola, El Salvador, Cambodia, Bosnia and Kosovo showcases the liberal bias of the UN peace keeping. The United Nations through its agencies in peace keeping have been figured out to provide financial assistance to war torn states putting democracy and human right as a condition for such assistance, the ideological premises upon which the UN and these agencies operate creates the notion that its pattern of peace keeping assures development and promotes international peace and security, the defence to this notion has been that liberal political and economic principles offers the most viable model for reshaping and reorganizing war torn states.

Given this pattern of operational model, it is critical to say that institutions such as the OAS, NATO and the UN are collective in their composition, operationally their primary funding source emanates from industrialized democracies in Western Europe and the United States hence their dominance in the decision making procedure which tend to nurture their interest. For instance the OAS from inception is formally aligned to the principles of electoral democracy and this principles have been passed to its member states as indicated in the establishment of democracy unit within the OAS structure which have influence election monitoring in Paraguay, Haiti, El Salvador and other member states as well as sanctioning member states with anti democratic regime like Peru (Tacsan 1998, p 91).

However the dominant transformation of the member states to liberal market democracies through peace keeping and peace building mechanism

were tactically possible through peace settlement agreement drafted directly. For instance the involvement of the UN in the civil war in El Salvador saw the UN drafting an agreement urging El Salvador to embrace free, fair and periodic elections as well as frown at human right abuses, this trend persisted in Rwanda peace settlement between the Hutu and the Tutsi, also the civil war in El Salvador which ended in 1991 was greeted with the signing of a peace settlement agreement among other strategies set out by the UN in conjunction with other international agencies.

The point to be made on the peace keeping mission of the United Nations is that, the empirical actions as shown promotes an internationally approved set of norms which has generated some kind of ideological debate.

Nonetheless promoters of this unilateral pattern (US) under the auspices of a multilateral organization like the UN use conflict situation as a reason for their action, this has provoked a lack of confidence in collective security as it is argued that the current UN style of maintaining international peace and security undermines effective state sovereignty in host countries, which translates into the construction of modern globalisation that describes states as inconsequential.

## **Regional Collective Security**

In spite of the United Nations broad responsibility on international peace and security, regional organization is considered necessary to complement the UN role. The United Nations secretary general in an agenda for Peace had suggested a co-operative network between regional organization and the United Nations (Sutterlin 2003, p130).



A demonstration of a mutually workable network between the UN and regional bodies has shown to some extent gains that can be improved upon.

Regional organizations in preventive diplomacy can be essentially productive. The European Union acted remarkably well in peace keeping and peace enforcement in the former Yugoslavia war. The EU was active in suggesting a post war federal structure capable of creating balance to the parties of the conflict, though this failed because the EU was not accepted by the Yugoslavia conflict parties as an impartial mediator due to the suspicion that the various members in the EU had interest in either the Serbia or Croatia. However the EU has been fundamentally pivotal at maintaining peace with the region as it puts conflict management at the heart of its function towards strengthening a common security policy within the entire Europe, we can therefore learn from the lessons of the EU in Bosnia that regional collective security has the capacity to act and respond to international conflicts as well as plan policies towards conflict prevention and peace building.

NATO has also been recognized as a dominant security network in Europe. A creative linkage to article 52 of the UN charter relates to NATO as a regional institution, NATO has considerably contributed to the calm of regional tension in Europe through collaboration with the UN as evident in post cold war enormous challenge. NATO therefore has become a viable institution for managing military intervention when necessary in Europe and added to the core strategy is the collective defense within its member state, although the involvement of NATO in the Yugoslavia conflict raised a lot of controversies about inaction and bureaucratic bottle neck, NATO succeeded to the extent

that lives were saved and the further escalation of the conflict was eschewed, also in Kosovo NATO operations was in consonance with apparent consensus which was endorsed by the United Nations security council resolution. The success of NATO in Europe represents a viable precedence that regional collective security can serve as a cornerstone for international peace and security if agreement on fundamental norm governing its behavior thrives jointly, the actions of NATO were clearly for the survival of member states through a fundamentally multilateral fashion of intervention which is what gives its operations a collective sense.

### **The State and the Responsibility to Protect.**

The historical antecedent of UN mission in Somalia, Rwanda, and Kosovo, as well as the interventions and non-interventions of other international bodies in a number conflicts, have necessitated the thinking that the mechanism of international relations needs re-engineering, in order to embrace the foreseeable needs of contemporary security threats.

State sovereignty became a rallying point in understanding whose obligation it was to protect citizens from security threats like ethnic cleansing, genocide and terrorism that characterise the 21st century, revelations from this concern show that the states should bear the burden of protecting the lives and security of its citizens as well as the promotion of their welfare. State authorities are fundamentally responsible to their population both internally and to the international community via its membership with the UN and other international body to which it owes membership. This clearly gives an understanding that states are responsible for their actions or inactions; put

differently, states by definition should be held accountable for their acts in relation to the protection of its citizen.

