

Examine the effectiveness of economic sanctions as a tool of statecraft.

Introduction

Since the end of the cold war the international community has seen the significantly increased use of economic sanctions as a tool of statecraft. Economic sanctions ‘appeared to offer the promise of effective Security Council action to resolve conflict and enforce international legal norms without the use of military force’ (Cortright and Lopez, 2000, p.2). This report will evaluate if the aims of political leaders, who have increasingly used economic sanctions, have been realised or if they have failed to achieve their intended impact.

Measuring Effectiveness

It appears that political scientists in this area of study harbour differing views on how the effectiveness of economic sanctions should be measured. Baldwin argues that ‘the mere imposition of economic sanctions should automatically qualify as success’ (Baldwin, 1985, p.372) therefore if this is to be believed then an economic sanction should be considered a successful just because of its implementation, even if it is ineffective in its goals hoped for by the sender countries government.

However most scholars are not so quick to brand economic sanctions a success with Hufbauer, Schott and Elliot agreed that ‘in judging the success in sanctions, we confine our examination to changes in the policies and capabilities of the target country’ (Elliot, Hufbauer and Schott, 1990, p.3). So the effectiveness of sanctions, if their analysis is to be considered, is ultimately measured by whether the target state changes a certain policy that might stop sanctions, or if its capabilities militarily, economically or politically are hindered.

Pape agrees with this argument and sets out three criteria’s by which the success of sanctions can be measured:

1. The target state conceded to a significant part of the coercer’s demands.
2. Economic sanctions were threatened, or actually applied before the target changed its behaviour.
3. No more-credible explanation exists for the targets change of behaviour.

(Source: Pape, 1997, p.97)

The following sections of the report will relate back to these views when considering the success of sanctions discussed.

Why Economic Sanctions are a Success

- There have been successful economic sanctions in the past as ‘a largely symbolic but still not wholly ineffective way whereby adversaries in a conflict can signal their position and intentions’ (Mayall, 1984, p.632). The U.S under president Reagan imposed economic sanctions on Libya to show their leader Colonel Qaddafi and the rest of the world that America would not tolerate states that supported international terrorism. Libya was the target because it was believed that Quaddafi was providing the terrorists responsible for the Panam flight bombing with a safe haven. These sanctions were unilateral and

appeared to have little real impact on Libya. However these sanctions were not aimed to have a significant impact but ‘the embargo itself can be considered a successful international symbol. The sanctions themselves signalled American opposition to Qaddafi’ (Lindsay, 1986, p.166). Here we see sanctions which are aimed to represent the ideological beliefs of a nation and are successful in doing so, this success fits into Baldwin’s idea, mentioned in the last section, that just by its mere implementation this sanction should be deemed a success.

- The implementation of sanctions abroad can sometimes have aims on the domestic agenda for sender countries. President Carter imposed unilateral (For most of its time) sanctions against Iran (1979) ‘to condemn the holding of hostages and to reaffirm American resolve’ (Lindsay, 1986, p.165). The success of this is debatable, as Iran still held the hostages for some time, however like with Libya the U.S did show a willingness to punish Iran and stand up for her political beliefs, even if it did mean an embargo on one of Americas main oil exporters.

These sanctions against Iran may have proved costly, with an overall belief that ‘in a global economy, unilateral sanctions impose higher costs on American firms than on the target country’ (Haas, 1997, p.77). However the Carter administration may have deemed their actions as successful with opinion polls on his government increasing significantly. Polls showed that support for his handling of the presidency rose from a meagre 32% to 61% in just one month (Gallup opinion index, 1980, p.13) which shows how a governments issues on ‘the opposition or public opinion, may transform the payoffs of a government although it knows very well that they will not be instrumental with respect to the target country to change its behaviour’ (Tsebelis, 1990, p.16).

