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## Sanctions as a Tool of Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Framework

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**Abstract:** *Sanctions are a type of policy instrument that have emerged as one of the most popular and effective tools of foreign policy. According to sanction theory analysts, sanctions are seldom regarded as the “ideal” weapon; rather they are seen as the “least bad” alternative. Both as an alternative to armed force and, conversely, the often burdensome diplomatic solutions on offer, the salience of sanctions to international security politics is increasingly apparent. It is the increased use of economic or political leverage that has triggered the debate among the host of scholars and foreign policy experts. There are many scholars who have detailed about the efficacy of sanction whereas others have out rightly rejected the imposition of sanctions as a successful foreign policy tool. This paper seeks to look at the various aspects of sanctions as a foreign policy tool in detail.*

**Key words:** Sanctions, Foreign Policy, Economic sanctions, Unilateral Sanctions

To begin with, one should know what defines a policy instrument? Evert Vedung sees these tools as “a set of techniques by which governmental authorities wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect or prevent social change” (Vedung 1998).

Sanctions are also a type of policy instrument that have emerged as one of the most popular and effective tools of foreign policy. In general, a country can address foreign policy disputes in five different ways: diplomatic negotiations, political coercion, economic coercion, covert action and military intervention. Moreover, well thought policy responses often involve a combination of these tools.

Sanctions are majorly imposed in the course of foreign policy initiative, as either political coercion or economic coercion. Interestingly, it is the later form of foreign policy initiative that is used more often lately. According to sanction theory analysts, sanctions are seldom regarded as the “ideal” weapon; rather they are seen as the “least bad” alternative. Both as an alternative to armed force and, conversely, the often burdensome diplomatic solutions on offer, the salience of sanctions to international security politics is increasingly apparent. Sanctions are overused in the last few decades as demonstrated by the huge number of sanctions episodes in recent past. Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott did a comprehensive study of sanctions and reported 103 cases of sanctions since the beginning of World War I where they were deployed by a number of countries in pursuance of their foreign policy goals (Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott 1985).

Margaret Doxey, an eminent authority in the field of economic sanctions defines international sanctions as:

“Penalties threatened or imposed as a declared consequence of the target’s failure to observe international standards or international obligations” (Doxey 1996).

Dictionary meaning of the term ‘Sanctions’ is granting of official permission or approval for an action and at the same time a threatened penalty or punishment for disobeying a law or rule. Sanctions are not a new phenomenon in international politics.

Economic sanctions are economic measures directed to political objectives. The relationship between economic activity and political behaviour is generally rested on an assumption that the authority of a political regime is believed to depend ultimately upon its economic strength.

Sanctions as a policy tool have been in use since the Athenian boycott of Megara approximately 2,400 years ago, that helped to trigger the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BC). As Renwick observed, “States since time immemorial had interrupted commercial relations or sought to withhold essential supplies when in a state of war or near war with one another” (Renwick 1981). Sanctions, in the framework of international relations, are ‘jaded tactics that has become less and less useful in the modern international economic system, particularly since the 1920s’ (Cortright & Lopez 1995).

Sanctions are said to be imposed when the ‘sender’ threatens to interrupt the status quo and/or blocks a stream of economic exchange with the ‘target’ unless the sanctioned country acquiesces to a

specific demand made by the 'sender'. If the 'target' complies with 'senders' demand, sanctions are not imposed. If the 'target' stands firm, the 'sender' faces a choice between backing down or carrying out its threat and imposing sanctions.

The main goal of economic sanctions is to lower the aggregate economic welfare of a target state by reducing international trade in order to coerce the target government to change its political behaviour (Pape 1997).

### SCOPE OF SANCTIONS

In recent as well as past history, we have seen a series of interventions in trade between nations for the purpose of forcing good political conduct by means of economic pressure (Amerongen 1980). And while doing so, the scope of sanctions practice became very wide, ranging from unilateral attempt to multilateral support and then moving on to near universal sanctions regime imposed by an international organisation.

