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SANCTIONS

A VIABLE TOOL OR AN INEFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY?

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Sanctions

A Viable Tool or an Ineffective Instrument of Foreign Policy?

The preponderance of American strategic thinking today is that sanctions do not work as an effective instrument of foreign policy. If one accepts this conventional wisdom, then why has the United States substantially increased its use of sanctions to obtain political objectives? The answer may lie in our definition of success. This paper will examine the use of sanctions and their effectiveness. It will also discuss ways to make sanctions more effective, address alternatives and the usefulness of combining other diplomatic instruments with sanctions. The discussion will argue that sanctions do offer a reasonably low cost and potentially effective means to achieve political ends. Additionally, this paper will address sanctions as a viable and preferred alternative to the use of force to accomplish goals established by U.S. policymakers.

Sanctions are one of a series of instruments or means of statecraft which a nation state may use to seek political objectives against a target country. Sanctions are regarded as coercive in nature in that their use is designed to force the target to bend to the will of the nation which imposes the sanctions. In recent history, leading nations and the United Nations (UN) have increased the imposition of sanctions. The more recent and well known uses of sanctions include economic sanctions to force Iraq to leave Kuwait, sanctions against Serbia, Haiti, South Africa and, of course, the long standing U.S. embargo against Cuba.¹ In addition to these examples of imposed sanctions, there are a number of recent cases where the U.S. threatened to impose sanctions (e.g.,

¹ Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," International Security Vol 22 No 2 (Fall 1997) 90

North Korea, China) in the hope that the mere threat of sanctions would be sufficient to bring about the desired behavior by the target country

What do we know about the effectiveness of sanctions other than the consensus view that they do not work? One comprehensive examination of the effectiveness of sanctions is found in the 1990 research by Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott (HSE). These three economists collected data on 116 cases involving the use of sanctions since 1914 and concluded that sanctions were effective in 34 percent (40 of 116) of the cases studied.² At first glance, the HSE research would seem to make a compelling case that sanctions are effective more than one-third of the time. This favorable assessment of the effectiveness of sanctions is somewhat tempered by the overwhelming number of authors who proclaim that sanctions do not work. Furthermore, the work of HSE is castigated by Robert A. Pape who declares the HSE study is seriously flawed. Pape purports that none of the 40 successes claimed by the HSE study stand up under serious scrutiny.³ Pape goes on to state as follows regarding the 40 successes claimed in the HSE study

"Eighteen were actually settled by direct or indirect use of force, in 8 cases there is no evidence that the target made the demanded concessions, 6 do not qualify as instances of economic sanctions, and 3 are indeterminate. Of HSE's 115 cases, only 5 are appropriately considered successes."⁴

If we accept, for the moment, the view that Pape and others are correct - that sanctions do not work - how then do we account for the dramatic increase in

² T. Clifton Morgan and Valene L. Schwebach, "Fools Suffer Gladly: The Use of Economic Sanctions in International Crises," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol 41, No 1 (March 1997) 28-29

³ Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," 93

⁴ Ibid

the use of sanctions in the post-Cold War era?⁵ A 1997 study by the National Association of Manufacturers listed 35 countries against which the United States has imposed sanctions from 1993 to 1996.⁶ The U N Security Council imposed sanctions twice from 1945 to 1990 (Rhodesia and South Africa), but eight times between 1990 and 1994.⁷ Why the significant increase in the use of sanctions? There are a number of reasons which may account for the significant increase in U S use of sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy

The first reason which may explain the increased use of sanctions is the relative ease by which sanctions can be imposed. For unilateral sanctions, the U S Congress simply votes the sanctions into law thereby forcing U S companies to comply or face prosecution by the Justice Department. A second reason is cost. The cost to the U S Government is basically the expense of passing and enforcing the law. It is the U S companies which bear the brunt of the cost (both in money and affected workers) of sanctions in terms of lost business and lost business opportunities with the target country. Perhaps another reason for the increased use of U S sanctions is the lack of other available means to achieve the political ends. Additionally, whether sanctions have been effective in five percent or 34 percent of the time they have been imposed, the fact is there have been successes. Evidence of past successes, leads to the hope that the contemplated sanctions will work. The final set of reasons for the imposing sanctions is that they send a signal to the target

