COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The basic principle behind this concept can be summed up in the phrase ‘one for all and all for one’. As a means of maintaining peace between states, the legal and diplomatic organisation of collective security can be located midway between the two extremes of an unregulated **balance of power** and a world government. Although the idea of a single world government is sometimes entertained as a solution to the problem of war, it is extremely unlikely to be brought about by conscious design. The idea of collective security is attractive because it seeks to bring about some of the alleged benefits of a world government without altering the essential features of an **anarchical** states system.

In formal terms, collective security refers to a set of legally established mechanisms designed to prevent or suppress aggression by any state against any other state. This is achieved by presenting to potential/actual aggressors the credible threat, and to potential/actual victims the reliable promise, of effective collective measures to maintain and if necessary enforce the peace. Such measures can range from diplomatic boycotts to the imposition of **sanctions** and even military action. The essence of the idea is the collective punishment of aggressors through the use of overwhelming **power**. States belonging to such a system renounce the use of force to settle disputes among themselves but at the same time promise to use collective force against any aggressor. In all other respects states remain **sovereign** entities.

The purpose of a collective security system is to maintain peace among the members of the system, not between the system and outsiders.

For example, **NATO** is not a collective security system. It is an **alliance**, or perhaps it could be called a collective defence system.

Ideally, in a global collective security system alliances are unnecessary. Collective security allows states to renounce the unilateral use of force because they are assured of assistance if a state illegally uses force against them. Simultaneously, it requires that all states participate in enforcing sanctions against an aggressor.

There are three reasons why many commentators (and sometimes states) have found the idea of collective security attractive. First, it promises security to all states, not just some of the most powerful.

Ideally, all states have an incentive to join such a system, since they are all subject to the threat of war. Second, in principle collective security provides much greater

certainty in international relations, at least in promoting a concerted response to war. Third, collective security is focused on an apparently clear problem – that of aggression, which is typically defined as the military violation of the territorial integrity and political independence of member states.

The first major attempt to implement a system of collective security took place at the end of the First World War, with the signing of the **League of Nations** Covenant. With Article 10 of the Covenant, peace was guaranteed and together with Article 16, which provided the threat of counteraction, they formed the core of collective security.

Every member state was asked in Article 10 to guarantee the territorial and political integrity of all other member states. To secure this promise, each member state was (according to Article 16) automatically at war with an aggressor. The sorry history of the League of Nations in failing to maintain international peace and security (its successor, the **United Nations**, does not even mention the term ‘collective security’ in its Charter) reflects some fundamental problems with this concept as a means to maintain peace.

First, unless collective security really is universal, and in particular includes the most powerful states in the system, it is unlikely to be effective. If the latter are outside the system, then other states cannot rely on collective security to protect themselves from the **great powers**. This was particularly the case in the interwar period. The United States never joined the system, and other great powers (including the Soviet Union, China, Germany, and Japan) were never permanent members of the system.

Second, the effectiveness of collective security depends on states sharing the view that peace is ‘indivisible’. Aggression against any state is meant to trigger the same behaviour amongst members, regardless of where it takes place or the identity of aggressor and victim. This view was shared by many states at the end of the First World War in light of the manner in which that war had spread so rapidly and the degree of destruction it had caused. None the less, it remains somewhat **idealistic** to believe that collective security can totally replace the balance of power and the calculations of **national interest**. For example, the refusal of some states to impose sanctions against Italy after its invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in December 1934 was due to their belief that Italy could still be a useful ally against Germany.

Third, despite its apparent simplicity, the term ‘aggression’ is notoriously difficult to define in practice. For example, Japanese treaties with China allowed Japan to

keep troops stationed on Japanese railways in Manchuria and those troops had the right of self-defence. When a bomb exploded on a railway near the city of Mukden in September 1931, the Japanese took over the city and soon had control over the whole province of Manchuria. China claimed that Japan had committed aggression. Japan claimed that it was acting in self-defence. It took the League a whole year to determine who was right, by which time the Japanese had succeeded in setting up their own puppet state in the area.

Finally, the concept of collective security is deeply conservative. It is dedicated to the maintenance of the territorial status quo, identifying 'aggression' as the worst crime in international relations, and it assumes that peaceful mechanisms of territorial change exist which make war unnecessary. In the twenty-first century, when war within states rather than between them is likely to be the norm, collective security is unlikely to provide a solution even if the great powers share its basic assumptions.

