

International Security Institutions: Current Challenges and Prospects for Reform

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Abstract

This study aims to identify problems that undermine the effectiveness of international security institutions in maintaining global peace and security, and to propose possible approaches to updating their protocols for action. The secondary goal of the study is to determine if the functions and powers of international security institutions account for modern threats to global security. The study looks into the performance of the following international organisations: the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Council of Europe (CoE), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) focusing on legal documents that have been regulating their decisions during 2014-2025. The study showed that 2014 became a turning point for the collective security system. A full-scale war that broke out in Europe exposed the lack of adequate responses from security organisations. The fact that participation in these organisations and international security agreements is voluntary and can be terminated at any time makes the entire system vulnerable. The likelihood of a strong member withdrawing not only weakens the collective security system but also disrupts the balance in global security. The existing paradoxes in the decision-making protocols contribute to the collapse of the collective security system. This problem can only be solved by completely eliminating the parties to the conflict from the decision-making process. The present findings can serve as a basis for further research in the field of collective and global security.

Keywords: International Security; NATO; Nuclear Plants; UN Procedure; War

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Introduction

Due to changes in the geopolitical landscape, the collective security system, which formed over decades and was considered capable of ensuring global peace, is increasingly proving ineffective in the 2020s. The growing number and scale of armed conflicts, the openly aggressive policies of certain countries, war crimes and mass violations of human rights, coupled with the inability of international institutions to confront these challenges adequately, indicate that the entire global security system is in a deep crisis. According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) (2024), the world has become 12 times less safe between 2008 and 2024; of 163 countries in the GPI, 46 are assessed as having a below-average level of peacefulness. At the same time, the understanding of collective security becomes broader and more encompassing; the framework now extends beyond security protection to other areas, such as health threats, the aftermath of emergencies, climate change, and humanitarian crises, thereby covering the domains of high (military conflicts and nuclear security) and low (other security threats) politics (Ozguc & Rabbani, 2023).

The collective security crisis of the 21st Century is not the first crisis of this kind. The League of Nations' efforts collapsed in the same way when its idealistic principles prevented it from countering Japanese aggression in 1932 (Chen, 2020). After 1945, a new, more extensive system was created, which incorporates both global and regional security institutions (that is, the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Union, and Council of Europe), but the crisis reemerged in the 2020s. An outdated decision-making system that is unable to respond quickly and objectively to changes in world politics slows response time, if not completely neutralises the ability of security institutions to preserve peace, thereby affecting their effectiveness. Some decision-making algorithms lead to a paradox: the aggressor state has the power to veto decisions made by the UN Security Council.

Moreover, the frequency with which a member state exercises its veto directly correlates with the aggressiveness and destructiveness of its foreign policy. In particular, Russia was recorded to have been using the Security Council veto twice as often as other members of the Council since 1991, while pursuing an aggressive policy against the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Georgia, and Moldova, inciting conflicts in Africa, and ultimately launching an open assault on Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Despite this, debates concerning the reform of the UN Security Council have revolved around its structure and composition, even though both have little impact on the Council's effectiveness in maintaining peace. Fundamental changes require that the Security Council review its powers, reform its decision-making procedures, and develop tools for peace enforcement (Hadano, 2018). Regional institutions are hardly more effective. For example, the OSCE's consensus principle, by which it operates, made it impossible for it to adequately respond to international aggression in Europe.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demonstrates an almost complete inability to respond adequately in a global crisis. Unlike other international institutions, the IAEA has a narrowly focused goal of ensuring the safety of nuclear facilities and nuclear non-proliferation. This mission aims solely to ensure humanity's physical existence. The military assault and occupation of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP) by Russia, however, which threatens compliance with nuclear safety principles, exposed the complete inability of the IAEA to carry out its functions in a real crisis. The likely reason for this inability is the lack of effective mechanisms to compel the violator to stop illegal actions.

Political debates and contradictions within NATO cannot help but cause concern. Created in the mid-20th Century as the main transatlantic forum for military and political operations, the North Atlantic Alliance faces today the fact that its foundations no longer meet the conditions of the present. This necessitates expanding NATO's

activities in areas related to economic security and finding effective deterrents against hybrid threats (CSIS, 2024).

This study offers a comprehensive perspective on the challenge of ensuring global security. It provides an analytical foundation for revising the functions of international security institutions. The study opens with a review of the relevant literature, followed by a detailed account of the materials and methods employed. It then presents the results, accompanied by a critical analysis and discussion of the findings.

Literature Review

Global peace requires increased attention in the 21st Century. Several conceptual points can be made in this regard. The international scene is in a state of turbulence – changes in international leadership accompany elevated threat level, but there are no effective responses from international institutions (Ximing et al., 2020). Despite globalisation processes, national interests continue to play a crucial role in how international players respond to global crises. This calls for a shift towards collective interests (Dermawan, 2020). International institutions can serve as a platform for promoting national interests in a variety of areas that are recognised as crucial for national security (Putra et al., 2024). However, it is not possible to balance such interests without international cooperation at the global and regional levels, nor is it possible to resolve conflicts, directly deter threats, or enforce international law in these conditions (Pierre et al., 2024). The lack of interjurisdictional cooperation makes it impossible to counteract and combat global crimes, in particular terrorism (Singh, 2021). What cannot be ignored is that we cannot confront many modern-day threats at the national level alone. Additional risk factors are the cross-border nature of cybercrime, the widespread use of social networks by criminal groups, the rapid development of technologies,

the convergence of cybercrime and terrorism, etc. The expanding threat landscape requires a combination of organisational and technical efforts to counter hybrid challenges (Farmer, 2025). The problems of global security manifest in areas that are not related to it at first glance. For example, research on global warming highlights a direct connection between shifting weather patterns and changes in terrorist activity (Dmello & Neudecker, 2024). From this perspective, there is a whole range of new threats that either do not fall into the category of global security issues or do not receive due attention as of now.

