

Collective Security

An Indispensable Requisite for a Lasting Peace

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Introduction

Collective security is a term that can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this article, the term encompasses the idea of an international agreement whose sole purpose is to ensure the peace and security of all people. This agreement is to be reached by a core group of world leaders who are, in Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "high-minded" and "distinguished," "shining exemplars of devotion and determination," who arise "with firm resolve and clear vision," with the sole motive and purpose of acting for "the good and happiness of all mankind" and for the establishment of "Universal Peace" [SDC 64]. Once agreement is reached, the core group will seek to have it ratified by all nations resulting in an International covenant in which all countries universally participate. A core provision of this Covenant is that if a nation violates any of its terms thereby disturbing the peace, all the other nations will arise as one, to bring it to heel. This united response is to be carried out applying pre-determined criteria and rules arrived at and implemented collectively.

The need for this this kind of an International Covenant that is collectively enforceable is evident when we consider the state of the world today in which nations often engage in egregious acts that break the peace and do so with impunity. We need only consider the examples of nations that have illicit nuclear weapons programs in direct contravention of international laws, such as North Korea and Iran, or nations that engage in gross human rights abuses of their populations like Sudan and

Syria, or nations that openly sponsor terrorism, like Iran. The fact that these examples are allowed to continue year after year demonstrates the bankruptcy of the international security system and the reality that the international community has abdicated responsibility to do what is necessary to preserve peace in this world for too long. Unfortunately, it is the common people who have suffered as a result. Their suffering has been widespread and prolonged. It is high time for all nations to act in unity to create a system of collective security that is both strong and flexible to meet the needs of our time.

Key Elements of a Viable System of Collective Security

The most effective system of collective security is one that is able to deter nations from breaching the peace and also to effectively and swiftly restore the peace in those few instances in which it is breached.

What We Need to Minimize the Risk of a Breach of International Peace And Security

In order to forestall and prevent conflict and maintain the peace, several requirements should be met. They are as follows:

Limit the Amount and Type of Arms Every Nation Can Have

To minimize the risk that any nation will be tempted to breach the peace, the amount [SDC 64] and type of arms each nation may possess must be restricted. First, all nations must agree, as matter of principle, to limit the amount of arms each of them can have to that which they need to maintain internal order and security within their borders [GWB CXVII, p. 249]. This agreement must be embodied within the International Covenant. Thereafter an International Commission should be appointed to study the circumstances of each country and determine what that amount should reasonably be for each country. The Commission should undertake an investigation to determine the amount of arms each nation actually possesses. A

plan should then be made for the destruction of that quantity of arms that exceeds the amount deemed sufficient to maintain internal order. Lastly, the process of arms' destruction must be supervised by an internationally appointed body so as to ensure transparency and avoid arousing suspicion.

For this scheme to work, such agreement to limit the possession of arms must apply to all countries without exception. No country can be allowed to rely on a security exclusion to opt out nor can any country be allowed to withdraw from the agreement. Should a country be tempted to do either, its action should be regarded as a threat to the peace triggering collective enforcement action, a topic that is discussed further on in this article.

Second, the international covenant must include a provision to eliminate all nuclear weapons. There is no good reason for any nation to possess nuclear weapons. Using them is unthinkable and it is both unfair and ultimately impossible, as humanity has discovered the hard way, to confine them to a few countries. As long as even one nation has nuclear weapons, others will want them for a host of reasons including at best the insecurity they engender or at worst a desire to wield more power and influence in the world. In addition to the elimination of existing arsenals of nuclear weapons, all nations must agree to stop developing and producing new weapons of mass destruction as well as fissile material such as highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium that can be used to produce such weapons. Finally, countries must agree to put all facilities and nuclear material needed for the creation of nuclear energy under the management and control of a supranational body that will ensure that they are used solely for the legitimate end of making electricity to meet the energy demands of the planet. By doing this, the risks of a nation secretly diverting an otherwise legitimate energy-producing nuclear program for military purposes will be eliminated.

Strengthen the International Court to Make it More Effective and Trusted

Nations will inevitably have disputes, which must be resolved. Our goal should be to ensure that they are resolved peacefully, without resort to force and without degenerating into destabilizing conflicts. In order for this to happen, nations must be required to take their disputes to the International Court Of Justice (also known as the “World Court”). In other words, the World Court must be granted compulsory jurisdiction over all disputes between countries to which all nations must submit without exceptions and opt-outs. Moreover, the judgments of the World Court must be binding upon the parties to any conflict or dispute and capable of enforcement by an international force. Without this, nations may choose to ignore the World Court’s verdicts with impunity, thereby undermining its credibility and increasing the chances of conflict.