⁵ George A. Lopez and David Cortright, "The Sanctions Era: An Alternative to Military Intervention," The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs Vol 19, No 2 (Summer/Fall 1995) 65

⁶ Richard N. Haass, "Sanctioning Madness," Foreign Affairs Vol 76, No 6 (November/December 1997) 74

⁷ John Stremblau, Sharpening International Sanctions - Toward a Stronger Role for the United Nations (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1996) 1 and 8

country and to the international community. Sanctions also make a statement about U.S. interests and values. If we impose sanctions over human rights abuses, the American government is making a political statement about our values, interests and determination to bring about changes in situations we deem to be inappropriate or intolerable. Sanctions express a specific concern and may also send a warning that the United States may contemplate additional measures to achieve foreign policy objectives.

Given the increased use of sanctions by the United States and the expectation that the United States will continue to use sanctions as a political tool, what can be done to make sanctions more effective? First and foremost, the consensus view is that multilateral sanctions are more effective than those imposed unilaterally by a single country. From an economic point of view, the pain is obviously much greater to the target country when more countries participate in the sanctions. For example, the sanctions which the United States imposed against Cuba some three decades ago are today nearly universally regarded as ineffective. The obvious reason for the ineffectiveness of the U.S. sanctions is that nearly all other nations of the world do not participate in the sanctions. In fact, Cuba has benefited from a benevolent (until recently) Soviet Union, China and others who have provided Cuba with enormous trade. From this discussion, one may conclude that multilateral sanctions will in most, if not all cases, be more effective than sanctions imposed and supported by a single country.

Besides multilateral sanctions there are other measures which the United States can take to make sanctions more effective. For example, in early September 1998, the Clinton administration asked Congress for blanket authority for the president to waive any existing or future sanctions in the national interest. Undersecretary of State Stuart E. Eizenstat termed the waiver

authority the "single most essential element if we want to make sanctions work"⁸ In exchange for the waiver authority, Eizenstat indicated the president would sign an executive order to help alleviate the damage caused to U S businesses by the imposition of sanctions⁹ At this time, Congressmen Lugar and Hamilton are working to provide the requested legislation

Another approach to improve sanctions is the use of "smart", "designer" or targeted sanctions¹⁰ The notion behind targeted sanctions is that success appears to be enhanced by very specific and focused sanctions versus all-inclusive sanctions The argument is made that sanctions do not hurt the Saddam Hussein's and Muammar Qaddafi's of the world, but rather the citizens of the target country Perhaps the more narrowly defined and targeted, the better the chances of applying the appropriate degree of coercion directly to the target which we are attempting to influence

In addition to multilateral and targeted sanctions, there are a number of other proposals to make sanctions more effective The proposals include the creation of a separate Council for Sanctions and Peacekeeping within in United Nations, combined with a monitoring element which would assess the impact of sanctions¹¹ Additionally, Boutros-Ghali, former U N Secretary-General, pushed for the creation of a U N organization which would

- a assess potential impact of sanctions before sanctions are imposed
- b monitor the implementation of sanctions
- c measure the effects of sanctions
- d ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups
- e explore ways to assist third countries¹²

⁸ Thomas W Lippman, "Negotiations on Sanctions Open on Hill," The Washington Post September 9, 1998 A-24

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Haass, "Sanctioning Madness", 79

¹¹ Lopez and Cortright, "The Sanctions Era", 81

¹² *ibid*

The aforementioned proposals would all appear to have merit. Although a sanctions monitoring organization at the United Nations remains in its infancy, the proposal remains viable and under discussion at the U N and elsewhere. With our discussion for improving the effectiveness of sanctions via the various means described as food for thought, let us examine the opposing view that sanctions will remain ineffective and further, that the U S government should resort to other instruments of statecraft to advance its foreign policy goals.