Research focuses on the performance of international institutions whose activities include ensuring global peace. In particular, researchers have highlighted the role of the United Nations, whose repertoire of functions has expanded since 1945 from ensuring peace and preventing conflict to achieving sustainable development goals. Despite a generally positive assessment of the UN's performance, it is indicated that the beginning of aggression against Ukraine in 2014 became a challenge to which the UN was unable to offer an effective solution (Chettri & Sekhar, 2022). Among the main reasons for a decline in the effectiveness of the UN's global peace efforts are the rapid change in the balance of political powers in the world and advances in technology (Nasu, 2021). Sanctions are among the main instruments the UN uses in response to violations of international law (Sutikno, 2024). However, because this instrument requires the involvement of the UN Security Council, this mechanism often remains unrealised, in particular, in connection with Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

NATO's role as a deterrent against a communist threat lost its relevance with the collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact¹ bloc. This forced the Alliance to reconsider its goals and objectives for

¹ The Warsaw Pact was a military alliance formed in 1955 by the Soviet Union and several Eastern European countries during the Cold War. It was created mainly as a response to NATO, the Western military alliance. The pact aimed to ensure mutual defence and to keep Soviet

influence over Eastern Europe. It lasted until 1991, when the Cold War was ending, and communist governments in the region collapsed.

the first time. It is no longer limited to maintaining collective security; NATO membership has become an instrument of foreign policy. Countries within the Alliance share an interest in global peace and democracy (Kutllovci & Çeku, 2024). The shift was prompted by a terrorist attack on the USA on 11 September 2001. The problems the Alliance may concern itself with include terrorism and other threats to humanity, such as religious extremism, global warming, possible energy crises, humanitarian challenges in areas of natural disasters, and more. At the same time, it remains unchanged that NATO is most active when the interests of the United States come into the forefront (Rehman et al., 2022). In the 21st Century, globalisation processes and technological advancement have reached a level where new threats have arisen that cannot be territorially limited. These include cyberterrorism, access to technologies for creating weapons of mass destruction, biological threats, and the possibility of deploying weapons in space (Guchua, 2023). This indicates that extending protection exclusively to Alliance member states is an outdated strategy. However, there is a real possibility that NATO's policies may change. The unique structure of NATO, which combines its military identity with value orientations, allows the Alliance to balance and adapt to new conditions (Flockhart, 2024). That is why NATO membership as a guarantee of security in the event of aggression against democratic values remains a desirable goal for some countries today (Kutllovci & Çeku, 2024).

In the 2020s, the role of critical studies of global security is growing, including in areas that offer alternative approaches to understanding what constitutes a threat to security. Moving away from the traditional assessment of war as the main threat, researchers identify migration, cyber threats, chronic poverty, climate change, epidemics, and others, as threats, thus broadening the understanding of security (Wallace & Romaniuk, 2023). The formation of the post-colonial space also marked a turning point in the understanding of security, underscoring the need to account for historical and geographical realities (Dwyer et al., 2023).

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that the countries of the Global South have their own understanding of threats and legitimacy, which requires a balance of priorities (Al-Bulushi et al., 2022).

The war in Ukraine has drawn attention to the safety of nuclear facilities in combat zones. Nuclear power plants are considered an instrument of military and political influence. International standards and protocols that worked in peacetime turned out to be ineffective during war, whereas the system for nuclear safety became compromised (Przybylak, 2024).

Assessing the effectiveness of the collective security system thus requires that problems affecting the functioning of all security institutions be considered comprehensively. The current study offers a look at specific cases related to Russia's war on Ukraine from the perspective of various security institutions.

Arguably, maintaining global peace today requires an integrated international security framework. Revising approaches to collective security and related instruments from time to time is not uncommon. At the same time, developments in international politics in the 2020s revealed the need for fundamentally new approaches to collective security. Cosmetic changes in the form of restructuring no longer achieve the desired effect, prompting a complete revision of how international security institutions operate, what powers they must have, and how best to influence those who pose a threat to global security.

This study aims to identify problems that hinder the effectiveness of institutional structures in the collective security system by looking into concrete cases. The objectives of the study, therefore, are:

- To discuss the concept of a collective security system and what makes it ineffective in war conditions;
- To explore the right of veto as a critical obstacle to making adequate decisions on resolving an aggressive war, focusing on Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014

as a prime example, the right of veto was used during the Syrian Civil War.

- To determine the role of NATO in the context of providing security guarantees and related issues; and
- To investigate the functionality crisis of the IAEA in conditions of military aggression, including against the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (February-March 2022) and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (since March 2022).