The idea of looking at sovereignty is informed by the ever-increasing impact of human rights norms internationally, and the overwhelming impact on the concept of human security. Therefore the responsibility to protect offers to resolve the dilemma as it focuses on the human needs of those seeking assistance and protection.

The responsibility to protect shifts the security debate further from mere intervention to territorial security and environmental challenges, as well as human development issues which have the capacity to provoke conflict. It holds that states are responsible for providing the basic and legitimate security concerns of its ordinary citizen in their daily lives and that a situation where huge proportion of national capital is spent on arms acquisition and training of armed forces yet its population is exposed to unemployment, disease, lack of food and worst still have its citizens killed by indigenous security forces as in the civil war cases is internationally unacceptable, hence making a case for security concerns to transcend state territory to embrace a more broad circumstance of human security.

The implications of the responsibility to protect also translate to the responsibility to prevent. In the concept of the responsibility to prevent, the sovereign state ought to always act justly to create a foundation for conflict prevention. The state must always strive to guarantee good governance within its will and resources to its citizen, although the state function lies at the heart of conflict prevention it requires the continuous support of the

international society since the ills of conflict have large scale adverse effect on the international community.

The international community must engage with states in proffering preventive incentives by way of strengthening human right laws, the promotion of social and economic resources as well as efforts at reconciliation and dialogue in disputes. The consequence of prevention helps to touch on the root of potential conflict triggers, and assist the international organisation perpetuating such assistance to attain an acceptable neutrality and credibility which is crucial in situations where prevention fails and reaction becomes an option.

As a systemic process a failure on the responsibility to prevent leads to the responsibility to react, although reaction is a last resort option, when all avenues to prevent conflict have been exhausted. The responsibility to react shifts more often to intergovernmental organizations, since their establishment gives them the legitimate right to come in when internal preventive options fails. Therefore the reaction in conflict situation takes the form of intervention and peace keeping operation, the international organisation with the financial and military muscle to react must be seen to be credible and constantly engage with its agent which created it. The benchmark for military intervention is usually conditional; the dissatisfaction demonstrated in most intervention is as a result of breach to the principles guiding it. However if all necessary precautionary principles are satisfied, the controversy on intervention would have been tied to principle thereby making collective security less complex.

## **Canvassing Domestic and International Political Will for Collective Security.**

The impetus for achieving international support on security issues lies in the success on canvassing local or domestic support. The success of intervention as seen overtime depends largely on how well it plays domestically, since the cost usually emanates from domestic resources, the extent to which domestic factor interfaces with decision making internationally is vital.

Although due to varying contextual factors like population, culture, power and wealth of states the journey towards multilateral engagement is often tasking.

The aggregation of political will for collective action on intervention for the purpose of human protection or any security concern also comes from the kind of leadership states posses, as well as the institutions through which decision making is galvanized, again due to contextual difference in states formation, some states would carry more burden due to its advantage, it does follow then that such states must strengthen its institutions since it will be more responsible in channeling concerns to the global arena. The multilateral network is even more crucial as it is a platform with the legitimate intergovernmental blessing to act and be held responsible. Therefore international institutions in collaboration with domestic institutions require committed leadership and vibrant structures to produce results that touch on resources, morality and the collective good.

## **Conclusion**

The framework for collective security has been further reawakened by contemporary security concern, although the theoretical assumption of

collective security does not match practical realities, international co-operation on territorial defense within the global environment is said to be practicable. A bottom-top collective security approach that embraces state, region and global institution seem a plausible solution for the multiple security threats within the international system (Ayoob 1993, p50).

The central assumption of solidarity of states in an international society is premised on co-operation rather than interdependence, I therefore find Bull`s conception of solidarism a strong tool that should underpin collective security engagements. He opined that solidarism is capable of reducing the unilateral interventions, legitimizing collective security and establishing a framework that accommodates diversity and manage peace and security in an expanding international society (Bull 1995, p231). Indeed the solidarist perspective emphatically prescribes the use of force only for the good of the international society, even though this seemed like the bases upon which the United Nations was established, empirical analysis shows a departure from principles.

In sum the virtues of a viable collective security system lies in the practical ability of ' all states joining forces to prevent one of the number from using coercion to gain advantage' (Weiss etal 1994, p21). Rather than individual state pursuing their security in contrast with collective security as pursue by International bodies a consensus on a commonly beneficial strategy for the good of all will be more viable in today`s anarchical world. This is ideally what the United Nations represent, but the manipulations by western power is guilty of the resentment that collective security attracts amongst actors. However the demonstration and willingness by state and non state actors

towards a selfless and constructive collect security union is capable of  
arresting the gathering anarchy in today's global arena