See also: **alliance; anarchy; common security; concert of powers; idealism; just war theory; League of Nations; sanctions; sovereignty; United Nations**

Further reading: Butfoy, 1993; Buzan, 1991; Claude, 1967; Lepgold and Weiss, 1998; Mearsheimer, 1994/95; Saroosh, 1999; Sloan, 1998

COMMON SECURITY

This concept expresses the idea that **security** need not be a value for which states compete. Traditionally, scholars have tended to discuss security within an adversarial frame of reference, focusing primarily on military strategies. In contrast to the concept of the **security dilemma**, the idea of common security (sometimes referred to as cooperative security) stresses non-competitive approaches through which adversaries can achieve security with, rather than against, each other.

It was only in the 1980s that the concept entered into common currency, partly in reaction to the deterioration of East–West relations at the time. Common security, while in many respects still an ill-defined and ambiguous term, had an immediate attraction for supporters of radical change as well as more pragmatic proponents of peaceful co-existence between rival blocs. The phrase was embraced towards the end of the decade by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who promoted aspects of a broad common security agenda under the label 'New Thinking'. At the time the

Soviet Union was struggling to keep up with the United States in the nuclear **arms race**, and the success of Gorbachev's domestic reforms depended on his ability to cut defence spending without undermining the security of the Soviet Union. By embracing the idea of common security he hoped to enlist the support of the United States and Western Europe in a mutual process of radical arms reduction. His hope was that once the habits of cooperation and self-restraint took hold, it would become possible to scale down competition and force levels and to evolve more comprehensive and reliable frameworks for reducing the risk of nuclear **war**.

The measures advocated by Gorbachev and others were very broad ranging. In the area of **arms control**, they included the development of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) as well as the implementation of non-offensive defence (NOD). The former could include regular visits between military leaders on both sides, prior warning of military exercises, and other attempts to promote greater transparency in defence planning. The latter refers to the deployment of weapons and strategic doctrines that reduce the fear of surprise attack by the adversary. In addition to new approaches to arms control, supporters of common security sought to expand the meaning and scope of security to cover economic and environmental issues. Three important assumptions underpinned their analyses and prescriptions.

First, it is possible for governments to learn cooperative behavior and converge their policies in ways consistent with an increasingly interdependent international system. The evolution of a more cooperative relationship is thus likely to have a 'knock-on effect' throughout the system, not just because former rivals become more willing to reduce the number of conflicts in which they have been indirectly involved, but also because some of the new concepts to which their relationship gives rise may have wider international application.

Second, peace and security are 'indivisible'. A country either holds security in common with other states or it simply cannot achieve it. To be successful, new security policies must be far more comprehensive in addressing non-military problems. Third, it is often assumed that miscalculation or **misperception** essentially causes war.

It should be noted that whilst one can identify these assumptions as consistent with prescriptions put forward under the label of common security, there is no rigorous **theory** associated with the concept.

Rather than being a theory, common security is little more than a set of general principles. Furthermore, most attempts to articulate the meaning of common security have been closely linked with the issues of a particular historical moment. The latter would include the heightened risk of nuclear war in the early 1980s, moves towards ending the **cold war** later in the decade, and attempts to stabilize the post-cold war international order in the 1990s. This has given the literature on common security a somewhat ad hoc character.

Having said that, it is possible to locate this concept somewhere in the middle of a theoretical spectrum between **realism** and **idealism**.

Realists tend to argue that supporters of common security are naïve in so far as they neglect the importance of factors that ensure the durability of competition for security among states. Its underlying assumptions were shared by some of the creators of the **League of Nations** in the 1920s, which ultimately failed to create a durable security environment in Europe. On the other hand, those who argue that the state itself is a threat to human security claim that proposals consistent with common security are far too modest. Global security requires a radical change in the international political system and states must be transcended in favor of new forms of **global governance**. Advocates of common security have yet to show either that their proposals do not depend on a prior resolution of underlying conflicts between rival states to be effective, or that their effect can prevent the recurrence of conflict.

See also: **arms control; arms race; cold war; collective security; idealism; interdependence; Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); peace studies; realism; security; security dilemma; war**

Further reading: Booth, 1991; Buzan, 1991; Croft, 1993; Dewitt, 1994