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Q3(b)

Discuss the conceptual dimensions of collective security

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Key concepts in International Relations

Key concepts in International Relations: National interest, Security and power; Balance of power and deterrence; Transnational actors and collective security; World capitalist economy and globalisation.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the conceptual dimensions of collective security
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

Collective security treats peace as indivisible and aggression as everyone's business.

Claude contrasted it with balance of power and with world state.

The League failed; the Charter put force decisions in the Security Council.

NATO is collective defence, not the same inclusive machine.

The veto and weak automaticity are the built-in conceptual limits.

Introduction

Collective security is the idea that peace is a common good and that aggression against one is the concern of all. It is a legal-political design, not a synonym for every alliance.

Body**Core concept**

- **Inis Claude** treated collective security as an alternative both to a pure balance of power and to world government.
- The community of States agrees in advance to identify aggression and to combine against the aggressor, including former friends.
- Universality, automaticity of response, and the indivisibility of peace are the classical dimensions.

Legal architecture

- The League of Nations Covenant tried the idea and failed over Manchuria and Ethiopia.
- The UN Charter, Chapters VI and VII, especially **Articles 39** to 42, locates determination and measures in the Security Council.
- **Article 51** preserves individual and collective self-defence until the Council acts. That clause is the hinge toward alliances.

Distinctions that matter

- **Collective security is inclusive:** the aggressor is unknown in advance. NATO is collective defence against a named outside threat.

- Peacekeeping is a later practical overlay, often with consent, not the full Chapter VII vision of the **Military Staff Committee**.
- Humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect borrow the language of common peace and split the original State-consent core.

Conditions and failures

- Great-power concert is required. The veto is the Charter's admission that collective security yields to polarity, which Waltz would treat as structural fact.
- Without agreed definition of aggression, and without troops on call, the concept becomes a resolution rather than a system.

Flow diagram

Collective security -> Universal against unknown aggressor
Collective security -> UN Charter VII
UN Charter VII -> Veto polarity
NATO -> Collective defence named threat

Conclusion

Collective security's dimensions are universal membership, prior commitment against unknown aggressors, and centralised enforcement. The UN Charter writes that design and then qualifies it with the veto and **Article 51**. Alliances such as NATO are cousins, not the same concept.

Facts & figures

Inis Claude

Mapped collective security as a distinct system requiring commitment against an undefined future aggressor.

UN Charter **Articles 39-42**

Council determination of threat, breach, or aggression, then non-forcible and forcible measures.

Article 51

Inherent right of self-defence, individual or collective, until the Security Council has taken measures.

League failures

Manchuria and Ethiopia showed that members would not automatically combine against a powerful aggressor.