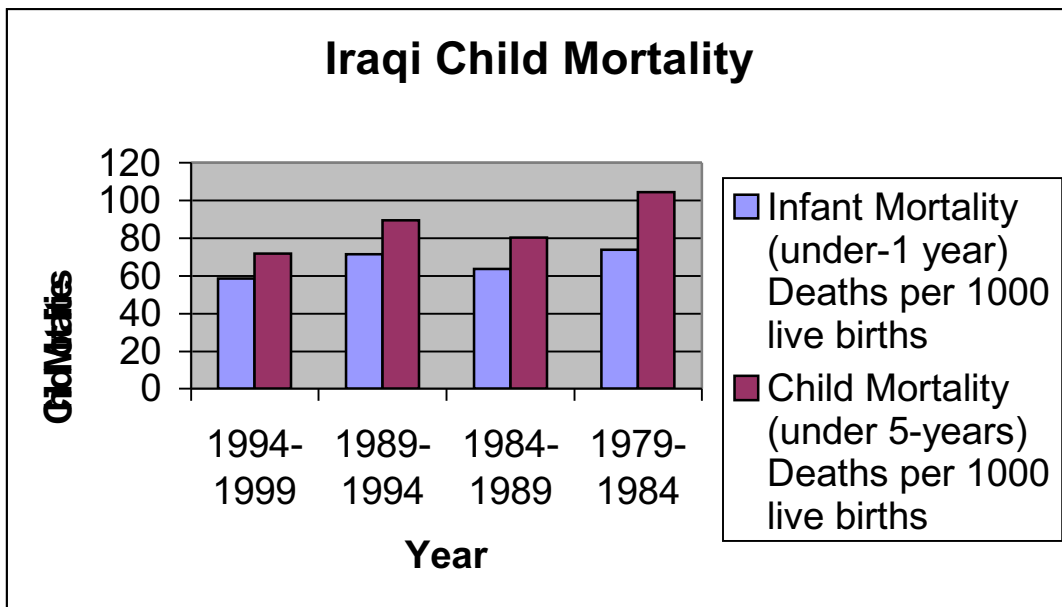
- Sanctions can be effective in preventing war or when the sender state is preparing to wage war on a target state in minimising the timescale of a conflict. Scholars agree that ‘economic pressure weakened the targets military capability, and thus accelerated military conquest’ (Pape, 1997, p.97). The U.S have in the past decade, punished Iraq for its non-appliance in allowing U.N weapons inspectors into the country to check Saddam Hussein possesses no weapons of mass destruction. This punishment has included crippling economic sanctions which have represented ‘a strategy of deliberately weakening Iraq’s military capabilities as Washington seeks to ensure Baghdad poses no threat to its neighbours’ (Recknagel, 1999, P.1) or to the wider world. Economic sanctions to weaken the military capabilities of a country can be deemed a success if Iraq is used as an example. In the current second war with Iraq, media coverage has clearly indicated how Iraq’s military equipment is limited and unreliable which is almost certainly due to sanctions being imposed on the country.

Why Sanctions are ineffective

- Sanctions are often aimed to damage the grip that the target countries government has over its people and to increase the chances of those people of that nation to overthrow that regime. However when this has been the case we have often seen the opposite effects, during the Cold War the ‘American sanctions against Cuba had the reverse effect of that intended, for they helped

to bolster Castro's position and opened up opportunities for Russian involvement' (Barber, 1979, P.374). We can see how by depriving the people of Cuba during the Cold War the U.S hoped that the Cuban people would revolt against Castro's regime. However the sanctions caused misery and created hatred for the U.S and toughened their resolve and support for Castro. So in relation to the question, 'sanctions sometimes strengthened the centralized control of the repressive regimes' (Cortright and Lopez, 2000, P.4) and fall way short of Elliot, Hufbaer and Schott's thesis of what should be considered as effective. Sanctions that strengthened a regimes grip instead of loosening it should be deemed ineffective.

- The morality of economic sanctions has brought about the question of whether they are effective in the light of the humanitarian cost inflicted on the target states people. The former co-ordinator of the UN oil for food programme in Iraq, Dennis Halliday, expressed how his experiences there have 'taught him the damage and futility of sanctions' (BBC News, 1998, P.1). Mr Halliday said sanctions were against the ideal of the UN charter and drew attention to "the 4000 to 5000 children dying unnecessarily every month due to the impact of sanctions because of the breakdown of water and sanitation, inadequate diet and the bad internal health situation" (BBC News, 1998, P.2)



(Source: UNITED NATIONS FOOD & AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION'S, 1996)

If sanctions are killing thousands of children and they are not reaching their targets in Iraq and other countries, which is evident through Saddam's continuing reign of terror and obvious wealth then sanctions cannot be labelled effective.

This pursuit of national interests through sanctions appears to link them with realist political thoughts. The U.S is a prime example of this with it being a 'state forced to help itself and give priority to its own national interest' (Heywood, 1997, P.143). If sanctions are implemented to prevent any kind of hardship or grievance to the sender country, even if it means adverse humanitarian effects then they are part of a realist form of statecraft.