Materials and Methods

The present study discusses and assesses the actions taken by collective security institutions (that is, the UN, NATO, and IAEA) in response to Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine and its encroachment on Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity. The goal is to determine how effective the instruments in their arsenal are when applied to address the violations of international law in the context of a military confrontation between two states. This study draws on data illustrating Russia's non-compliance with international agreements in the field of global security, including the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), the Treaty between the United States and the Russian federation on Strategic Arms Reduction (START III), the Treaty on Open Skies and the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF) (NATO, 2024).

CFE was designed to limit large-scale conventional military equipment (such as tanks, artillery, and aircraft) in Europe to reduce the risk of conflict after the Cold War. START III were agreements between the United States and Russia aimed at reducing the number of deployed nuclear weapons and delivery systems. The Treaty on Open Skies allowed participating states to conduct unarmed observation flights over each other's territory to promote transparency and build trust about military activities. INF Treaty eliminated an entire class of land-based missiles with short and intermediate ranges, significantly reducing the risk of sudden nuclear escalation in Europe.

The study also discusses Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe, the prospects for pending cases and unimplemented decisions (Council of Europe, 2022a), resolutions related to the annexation of Crimea (United Nations, 2014a, 2014b) and Yemen (United Nations, 2015); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reports (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2017), The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI, 2025), United Nations Veto List (United Nations, 2025a); Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies Report (SANA'A, 2020). The study employed triangulation of data sources (using official UN data, analytical reports from independent expert organisations, and media information).

The study consists of four stages. The *first stage* examines how international security institutions operate in light of modern challenges and global contradictions. The concept of a collective security system was considered from the perspective of how it has changed and what aspects it covers today. The difference between collective and global security has been determined. By analysing how Russia has violated the European Convention on Human Rights and the aforementioned treaties (NATO, 2024), this study highlights the challenges of maintaining compliance with security agreements in times of war.

The *second stage* involves identifying the problem areas that affect the collective security system's performance, hindering its effectiveness in responding to security threats. The results of the UN General Assembly and Security Council's votes on resolutions concerning the territorial integrity of Ukraine has been considered, with special attention paid to the veto power of the UN Security Council member states as a critical obstacle to making adequate decisions on war resolution. An analogy is drawn with the voting on UN resolutions concerning the situation during the civil war in Syria. The situation with voting on UN resolutions in general from 1946 to September 2025 is analysed, highlighting the countries that exercised their veto rights and the cases in which they did so. The effectiveness of Resolution 2216

regarding the crisis in Yemen is examined. The cases were selected for their representativeness and for demonstrating different types of threats: full-scale war (Ukraine) and internal civil conflict (Syria, Yemen). The *third stage* focuses on examining the problems with NATO's performance as a security-guarantee donor. The *fourth stage* entails identifying problems that affect the operation of nuclear power plants and thus threaten global security, focusing on the military occupation of the Chernobyl (February-March 2022) and Zaporizhzhia (since March 2022) nuclear power plants, Al-Qibaar in Syria.

The study was conducted amid the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, which exposed problems with the collective security system. However, it is important to note that the researchers have no conflicts of interest.

Results

The Performance of International Security Institutions in the Context of Modern Challenges and Global Contradictions

Collective security is a framework designed primarily to prevent military conflicts through cooperation between states. This cooperation is governed by international agreements that outline the fundamental principle upon which the framework is built — aggression against one member is considered an aggression against all members, which must join forces to counter the aggressor. Usually, when it comes to collective security, one refers to a global system of sorts (Britannica, 2025). In academic literature, collective security is defined as an institutionalised, universal or regional system in which states have agreed to collectively counter any manifestations of aggression or other unlawful use of force against any member state of such a system (Rehman et al., 2022). The concept of collective security thus has both global and regional dimensions. Conceptually, collective security arrangements require that states respond to any threats regardless of their location, if such threats pose a danger to the system as a whole (Ozguç & Rabbani, 2023), but this extends to areas that are not part of the framework in the classical sense, such as viral threats, climate change, humanitarian crises,

etc. (Dmello & Neudecker, 2024). From this perspective, collective security is more than just a tool for ensuring global security. Each collective security system that is created must not only fulfil the interests of its members but also be able to respond appropriately to any challenge that may have global consequences. Such a response cannot be ensured at the national (sometimes regional) level. Until recently, the existing institutions of collective security (that is, the UN, OSCE, EU, and the Council of Europe) demonstrated the ability to fulfil the tasks assigned to them. The first signs of a crisis began to appear in the 2010s; the first clear indication of the shift was the annexation of Crimea in 2014, when the most common reaction to an open military invasion and violation of treaty obligations was an expression of “deep concern”.

Historical experience shows that in the *absence* of effective leverage, international institutions are unable to confront real global threats, and that the existing instruments themselves *need to be revised systematically*. The evidence for the first statement is the League of Nations' performance, which, despite all efforts, proved unable to prevent the outbreak of World War II. As its legal successor, the UN has demonstrated its ability to manage international processes for a long time. However, its blatant failures in deterring Russia's military aggression against Ukraine indicate that the instruments available in its arsenal no longer meet the requirements of modern times. To one degree or another, this also applies to other security institutions. The problem primarily lies in the fact that the collective security system, founded on voluntary agreements, does not provide for serious consequences if those agreements are violated. The collective security system thus relies heavily on the good faith of its members. At the same time, non-compliance with or withdrawal from security agreements may have serious consequences for global security, affecting all participants in the system or individual participants in one way or another.

Russia's starting the war against Ukraine is an example of how easily the balance can be upset.

