A study of the future role of international security institutions in the relationship between security and sovereignty requires an examination of doctrine. The ‘new’ question of the feasibility and desirability of attributing sovereign rights of states to international organizations is connected with ‘old’ issues long addressed by jurists and theorists of international relations.¹ The link between sovereignty and security dates back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which gave the international society their present structural features. It is because of these features that we speak of an international ‘society’ as opposed to an international ‘community’.

Two universal institutions (the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire) averted the anarchy and conflicts of international society: the former through ethical and political universalism; the latter through the global verticalization of sovereign power. The strengthening of the modern state was set in motion, and with it the national and international implications of sovereignty.

At the internal level, sovereign power is that which prevails over all other agencies that govern the citizens of a given state; at an international level, it consists in the series of rights through which the state, while pursuing its aims, can ensure its political independence and territorial integrity.² This dual nature of sovereignty is connected with the two major issues that the modern state must tackle to assert its autonomy: cohesion and exclusion. Ensuring the institutional and social cohesion of a community in a given territory and subject to common laws implies the exclusion of those who not belong to it. The entire system is organized around the friend/foe dichotomy.

As the level of cohesion of a political system increases, with its dysfunctions and vulnerability, the exclusion of anyone who rejects the state’s ambitious goals becomes increasingly imperative. For
example, the viability of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society requires the preservation of freedom and equality, and thus implies a considerable degree of complexity and on-going adjustments, with the consequent vulnerability of institutional mechanisms. Hence, the state is bound to feel the need to endow itself with an efficient military instrument, capable of dissuading other actors from threatening its system. The democratization of states does not automatically give rise to a cooperative attitude among the states, unless the threat of a common, external enemy arises. This should be understood by those who believe, through a mixture of enthusiasm and superficiality, that the process of reform and democratization of Eastern Europe implies the simplification of the international security scenarios.

The principle of equality among international sovereign states is justified by the existence of a great number of formally equal states without an institutional apparatus above them. This is a fundamental and objective principle of the international society. As such, it is also enshrined in the statute of the organization with the highest universalist aims, the United Nations (UN). Article 2 of Charter states that the UN is based on the principle of sovereign equality of its members, and acknowledges that each state enjoys all the attributes of sovereignty, specifically the right to protect its political independence and territorial integrity.

This formal equality of states, however, is made moot by the substantial diversification of their real powers. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing individual members of the system of international relations is preventing the conflict between formal equality and real power imbalances, which would lead to long-term and severe dysfunctions of the system.

In the past three centuries, two different approaches have been taken to prevent such conflict. The first, is balance of power, explicitly sanctioned for the first time by the Treaty of Utrecht of 13 July 1713. As an expedient for the creation of a political and diplomatic system, this approach is risky, and must never be taken for granted. Furthermore, it presupposes both the application of Clausewitz’s theories on the subordination of war to politics, and the obligation to frame a set of military rules on the logic of politics.3

The second approach is multilateralism and the assignment of some of the sovereign rights of states to international organizations