- Sanctions have caused humanitarian crisis in the past Bosnian conflict. Seemingly doing the right thing the U.S and her allies imposed an arms embargo on Bosnia so that fighting would be forced to a stop once the ammunition ran out. However ‘the arms embargo weakened the Muslims since the Bosnian Serbs and the Croats had larger stores of military supplies and greater access to outside sources’ (Haas, 1997, P.77). This shows how sanctions in the past have been very difficult to implement without there being adverse humanitarian consequences, and highlights how in the past sanctions have not been thought through and have proved ineffective. The simple implementation of this sanction as a symbol of U.S opposition to military violence, as taken from Baldwin’s perspective, holds no credibility in this case. The sanctions clearly implemented to stop violence but instead meant the slaughter of one side of the war therefore one cannot argue a credible case for its success.
- Sanctions against Iraq buying weapons with the money Hussein makes from his oil exports appear on the surface to be a good idea and an effective way of preventing him stockpiling advanced weapons. However ‘Mr Hussein still manages to export perhaps 400,000 barrels per day to Jordan, Syria and Turkey via pipeline and lorries; he smuggles some in tanker caravans through the Gulf’ (Economist, 2002, P.27) which makes the sanctions against him ineffective in crippling his money supply for weapons. The oil sanction imposed on Iraq should therefore, if considered from Elliot, Hufbaer and Schott’s perspective should be considered a failure because the target state’s government did not change their stance on allowing unrestricted access for weapon inspectors in Iraq. This fits well in to the second point set out previously by Pape about how a sanction should not be seen as successful unless the target state made concessions before military force was threatened, otherwise the military force should be seen as the determining factor which altered the targets position.
From Baldwin’s perspective the sanctions should probably be considered a success because they have signalled to the world that the U.S will not tolerate hostility or totalitarian dictatorships just by its implementation. Depending on what perspective you take signals what your opinion is on the effectiveness of sanctions.

Conclusion

To conclude we must evaluate if sanctions, with consideration to the adverse humanitarian costs to the target country, financial costs of both the sender and target country, are effective and are worth the struggle that come with them. We should look at past examples and try to learn from them so that we can improve the effectiveness of sanctions in the future.

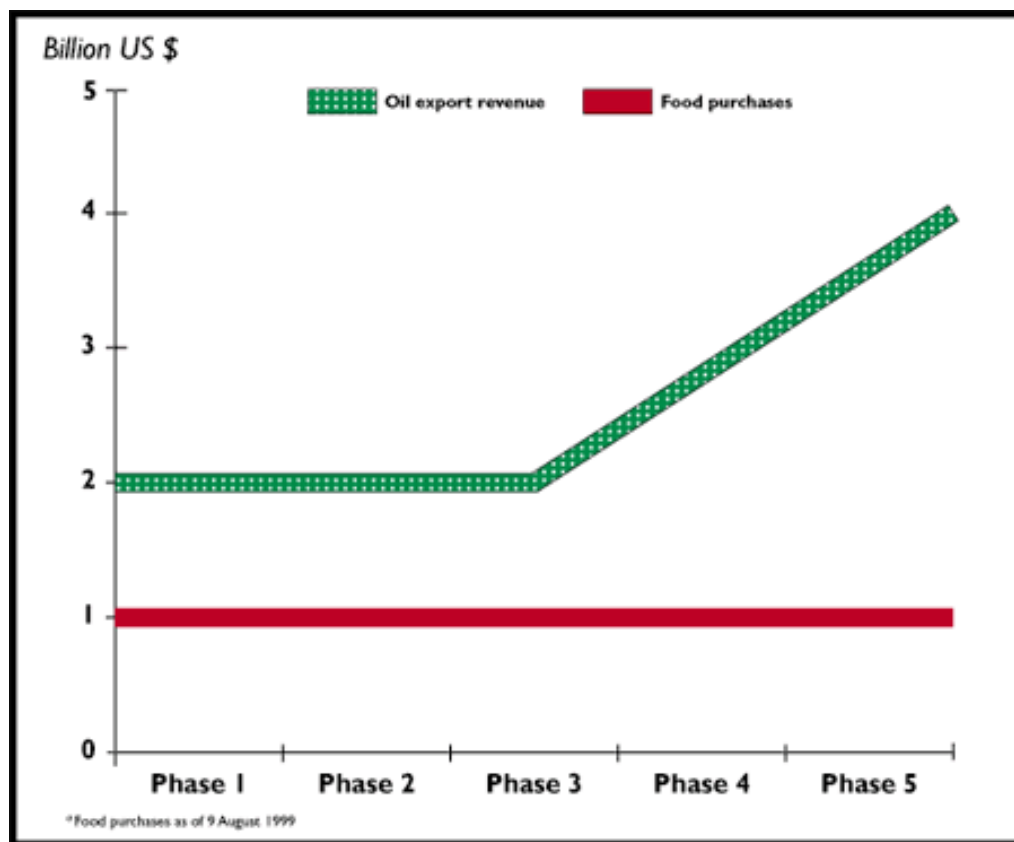
‘Diplomacy and displays of military force often accompany sanctions and may be critical in conveying the initiators message’ (Lindsay, 1986, P.164) and therefore if sanctions are to be effective then they must be part of an overall strategy that must include military action if the targeted state still refuses to co-operate. We have seen in the past how, if aggressors refuse to change their position even after sanctions have been imposed and the sender country doesn’t apply force, then political institutions can be undermined and possibly abandoned by international actors. We have seen this with sanctions against Mussolini’s Italy in 1936, which signalled the end of the