This event destroyed more than thirty years of cooperation with NATO and all contractual agreements without any serious consequences for Russia (Table 1), while global security continues to remain threatened.

Table 1: Russia's Fulfilment of Its Obligations under Global Security Treaties

Treaties	Russia's actions	Consequences for Russia
CFE Treaty	Russia withdrew from the Treaty on 7 November 2023	The terms of the Treaty cannot be implemented without Russia's participation. Action suspended.
START III Treaty	Russia was found to be non-compliant with the terms of the Treaty, refused to hold bilateral consultations, and did not assist with US inspections	The word can no longer control nuclear buildup in the nuclear-weapon state
Treaty on Open Skies	Russia withdrew from the Treaty on 18 December 2021	Observation flights are now terminated, which reduces transparency
INF Treaty	Russia was found to be non-compliant with the terms of the Treaty	The United States suspended their participation in the Treaty (01 February 2019) and later withdrew from it (02 August 2019) due to Russia's failure to fulfil its obligations

Source: Developed by the Authors Using Data from the Official NATO Website (NATO, 2024)

Despite Russia's violation of previously signed security agreements, the country in question faced no consequences beyond concerns expressed by counterparties and calls for compliance with the agreement's terms (NATO, 2024). Moreover, if that was not enough, the violator can terminate their membership in the international institutions of collective security if it does not see any benefits for itself in continuing to be part of them. Russia, for example, withdrew from the Council of Europe in March 2022 (Council of Europe, 2022b). This action was preceded by its withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights. Despite Russia continuing to respect the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for another six months, in June 2022, the Russian parliament decided not to implement them (BBC, 2022), completely disregarding all international agreements. There are no mechanisms for enforcing these decisions. As of 16 September 2022, the ECHR was considering 17,450 complaints against the Russian Federation. In addition, 2,129 resolutions and decisions adopted by the ECHR earlier had not been implemented by the Russian Federation (Council of Europe, 2022a).

This incident shows that contractual agreements have no meaning for members of the collective security system when they lose their personal interest in such participation. Because participation is voluntary, there are no mechanisms to prevent non-compliance after the interest has been lost. At the same time, this is how new threats to global security arise. The design of the collective security system, which is built on the principle that weaker states join forces with stronger ones, significantly affects its stability, as the withdrawal of any strong member has a devastating effect.

Veto Power as a Critical Obstacle to Resolving an Aggressive War. Case-studies: Russia's Annexation of Crimea (2014), Civil War in Syria (2011-2024), Yemen (2025)

Violators of international law may refrain from withdrawing from treaties or leaving security institutions if preserving their membership status enables them to fulfil their interests. The most striking example of this phenomenon is that the UN Security Council continues to keep one of the primary transgressors – the Russian Federation – around, even though the country in question exercises its veto power while brazenly violating international law. From this

perspective, the main obstacle preventing countries in the collective security system from fulfilling their duties and responsibilities is the conflict of Interest.

The annexation of Crimea can be considered one of the crux points in assessing the effectiveness of the collective security system in the 21st Century, as it had territorial, political and legal consequences. This was the first case of a European country's territory being forcibly seized since 1945.

The timeline of events preceding the annexation highlights the following stages of the illegal acquisition of territory. In the period from November 2013 to February 2014, mass protests took place in Ukraine, triggered by an attempt by the pro-Russian government led by the fourth President Viktor Yanukovich to reorient the state's foreign policy from European integration to deepening relations with Russia. Since the Kremlin's attempts to influence these events did not yield any significant results, on 20 February 2014, the Russian Federation began a latent occupation of Crimea, resorting to actions aimed at "destabilising" the situation in Ukraine and forming the so-called "self-defense units". On 27 February 2014, the buildings of the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Council of Ministers of Crimea were seized, with the Russian flags being illegally installed. On 01 March 2014, the Russian military presence on the peninsula began to openly expand, the so-called "Declaration of Independence of Crimea" being announced ten days later on 11 March 2014. On 16 March 2014, the Russian occupation authorities organised a referendum, which not only took place illegally under Ukraine's domestic laws, but also was held under military occupation, putting into question the genuineness of the votes. The seizure concluded with the signing of the Treaty on Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia on 18 March 2014.

² The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a cornerstone international agreement aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, promoting peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and advancing nuclear disarmament. Under the treaty, non-nuclear-weapon states commit not to acquire nuclear weapons, while

The actions of the Russian Federation violated Article 2 of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of another state (United Nations, 2025b). Additionally, Russia has grossly violated the Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons² (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1994).

On 27 March 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution concerning the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine (A/RES/68/262), with 100 votes in favour, 11 against (the Russian Federation included), and 58 abstentions. The remaining 24 members were absent during the occasion (United Nations, 2014b). Thus, the overall pattern is as follows (Figure 1).

Even though a majority of votes adopted the Resolution, it cannot be ignored that, despite the bluntness of the issue at hand and the violation of the UN Charter by Russia, the said majority cannot be called absolute. One may argue that members who abstained or voted against it made decisions based primarily on their own interests, rather than the interests of collective security, and without taking into account the apparent violation of international law by the Russian Federation, which is another evidence of the crisis within the UN system.