Other policy instruments or means which the U S Government may consider to achieve political ends are divided into three broad strategies as follows:

- 1 Diplomatic persuasion (diplomacy, international organizations, international law, public diplomacy and information)
- 2 Incentives (foreign assistance, trade policy and alliances)
- 3 Coercive diplomacy (sanctions, covert action and force without war)

With this wide array of policy instruments and the perceived ineffectiveness of sanctions, why should the U S ever resort to sanctions? The answer most likely is that the U S should seek to apply a combination of means which offer the greatest chance for success. It would be hard to make a case that sanctions should ever be applied as the sole instrument of foreign policy. Diplomacy and negotiation should always be the instruments of first resort. Even in situations where the United States does not have formal diplomatic ties with the target country, a third country is an appropriate intermediary through which diplomacy may lead to a compromise with the target country.

Likewise, incentives such as foreign assistance and favorable trade policy would appear to be very powerful and persuasive tools to achieve foreign policy objectives. Foreign assistance may take the form of millions of dollars in foreign

aid and other financial incentives which may produce the desired result. On the coercive end of the spectrum, the U S has and retains the prerogative to resort to covert action as an instrument of foreign policy. In recent history, many might cite the failure to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, despite a substantial U S program, as a major failure of covert action. The optimists might point to other covert action successes and advocate for more time with respect to Saddam Hussein.

There are those who contend that military instruments are the only effective means to achieve foreign policy goals.¹³ Others point to the HSE study as an important and effective alternative to the use of military force.¹⁴ As previously indicated, it is Pape's contention that sanctions are not a reliable alternative to military force and that sanctions have only been successful in five percent, rather than in 34 percent, of the cases in the HSE study.¹⁵ Pape goes on to contend that "there is no reason that economic pressure should not be employed together with force."¹⁶ This thought process seems to advocate the use of force as a preferred method to the tools of the diplomatic process and indeed, war may prove to be more effective in making the target country yield, but at what cost?

At this point, let us examine some recent examples of sanctions and determine what light these cases have shed on the effectiveness of sanctions. The United Nations Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Iraq shortly after Iraq's 6 August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.¹⁷ Subsequently, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William Webster, testified before the

¹³Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work", 90

¹⁴Ibid, 95

¹⁵Ibid, 106

¹⁶Ibid, 110

¹⁷Lopez and Cortwright, "The Sanctions Era", 73

Senate Armed Services Committee that the sanctions against Iraq were immensely effective. Specifically, according to Webster's 4 December 1990 testimony, the sanctions cut off more than 90 percent of Iraqi imports and 97 percent of Iraqi exports.¹⁸ Many supported the view that the sanctions were highly effective, but that the sanctions needed more time to strangle Iraq into submission. We will never know if sanctions alone would have forced Iraqi compliance with U N resolutions because some few months after the implementation of sanctions, coalition forces began the military campaign which forcibly ejected Iraq from Kuwait.

Today there remain significant economic sanctions against Iraq to compel Iraq to comply with U N resolutions concerning their chemical and biological weapon programs. A plausible case can be made that these sanctions have had the desired adverse impact on Iraq. From his public statements, and through his spokesmen, one of Saddam Hussein's major objectives is to have the sanctions lifted. Whether or not one believes the Iraqi rhetoric about the lifting of sanctions, most would agree there has been considerable suffering in Iraq. In this case, there is a nearly universal belief that it has been the Iraqi populace who have suffered rather than the desired targets of Saddam and his war machine.

