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Q3(b)

Collective security and responsibility to protect (R2P) are uniform neither in scope, goals and methods. Explain

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- Define collective security (League, UN Charter, all-against-the-aggressor)
- **Define R2P (ICISS, 2005 World Summit):** prevent, react, rebuild; sovereignty as responsibility)
- Compare scope, goals and methods
- Show why practice is not uniform (P5, **Libya vs Syria**, selectivity)

Revision summary

Collective security is all-against-the-aggressor under League and UN Chapter VII logic.

R2P (**ICISS 2001**, **World Summit 2005**) treats sovereignty as responsibility to prevent mass atrocity.

- **Goals differ:** interstate peace versus protection of populations; methods differ: central war versus a ladder to last-resort force.

NATO **Article 5** is collective defence, not UN collective security.

Libya, Syria and P5 vetoes show neither doctrine is uniform in practice.

Introduction

Collective security is the old hope that peace is indivisible: aggression against one is aggression against all. Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a post-1990s claim that sovereignty includes a duty to protect populations from mass atrocity, and that the international community may act if the state fails. They rhyme. They are not the same instrument, and neither is uniform in scope, goals or methods.

Body

Collective security

The League of Nations failed the test in Manchuria and Abyssinia. The **UN Charter tried again: Article 2(4) bans force; Chapter VII lets the Security Council name threats and authorise measures, including force. Korea (1950) and the 1991 Gulf War are the textbook 'successes', each with a Cold War or post-Cold War asterisk. Collective security's goal** is interstate peace and the defeat of a named aggressor. Its **method** is centralised authorisation, ideally universal. Its **scope** is legally the whole membership, politically whatever the **P5** will allow. NATO **Article 5** is **collective defence**, a club guarantee, not UN collective security - a distinction examiners mark.

R2P

After Rwanda and Srebrenica, the **ICISS (2001)** and the **2005 World Summit paragraphs 138-139** named **three pillars: the state's responsibility, international assistance, and timely response including, in last resort, Chapter VII force**. The **goal** is protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity - not regime change as a stated end, and not every human-rights violation. The **method is a ladder: diplomacy, sanctions, arms embargoes, then force**. The **scope** is narrower than 'all aggression' and wider than interstate war: it looks inside borders.

Not uniform

Libya 2011 used R2P language and a no-fly resolution; the campaign's drift toward removing Gaddafi poisoned the well. Syria showed vetoes and corpse counts. Myanmar, Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine display four different mixes of law, interest and paralysis. Collective security against Russia in 2022 was a General Assembly majority and Western sanctions, not a Chapter VII army - because a P5 member was the aggressor. R2P is **selectively invoked** when it fits a coalition; Global South states remember Kosovo, Iraq and Libya as warnings. **Hedley Bull** would say order and justice collide. **Mohammed Ayoob's** subaltern realism says weak states fear R2P as a door for the strong.

Uniformity would need a disinterested council and equal sovereignty in practice. Neither exists. The doctrines remain useful as **standards of criticism**. They are poor as predictions.

Flow diagram

Collective security -> Defeat aggressor
 R2P -> Stop atrocity
 Collective security -> UNSC / UNSC / P5
 R2P -> UNSC / P5
 UNSC / P5 -> Selective practice

Conclusion

Collective security targets the aggressor state for the sake of interstate peace. R2P targets atrocity inside a state for the sake of people. Goals, scope and methods differ, and P5 politics make both uneven. That unevenness is the doctrine's living history, not an accident.

Facts & figures

World Summit 2005

Paragraphs 138-139 endorsed R2P: four crimes, three pillars, no new legal right to unilateral humanitarian war.

ICISS 2001

Canadian-sponsored commission that coined Responsibility to Protect after Kosovo and Rwanda.

UN Charter Ch. VII

Council may determine threats to peace and authorise measures; the legal core of collective security.

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