By comparison, the Security Council's decision-making process regarding the draft resolution of 15 March 2014 on the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine demonstrated that parties were more united on their stance concerning the Russian Federation's encroachments on the territorial integrity and security of Ukraine, with 13 votes in favour, one against (Russia), and one abstention (China) (United Nations, 2014a).

nuclear-weapon states commit to pursue disarmament and share civilian nuclear technology under international safeguards. Ukraine joined the NPT in 1994 as a non-nuclear-weapon state, following its decision to give up the nuclear arsenal it inherited after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

How countries voted on the resolution calling to reaffirm Ukraine's territorial integrity

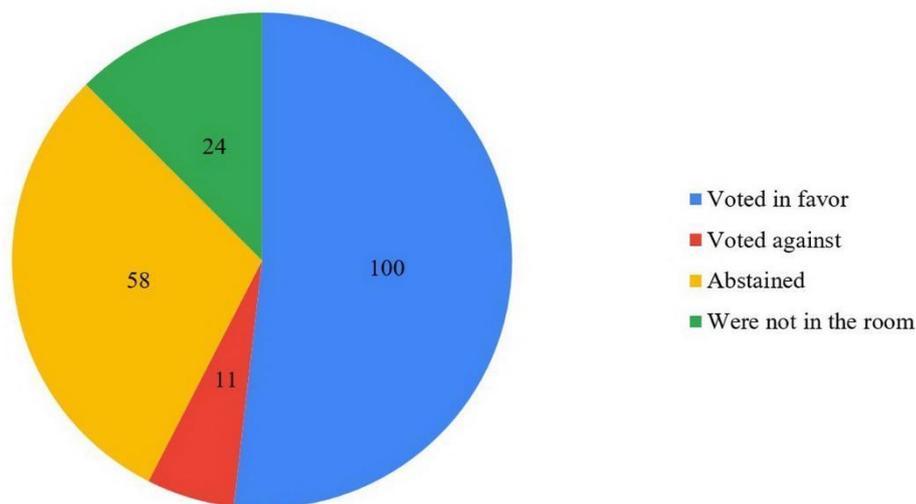


Figure 1: The Ukraine UN Resolution Vote Count

Source: Developed by the Authors based on Data from the United Nations (2014b)

However, this vote revealed another flaw in the UN decision-making procedure: its actions can be blocked by the aggressor country. The occupation of Crimea exposed the inability of the existing collective security system to counteract manifestations of aggressive policies, which had an irreparable impact on its image and created a dangerous precedent, when the violator did not suffer any significant consequences and resorted to even more aggressive actions as a result. The growth of the Russian military presence, followed by military actions in 2022, negatively affected the security of the Black Sea region (Atlantic Council Task Force on Black Sea Security, 2023). In turn, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has documented massive human rights violations in occupied Crimea throughout the years of occupation, including the targeted persecution of leaders of the Crimean Tatar people (United Nations, 2024).

A comparable impasse emerged during the Syrian civil war, when draft resolutions designed to ensure accountability for unlawful violence were repeatedly obstructed. This obstruction extended to investigations undertaken by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, despite credible evidence confirming the Syrian government's deployment of

chemical weapons—acts that constitute war crimes under international law (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2017). In total, four resolutions addressing the Syrian crisis were vetoed by Russia and China (22 May 2014; 19 July 2012; 4 February 2012; 4 October 2011) (United Nations, 2025a). The UN General Assembly's inability to act decisively in the face of such obstruction underscores the institutional paralysis that has prolonged this humanitarian emergency.

Between 1946 and September 2025, the veto was exercised 244 times by six permanent members of the Security Council: the United States, the former USSR, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France. Of these, 53 vetoes concerned resolutions on the Middle East, 7 on Syria, and 4 on Ukraine (United Nations, 2025a). The pattern reveals a continuity in Russian foreign policy, whereby the Russian Federation has systematically pursued the blocking strategy initiated by the USSR, whose succession it formally claims (Figure 2). This continuity highlights the enduring role of the veto as a geopolitical instrument, shaping the limits of collective action in international humanitarian crises and raising critical questions about the capacity of the UN system to uphold its

foundational principles of peace and accountability.