In order for nations to agree to the strengthening of the World Court in this way, the Court must command both the respect and trust of all nations. This will only happen if it is viewed as adequately representing all nations and its judges are seen to be acting fairly and in the collective interest of the community of nations. These judges must be unbiased and beyond moral reproach. The key to creating this type of confidence lies in the manner in which judges are elected to the World Court. As an initial matter, it is important that they be elected rather than appointed. The question then arises as to how the international community might conduct an election that ensures broad representation. The author of this article believes that Bahá’í scholars can offer some useful ideas and principles to the international community based on an examination of the method Abdu’l-Bahá has proposed for the eventual election of the “Supreme Tribunal.” Abdu’l-Bahá has proposed a two-stage election of judges: the first step requires the parliament of each country to elect two or three national representative in direct proportion to the size of its population. The election of these representatives is to be confirmed by the legislature, the executive branch and head of state of each country. Abdu’l-Bahá then goes on to suggest a second step in which the members of the “Supreme Tribunal” are to be elected

from among these representatives, without specifying who the electorate will be at this second stage [SWAB 306-307]. Although we do not know when this “Supreme Tribunal” as envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh and Abdu’l-Bahá will come into being, there is no reason why we cannot use Abdu’l-Bahá’s proposed method for electing its members as a blueprint from which we can derive ideas and principles to share with the international community which in turn can use them as it sees fit in order to bolster the credibility and perceived trustworthiness of the World Court in the eyes of the peoples of the world by making it increasingly representative of all peoples and governments.

Once elected, the judges of the World Court must act independently and free of political pressure or other. Their appointments should be for a fixed term and they should be banned from seeking future governmental appointments.

In the Event of a Breach of the Peace, What Is Needed to Restore Peace Quickly and Effectively

Regardless of how strong and effective a well-crafted a system of collective security is, it is unlikely to forestall all conflict. There will probably be instances – hopefully rare – in which a country will be tempted to act in ways that disrupt international or regional peace. In those instances an effective collective security system must be capable of swiftly bringing the country to heel and restoring the peace for which it needs a strong enforcement mechanism ideally in the form of a standing international force.

Establish an International Standing Force

In the event that a nation violates one of the provisions of the Covenant, thereby breaching the peace, or engages in behavior that threatens peace such as sponsoring terrorist groups, engaging in gross and widespread human rights abuses or illegally producing and acquiring nuclear weapons, the Security Council must have at its immediate disposal troops and equipment ready to deploy rapidly and effectively to maintain or restore the peace. Without such enforcement capability, the

Covenant is a dead letter and the Security Council loses its authority, effectiveness and credibility. Recent history is replete with examples of an ineffectual and weak Security Council. A few of these were mentioned above including the genocide in Darfur, illegal nuclear weapons programs in North Korea and Iran, and large-scale massacres and human rights abuses in Syria.

Many people and nations oppose the creation of an international standing force because they fear it may run amok and become a menace in the hands of a totalitarian world government. In order to convince these skeptics that an international standing force is vital to humanity's well-being and redounds to the best interests of all nations, they must first be persuaded to embrace three foundational principles articulated in the Writings.

The first principle is that force still has a role to play in international relations with the caveats that it be used collectively, in accordance with clear and pre-determined guidelines and by collective institutions that truly represent all the peoples of the world. In addition such force is to be used solely in the service of justice. Abdu'l-Bahá speaks to this point when He says that sometimes war is a "powerful basis of peace" and "ruin the very means of reconstruction" [SDC 70]. He goes on to say that if war is waged for a righteous purpose then "this apparent tyranny [is] the very substance of justice and this warfare the cornerstone of peace" [SDC 71].

An analogy that comes to mind in conveying the necessity for the occasional collective use of force is that of chemotherapy – a remedy consisting of harsh chemicals – that is nevertheless used to rid the body of cancer. Although many healthy cells are destroyed along with the cancerous ones, the alternative strategy of doing nothing is not a viable one. The sacrifice of some healthy cells is necessary for the greater goal of saving the patient. If we focus on ensuring that all cells stay intact, we are likely to lose the patient altogether.

The second principle is that national sovereignty must be curtailed. This principle [WOB 40] was implicitly recognized in the context of the use of force when the UN Charter was crafted. The framers recognized there would be instances where

the use of force was necessary. They therefore made provision for nations to enter into agreements with the Security Council to contribute armed forces, assistance and facilities to the Council for use in the event that the peace was threatened or broken.¹ Unfortunately, because of the unwillingness of nations to forego their hold on absolute sovereignty especially in the area of military power and more particularly in relation to the composition, maintenance and location of forces, the relevant provisions of the Charter were never implemented, thereby severely weakening the effectiveness and authority of the Security Council from its birth.

The third principle is that the good of the part can best be reached by assuring the good of the whole [WOB 198]. In other words, a nation can effectively guarantee its well-being, if it assures the good of the community of nations as a whole. This means that when there is a threat to the peace or a breach thereof, the response must be a collective one, undertaken by collective institutions such as a revamped Security Council and a standing force that represent all the nations. Moreover, the response must be in accordance with rules that have been determined collectively in advance.

Once nations embrace these principles, they will more readily accept the need for a standing force that is independent of the whim of any one nation or group of nations and free of the bane of expediency, as it unabashedly enforces the International Covenant and upholds international law.