The September 1991 U N arms embargo of all factions and the subsequent complete economic embargo against Belgrade brought the economy in the former Yugoslavia to a near collapse by the end of 1995.¹⁹ Stremiau purports that the sanctions against Serbia, combined with NATO air attacks, led Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic to bargain at the Dayton Peace Accords.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid

¹⁹Stremiau, Sharpening International Sanctions, 26-28

²⁰Stremiau, Sharpening International Sanctions, 29

Another example of the successful use of sanctions is the case of South Africa. U N sanctions against the South African government (1979-1994) are acknowledged as instrumental in setting the stage which brought an end to apartheid.²¹ Additional sanctions were imposed when the U S Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986. These additional sanctions are widely recognized as a major factor in persuading the white minority to give up power peacefully.²² According to Franklin Lavin, sanctions brought about years of economic stagnation which led the South African business establishment to favor majority rule in order to end the sanctions.²³

A lingering case of sanctions imposition without resolution is the tragedy of Pan Am flight 103 which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, on 21 December 1988. The plane was less than an hour out of London when it went down killing all 270 aboard, including 189 Americans.²⁴ Two Libyan suspects, Lamem Khalifa Fhimah and Abdel Basset Megrahi, were indicted in the United States and in Britain in 1991.²⁵ U N sanctions were imposed on Libya in 1992 and 1993.²⁶

In 1994, Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi raised the prospect of turning over the suspects if the trial would take place in a neutral country.²⁷ Nearly ten years after the tragedy, we seemed to be approaching a successful resolution when the U S and Britain agreed to a trial in the Netherlands. In late August, 1998, the U N Security Council unanimously voted to suspend sanctions against

²¹ Lopez and Cortright, "The Sanctions Era", 71

²² Stremmlau, Sharpening International Sanctions, 8

²³ Franklin L. Lavin, "Asphyxiation or Oxygen? The Sanctions Dilemma," Foreign Policy 104 (Fall 1996) 141

²⁴ Paul Hendrickson, "The Longest Journey," The Washington Post September 3, 1998, D-2

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*

Libya after the two suspects were handed over for trial²⁸ Recent Gadhafi posturing on this issue raises doubt that Libya will turn over the indicted men in the near term Recalling Pape's adamant position that sanctions rarely work, he proffers the notion that sanctions in this specific case would work if the sanctions included an oil boycott as follows

"First, economic sanctions should be most effective in disputes involving minor issues that do not affect the target country's territory, security, wealth, or the regime's domestic security For instance, a prediction that an oil boycott of Libya would compel Colonel Muammar Qaddafi to surrender the men suspected of bombing Pan Am 103 would be credible based on the historical evidence "²⁹

The circumstances seem to be in place for the successful resolution of this nearly ten year old matter There remains the expectation that the two Libyan suspects will be brought to trial The exact role that sanctions may play in the eventual resolution will be difficult to measure, but sanctions, along with condemnation of Libya by the western world, must be afforded appropriate credit if the suspects are turned over for trial

One remaining point must be addressed in this discussion of sanctions as a viable tool or ineffective instrument of foreign policy That is - what is the definition of success with respect to the use of sanctions? According to the most comprehensive and authoritative worldwide sanctions study, HSE describe a 34 percent success rate³⁰ Given the divergence between HSE and Pape, coupled with what appears to be a paucity of research data on this subject, one might propose that even a limited number of successes provide sufficient evidence that sanctions are a viable instrument of U S foreign policy Indeed, if sanctions are

²⁸ Unknown, "Libya Says U N Imperis Deal on Trial," The Washington Post August 29, 1998 A-14

²⁹Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work", 109

³⁰Stremlau, Sharpening International Sanctions, 9

instrumental in bringing an end to Iraqi's weapons of mass destruction or sanctions are the impetus which bring the two Pam Am 103 suspects to trial, I submit that these, and previous successes, make the case that sanctions are a useful tool in the U S inventory of foreign policy instruments

Conclusion

Sanctions do work! Their success is often difficult to measure. There are ways to enhance the success rates for sanctions such as multinational versus unilateral sanctions, targeted sanctions and sanctions used in combination with other policy instruments. Sanctions should be implemented quickly and in as air-tight manner as possible. The case for sanctions is further supported by their ease of implementation and because sanctions are a low cost alternative to achieve U S foreign policy objectives. Although the use of sanctions is clearly not an ideal strategy, the case for employing sanctions is compelling when compared to the alternative of protracted military conflict.