UN vetoes 1946- September 2025

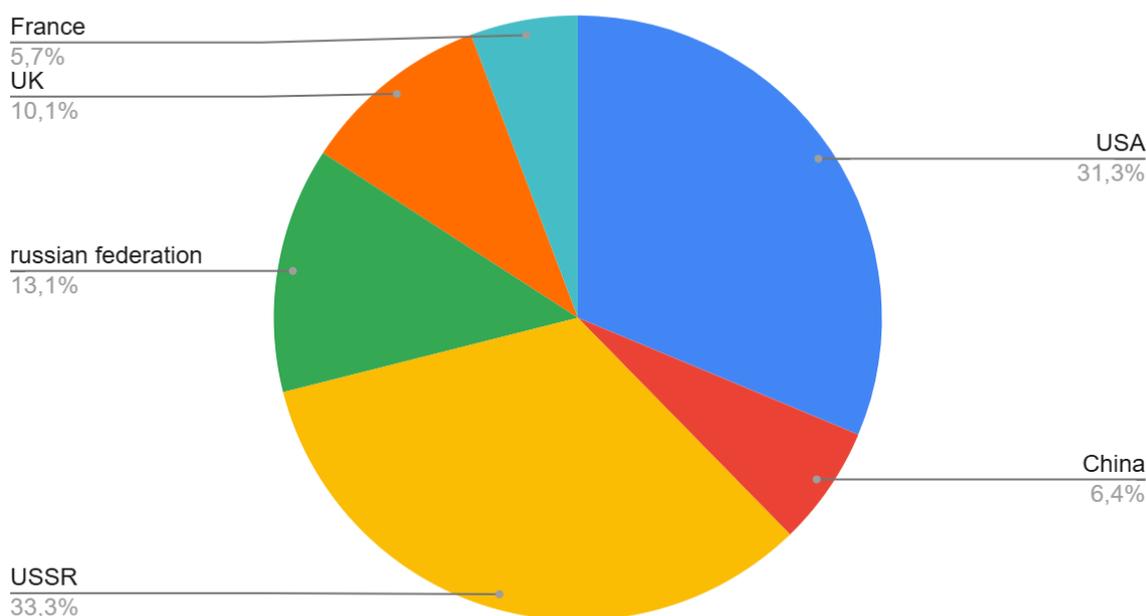


Figure 2: Use of the Veto Power by UN Member States between 1946 and September 2025
Source: Developed by the Authors based on Data from the United Nations (2025a)

At the same time, it should be noted that adopting a UN resolution does not guarantee a positive outcome. For example, Resolution 2216, adopted on 14 April 2015, introduced a targeted arms embargo and expanded the sanctions list in connection with the situation in Yemen (United Nations, 2015). However, this resolution was not successful because it did not take into account all aspects of the conflict (SANA'A, 2020), including local specifics (obstruction of humanitarian deliveries, local administrative barriers) (United Nations, 2021). Thus, although Resolution 2216 was adopted, its practical significance in resolving the Yemeni crisis was minimal. Therefore, UN decisions require not only a solution to the problem of their inability to be blocked by individual members, but also additional mechanisms to ensure their implementation. The analysis of the Yemen case

also shows the UN's limited ability to influence protracted regional conflicts of a non-European nature, due to its limited understanding of regional specifics. On the other hand, states lacking the resources and institutional capacity to provide their own security are frequently forced to depend on external actors for military assistance, security guarantees, or conflict mediation. This dependence highlights a broader pattern relevant to the Global South, where security vacuums tend to invite external involvement that can reshape local conflicts and constrain national autonomy.

It should also be noted that, while a global body such as the UN is often paralysed by the veto power, regional organisations can achieve successful outcomes. An example of this is the African Union mission³ aimed at stabilising the situation in Somalia (Aussom, 2025).

³ The African Union mission in Somalia refers to a long-running regional peace and security operation launched in 2007 to support the Somali government in restoring stability after decades of state collapse and conflict. The

mission has focused on combating the Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab, protecting key population centres and infrastructure, supporting humanitarian assistance, and helping to rebuild Somali security institutions. Widely seen

Problems Associated with the Provision of Security Guarantees by NATO

Contemporary manifestations of aggression extend well beyond conventional military deployments. A central issue in this context concerns the conditions under which Article 5⁴ of the North Atlantic Treaty may be invoked in response to hybrid forms of aggression. Notably, such practices predate the twenty-first century, as evidenced by a Russian cyberattack against Estonia's digital infrastructure that severely disrupted essential services. Nevertheless, these cyber operations were formally acknowledged as potential grounds for triggering Article 5 only seven years later, when the outbreak of the war in Ukraine compelled NATO member states to reassess and fundamentally revise the Alliance's framework for collective security (CSIS, 2024).

NATO countries recognised the year of 2014 as a turning point in Euro-Atlantic security. As stated in the Wales Summit Declaration⁵, Russian aggression became a challenge to Europe as a whole. In addition, the world witnessed a growing destabilisation campaign that spread to the Middle East and North Africa. Despite recognising that growing instability worldwide will inevitably affect NATO and its member states, the Summit Declaration emphasised Wales's territory and population. In contrast, the countermeasures were considered exclusively within the framework of Article 5. In other words, the Alliance continues to adhere to the position of non-intervention until the global situation becomes increasingly unmanageable.

as one of the African Union's most significant security interventions, the mission demonstrates how regional organisations can play a central and sustained role in conflict management where global mechanisms such as the UN face political or institutional constraints.

⁴ Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is the alliance's collective defence clause. It states that an armed attack against one NATO member is considered an attack against all, allowing allies to take collective action, including the use of force, to restore security. While Article 5 was originally conceived in the context of conventional military attacks, ongoing debates focus on whether and how it could apply to hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, or other non-traditional forms of aggression that fall below the threshold of open warfare.

While expressing deep concern about Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine, and despite acknowledging the fact that Russia has violated its agreements with the Alliance, the Declaration emphasises the possible strategic value of the NATO-Russia partnership.

With the beginning of the hot phase in Russia's war on Ukraine, the crisis in the functioning of the Alliance became more obvious. Repeated violations of NATO airspace (particularly the airspace of Poland, Latvia, and Romania) by Russian combat drones and missiles did not receive an adequate response from the Alliance because they "did not target NATO member states specifically" (Cimermanis & Davis Jr., 2024: p.5). This event not only revealed that some members had issues with their air defence systems, but also demonstrated the political weakness of the Alliance in general. NATO's statement became a signal to the aggressor (Russia) that the Alliance was unprepared for sudden aggression and that it could manipulate the Alliance's response by claiming that airspace violations were unintentional. It is possible to avoid such an ambiguous situation by extending NATO's competence to situations that, although not covered by Article 5, can nevertheless endanger both the member states and global peace. Such a reaction can manifest itself in the use of various leverages, ranging from political or technological instruments to military intervention. In the event of a threat to global peace, such a response should be mandatory.