Determine the Criteria and Conditions for Use of a Standing Force

In addition to creating an international standing force, it is imperative that the criteria by which it can act to enforce the peace be pre-determined by all nations collectively. Currently, under the terms of the UN Charter, the Security Council may use force in order to restore or maintain peace where there is a threat to that peace, a breach of the peace or an act of aggression.² However, these terms are not defined. This is a flaw that needs to be remedied. The definition should identify the triggering circumstances under which a standing force can act

and should include the following: gross human rights abuses such as genocide, the illicit production, acquisition or sale of nuclear capabilities in contravention of international laws, state sponsorship of terrorism, a build-up of arms, territorial aggression, failure to implement a judgment of the World Court (especially where this is likely to give rise to conflict), and breach of any provisions of the International Covenant.³

Gradual Steps Towards The Creation of A Standing Force

As mentioned above, states are likely to be resistant to the establishment of an international standing force. Therefore, they might find it more palatable if this is done in incremental steps. The first step proposed here would involve creating regional security organizations each with their own standing force. In this first stage all these regional standing forces would coordinate their activities as part of a loose network encompassing the planet. It will be easier for a nation to embrace this step, as experience has demonstrated that it is easier for nations to cede sovereignty over national security to a regional organization than to an international one.⁴ This is so for a number of reasons including the fact that language and culture are often shared in a region creating more trust and understanding. Also, a decentralized regional organization tends not to raise the same feared specter as a distant centralized authority making decisions from afar without an adequate understanding of the facts on the ground and the potentially adverse ramifications of its decisions. Moreover, there is a stronger incentive for a nation to collaborate in preserving regional security because it is more keenly and directly impacted by things that go awry in its backyard and it is therefore in its self-interest to engage in efforts to keep its region secure.

Once this loosely integrated network of regional security organizations and attendant standing forces is established and functioning for some time, the second step can be taken. This step requires these regional security organizations to formalize their relationship with the Security Council and make their forces available for its use. This step has the added benefit that the Security Council, with its finger on the security pulse of the

planet, can allocate primary responsibility for the security of each region to the relevant regional security organization. The operating principle would be that a threat to any one nation is to be viewed as a threat to all in the region. However, before using regional force in any given situation, the regional security organization would first need to seek the approval of the Security Council, as is currently required under the terms of the UN Charter⁵ except in a dire emergency in which it could be allowed to act first and seek ratification later. Finally, an additional benefit in having the Security Council coordinate security activities world-wide, is that it can specify a time frame within which the regional force must solve the regional problem. Then, in the event that the regional force is unable to meet the deadline, the Security Council can call upon other regional forces to lend their assistance. This kind of incremental solidarity in solving problems will slowly create trust and teach regions of the world to work together for the common cause of peace.

Eventually, the world would be ready for the third and final step which would require consolidating and integrating the various regional forces so that they function as permanent units of a truly independent standing army each stationed in their regional locations. Such an arrangement makes operational sense in that the forces are physically close to conflicts that may arise in their region and can therefore act more swiftly. It is also makes more fiscal sense as it eliminates the costs of transporting them over vast distances and setting up new regional quarters every time there is a new conflict. At this stage, these units will operate solely at the behest of the Security Council and completely independently of the individual nations or regional groups of nations. They will, however, engage in regular joint training exercises, and have integrated communications systems, compatible equipment and a shared language so that they can work together in unity in a seamless and effective fashion if needed.⁶

The Benefits of an International Standing Force

The creation of an international standing force will yield many benefits. Among them is deterrence: nations are likely to consider the consequences of collective action against them

before they flout international laws with impunity. Another benefit is that the authority of international laws and institutions will be upheld, not just in word, but also in practice. In addition, having pre-agreed rules that determine when the standing force can be used means that international agencies like the Security Council, tasked with preserving the peace of the planet can act quickly, decisively and effectively without vacillating and nip a problem in the bud without allowing it to fester and mushroom into a full-blown war. There is also the added bonus that no one nation's military is overstretched nor does it have to bear an unfair and disproportionate burden either financially or in human resources. Last, but not least, such a collective system will ensure that the rules are applied equally across the board to all violators of the peace.

Conclusion

The world is in desperate need of an effective system of collective security that will deter nations from entering into conflicts and restore the peace in the rare event that it is breached. The creation of such a system is not only possible but inevitable. It requires that a handful of enlightened and visionary leaders motivated solely by a desire for peace, enter into an agreement to create such a system. To be effective, this collective security system must at the very least, limit the amount of arms each nation can have, eliminate all nuclear weapons, strengthen the World Court and create an incrementally integrated international standing force.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Ma'ani Ewing, Sovaida. *Collective Security Within Reach*. Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 2008.

NOTES

¹ UN Charter, Articles 43-46.

² UN Charter, Article 42.

³ Sovaida Ma'ani Ewing, *Collective Security Within Reach*, pp. 121-122.

⁴ The African Standby Force and the European Rapid Reaction Force are good examples.

⁵ UN Charter, Chapter VIII.

⁶ For a more detailed analysis, see Ewing, *Collective Security*, pp. 159-168.