League of Nations, also more recently we have seen how the U.N has appeared toothless to stop aggressors seemingly because its members cannot agree on the best course of action and therefore the U.K and U.S have bypassed it. Whether this signals the beginning of the end for the U.N will be answered in time.

Most political leaders and ‘sanction policy makers have expressed enthusiasm for the potential of targeted sanctions to achieve political impacts without causing unintended humanitarian hardships (Cortright and Lopez, 2000, P.208). However in reality this has proved difficult to achieve, almost every sanction imposed has had adverse humanitarian effects because the targeted government or regime is able to deflect the impact onto the innocent people of that country. It appears impossible to prevent these disasters even with schemes aimed at providing help to the suffering. An example being the oil for food programme that was implemented in Iraq, with oil being exchanged for revenue, which could only be used to buy food. However the graph below shows how Hussein has not been spending more on food and is instead saving the profit, which alarms the West even more.

Revenue and Oil-for-Food Purchases ^a

Chart 1: Revenues from oil sales continue to increase under the oil -for- food program, yet the Iraqi regime refuses to use them to buy food for its people.



(Source: U.S department of state, 1999)

The world's countries have increasingly become more interdependent on one another, which further indicates that sanctions will have little place in future policy making. States depend on each other for resources and therefore only wealthy countries like the U.S can afford to lose millions of dollars so they can punish a country for something against their Liberal Democratic ideals. This again highlights the realist aspect of sanctions – if a country does not have the financial strength then they are unable to contribute to and are vulnerable to sanctions.

‘The one constant theme was that limited, poorly enforced sanctions had no chance of success’ (Cortright and Lopez, 2000, P.208) therefore what is surely important is that economic sanctions are conducted multilaterally not unilaterally. Multilateral sanctions have a better chance of success because the target country cannot simply swap trade partners and import the goods that the sender country has restricted from another country. Unilateral sanctions can inflict serious financial costs to the sender country and make the advantages of such sanctions limited and less effective in most instances. An example of the flaws of unilateral sanctions was when ‘in response to U.N pressure the U.S and Britain unilaterally imposed embargoes on arms sales to South Africa in 1963 and 1964, this was to the advantage of France, which quickly established itself as South Africa’s major arms supplier.’ (Mayall, 1984, P.639). This exemplifies how countries can punish other countries that impose sanctions unilaterally and serves as a warning against such action. However that does not mean that unilateral sanctions cannot be effective but they rely on the target state being heavily dependent on the sender. Unilateral sanctions did ‘prove more costly Haiti and Cuba, which were heavily dependent on trade with the U.S’ (Haas,1997, P.77) and is an example of when unilateral sanctions have had a significant financial effect on the target states.

This greater effectiveness of multilateral sanctions depends on ‘two expectations: that greater co-operation will increase the economic punishment on target states and, more critically, that increased punishment will make targets more likely to concede’ (Pape, 1997, P.108) so greater co-operation is fruitless if it signals no extra cost to the target country.

Overall it is the findings of this paper that ‘economic sanctions are ineffective in the aggregate’ (Drury, 2000, P.624) and have been over used in the past by states who are reluctant to embark on a military campaign but still want to signal to the world that they will not put up with the behaviour of the target state. Most of the literature supports this with most scholars agreeing that ‘sanctions should rather be implemented as part of a broader strategy’ (Barber, 1997, P.374) with the threat of military force if sanctions fail. It has often been the case that without the threat of military force behind them, sanctions have failed to convince the rulers of the target states to concede to the sender’s demands.

Also the humanitarian consequences in the past have been so great that it appears that sanctions have no place in a Liberal Democratic world, even though they have only been used more recently since the consolidation of Liberal Democracy in the majority of the world’s politics. The preventing of Humanitarian consequences should be seen as vital in ensuring the future use and effectiveness of economic sanctions. Until all of these problems are resolved and politicians rethink their strategies regarding sanctions we will continue to see, overall, the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions.

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