⁵ The Wales Summit Declaration was adopted at the NATO Summit held in Newport, Wales, in 2014, in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine. In the declaration, NATO leaders identified Russia's actions as a serious challenge to Euro-Atlantic security and reaffirmed the alliance's commitment to collective defence, deterrence, and support for partners affected by instability. The document also highlighted broader security concerns, including regional destabilisation, hybrid threats, and crises extending beyond Europe, notably in the Middle East and North Africa.

NATO is also facing a structural crisis. The uncertainty about the position of one of its core members (the US) and direct statements from President D. Trump about the readiness of the USA to participate in the defence of its allies (The Guardian, 2025) are clear signals that the current system is unreliable. It is important to underscore that these developments are unfolding amid genuine security threats posed by Russia to certain NATO member states.

The Crisis in IAEA's Wartime Functioning. Case Studies: The Occupation of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (February-March 2022) and the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (March 2022-present)

While energy blackmail can be considered a tool of hybrid warfare, it was Russia's war on Ukraine that revealed problems with ensuring the safety of nuclear facilities. The situation that developed around the Chernobyl (February-March 2022) and Zaporizhzhia (March 2022-present) nuclear power plants was assessed by the International Atomic Energy Agency as the first case in history when a real threat to the safety of nuclear power facilities arose. Among the factors contributing to this danger are hostilities that make it impossible to guarantee the facility's physical integrity, maintenance problems with water and electricity supply, and difficulties in organising work under pressure from the occupiers (IAEA, 2025). Any of these factors could cause a critical failure in the operation of the nuclear power plants.

Ukraine's situation has catalysed the nuclear safety crisis. The IAEA's main tools, that is, inspection of nuclear facilities and verification of the use of nuclear materials (IAEA, 1989), have proven not only ineffective but sometimes

simply impossible to use in wartime conditions. On 10 March 2022, the IAEA reported that data transmission from the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants had ceased. The IAEA also reported power supply problems, the inability to conduct radiation monitoring, and that personnel at the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia NPPs were forced to work under increased stress, overwork, and low radiation safety (IAEA, 2022).

Note that the problem of ensuring the safety of nuclear power plants goes beyond the two cases given, for by striving to destroy the energy system of Ukraine, the Russian Federation constantly targets nuclear energy facilities in air attacks (World Nuclear Association, 2025). Ukraine ranks seventh in the world in terms of the size of its civilian nuclear program (Stimpson, 2022). At the same time, nuclear power plants not only cover the entire territory of the country but are also located in close proximity to the borders, in particular with European countries (Figure 3), which makes them critical objects from the perspective of regional security.

In hybrid warfare, data related to nuclear energy often becomes the subject of information wars. One example includes Russia's statement about Ukraine's intentions to create its own nuclear weapons, whereby Russia attempted to justify its seizure of the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia NPPs (Stimpson, 2022).

The situation regarding the security of nuclear facilities during the war in Ukraine is not the first of its kind. During the Syrian crisis in 2010, the IAEA was unable to obtain information from the Syrian authorities regarding the status of the Al-Kibar facility⁶ and the location of natural uranium (NTI, 2025).

⁶ The Al-Kibar facility was a covert nuclear reactor site in eastern Syria, near the Euphrates River, discovered in the mid-2000s. It was widely assessed by international experts to have been under construction with the purpose of producing plutonium, potentially for nuclear weapons, and was reportedly built with foreign assistance. The

facility was destroyed in an airstrike in 2007, after which Syria provided limited cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), raising concerns about transparency, undeclared nuclear materials, and compliance with international nuclear safeguards.



Figure 3: Map Showing the Locations of Nuclear Power Plants in Ukraine
Source: World Nuclear Association (2025)⁷

Discussion

The importance of collective security and the need for reform in this field are beyond doubt. The UN, as the largest collective security structure, was unable to provide an adequate response to the Russian-Ukrainian war. While the current study shows that the UN Security Council faces protocol-related challenges, some researchers have highlighted the need to change the very notion of the collective security system and to consider the new conditions under which it must operate (Charron, 2020; Grasa, 2024; Hessler, 2012). This judgment correlates with the position expressed in this study that the conventional design of collective security systems based on the principle that an attack on one is an attack on all ultimately made the entire system unstable. In conditions where international institutions have proven unable to provide global security, regional cooperation becomes more important (Velthuisen, 2025). The need to build a bottom-up collective security system without recognised world leaders (in particular, the USA) should spark a radical

restructuring of the entire system, bringing forward the shift from focusing predominantly on the interests of strong states to prioritising collective interests (Druzin, 2018). It is advisable to divide the system's services into two categories: preventing aggression and enforcing protection (Charron, 2020). Without the latter, the system of collective security cannot be effective. Protection can be endured through the creation of regional security associations.

The current study confirms previous findings regarding NATO's incomplete understanding of changes in the contemporary geopolitical landscape (Flockhart, 2024) and its inability to adapt to new challenges, especially in the military sphere (Beaumont et al., 2024). The current study confirms previous findings that NATO has an incomplete understanding of changes in the contemporary geopolitical landscape. In particular, the Alliance has faced difficulties in fully grasping emerging threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, hybrid warfare, and the influence of rising non-Western powers like China. It has also struggled

⁷ This map is sourced from the official Energoatom website and may be used freely with appropriate attribution. Accordingly, no additional copyright permissions are required.

to anticipate the consequences of regional conflicts outside Europe, shifting alliances, and changes in US foreign policy, which affect its ability to act decisively. This limited awareness can delay decision-making, reduce the effectiveness of collective defence, and weaken NATO's role as a stabilising force in global security.

The belief that the recent expansion of the Alliance strengthens its influence has some general grounds (Jaber & Momani, 2024). However, its weakness is that it builds collective security around the big and strong; it is worth asking whether this hierarchy will strengthen new members or make them another buffer zone in the region? It should be emphasised once again that even though NATO is opposed as a single bloc to individual prominent figures in world politics, specifically Russia and China (Lartey, 2024), the study shows that changes in the US political power have had a significant impact on the stability of the entire bloc, weakening its image as a practical subject of collective security.

At the same time, when deciding on how to respond to destabilising behaviour, countries should not equalise the two parties in the conflict. Limiting military support to both sides and maintaining neutrality would be unlikely to be an adequate response (Nasu, 2021), as it may lead to a situation in which the strong have an unlimited right to impose their will on any weaker party in international relations, rather than preventing escalation.

Other studies also provide evidence that confirms the low effectiveness of existing treaties and nuclear security systems. It is rightly noted that this entire system, including the IAEA, will be effective only in conditions of peace and when all parties are willing to cooperate (Wang, 2024). Therefore, more effective instruments of influence, in particular, cooperation between security structures in crises governed by international treaties, would be a necessary addition to the goodwill of the parties. At the same time, the protective mechanisms should be preventive, since the safety of nuclear facilities during a military conflict depends solely

on the political will of the parties involved. Therefore, it should be agreed that an attempt to take control of a nuclear power plant after a military invasion can significantly expand the possibility of unforeseen consequences, which, due to the specifics of the facility, will be devastating not only for the parties involved but also for global security as a whole (Rezmer & Szpak, 2024).

Conclusion

As of today, the voluntary nature of participation in security organisations and agreements makes the entire system fragile. History shows that security agreements are adhered to as long as a particular party considers them essential for its own security and interests. This usually applies to parties with significant (including significant military) potential. At the same time, this is precisely what leads to a situation in which withdrawal from or violation of security agreements has severe consequences for global security. This means that those who stay in agreement will have to make concessions to the violator. Such a situation demonstrates the weakness of the entire security alliance. It necessitates restructuring in that the remaining majority can withstand the challenges arising from the withdrawal or improper behaviour of any influential party in the system. The aftermath of the withdrawal of strong members will be especially devastating, as the collective security system currently relies on them.

Contradictions that make it impossible to respond adequately to security challenges are also present in the decision-making protocols. In particular, the existing approaches to decision-making under the UN framework no longer meet the requirements of modern times, making it impossible to adequately respond to acts of aggression and preventing the organisation from resisting encroachments on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its members. The greatest paradox is that a country that violates international law can have UN veto power. It is considered necessary to ensure that the aggressor country is excluded from the decision-making process and can only provide explanations.

Despite the internal crisis, NATO remains the most powerful military-political association. However, several problems need to be resolved. First, there are financing-related contradictions within the system. Second, the Alliance is slow to respond to new threats, particularly those related to technological development. However, the main problem is the Alliance's isolated position, even in the face of global threats. Limiting NATO's role to protect its members alone is insufficient for maintaining global security in modern conditions. At the same time, despite a direct threat to some NATO member states from Russia, NATO continues to follow its containment policy. Thus, it is necessary to revise NATO's action protocol with respect to events that threaten not only collective but also global security (e.g., threats to nuclear power facilities) to obligate the Alliance to respond with force or to leverage political and technological instruments. As an alternative, consideration could also be given to adopting certain resolutions if they are supported by at least two-thirds of the members of the UN Security Council. From the perspective of implementing the adopted decisions, it is necessary to provide for regional enforcement. Given that these changes may face diplomatic barriers and rejection by member states with veto power, the most realistic approach would be to initially apply these restrictions to voting on issues related to grave crimes against humanity.

Understanding security threats extends beyond cases of direct military aggression. The network of civil nuclear power plants is increasingly dangerous, and any loss of control can have global consequences. The war in Ukraine revealed that the IAEA was unable to perform its functions effectively in conditions of military aggression precisely because of what the aggressor was doing. This problem seems solvable by creating an alliance with powerful security structures similar to NATO, but tailored to modern challenges. This approach may include both tightening control over nuclear facilities and creating buffer zones, the protection of which may be provided to third parties.

The present findings can serve as a platform for further research into the possibilities for reform within the collective security system. Future research may focus on exploring the challenge of creating security alliances (in particular, IAEA-NATO). It is also planned to develop a theoretical framework for assessing and comparing security models (including global and regional models). A separate area of focus may be the study of emerging threats (including hybrid threats) and the development of tools for identifying and countering them.

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Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The research has no conflict of interest.

Author Contribution Statement

RV: Conceptualisation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration, Writing - original draft; and Writing - review & editing.

VK: Resources; Software; Supervision; Validation; Visualisation; Methodology; Writing - original draft; and Writing - review & editing.

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