Unilateral sanctions are said to be imposed when a single 'sender' state on its own imposes sanctions against a single 'target' state. For example, the United States has aimed sanctions at governments that consistently violate internationally recognized human rights, at governments that sponsor international terrorism or harbour terrorists targeted at governments, individuals or corporations that engage in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or traffic narcotics and also aim at governments that conduct aggression against their neighbours to destabilise regional peace or threaten U.S. National Security. Despite of sanctions being an ineffective policy instrument in various cases, it is still a popular tool of foreign policy. Hufbauer et al. (1990, 2007), who have compiled the most extensive data set on economic sanctions to date, found that these coercive measures were successful only in one third of all cases.

There are different views regarding the impacts of unilateral versus multilateral sanctions. Kaempfer and Lowenberg argue that unilateral sanctions are likely to be more effective than multilateral sanctions in achieving their sought-after political results, even if unilateral sanctions perhaps reflect the interests of narrow groups in the sanctioning countries more than a global political consensus (Kaempfer & Lowenberg 2000).

According to Alexander Kern, unilateral sanctions can be divided into three categories: first, Retorsion, under this sender state applies retortive measures when the target state disagrees with foreign policy objectives or breaches a legal obligation. These Retortive measures include restricting trade, suspending economic assistance or the aids given to the target state (Kern 2009).

Second, countermeasures/ non- forcible reprisals are a response to a foreign state that has committed

an unlawful act that results in non-compliance with international obligations. Breaches of treaties and customary international law may entitle a state to take the course of countermeasures.

Third are the punitive sanctions, these are coercive and often take the form of a penalty or fine imposed on the target. United States sanctions against Iran during Bill Clinton Administration took the form of punitive sanctions.

However, recent years have witnessed a noticeable change, a movement away from unilateral diplomacy and toward increased reliance on multilateralism in international relations. This shift has been evident in the recent application of sanctions cases. Because, of an inherent belief that multilateral sanctions are more likely to be effective than unilateral sanctions. International institutions such as international organizations also play an important role in the process of multilateral sanctions.

Drezner observed regarding multilateralism that "International organizations play a decisive role in sustaining cooperation over time; they also suggest the mechanism through which this is accomplished. International organizations maintain cooperation not through the *ex post* punishment of defectors but through the *ex ante* reassurance of actors by developing common conjectures and blunting domestic pressures to defect" (Drezner 2000).

Daniel W Drezner defines Economic Coercion as the threat or act by a nation state or coalition of nation states called 'the sender', to disrupt economic exchange with another nation state, called 'the target', unless the targeted country acquiesces to an articulated political demand. And he further stresses on the point that the underlying assumption regarding the use of economic sanctions is that they are an important indicator of domestic and symbolic politics but inconsequential tool of statecraft (Drezner 2000).

Thus, as stated by some researchers, nowadays economic sanctions could work effectively only in a situation with international consensus backing their implementation or, at least, with the support of major international players and the trading partners of a sanctioned country (Elliott & Kimberly 1998). There seems a consensus among the scholars of political economy that unilateral sanctions are doomed to fail and there exists chances for successful sanctions of any significance when it is applied multilaterally or internationally.

Therefore, the existing literature suggests a logical reason that empirically, sanctions are more successful when they exert greater economic costs on the target, and multilateral sanctions generally impose greater economic costs than unilateral sanctions; but multilateral sanctions are no more successful than unilateral sanctions always.

Needless to say, this is very difficult in today's multi polar world. Because of conflict of interests, as the number of the actors increases the harder it becomes to obtain consensus.

### **TYPES OF SANCTIONS AND THEIR OBJECTIVES**

Sanctions as foreign policy instrument have also been an important subject of discussion among the policy makers and academic circles. It is the increased use of economic or political leverage that has triggered the debate among the host of scholars and foreign policy experts. There are many scholars who have detailed about the efficacy of sanction whereas others have out rightly rejected the imposition of sanctions as a successful foreign policy tool.

Diplomatic sanctions are also used by policy makers in order to isolate and put diplomatic pressure on the target country. Diplomatic sanctions are characterized by severing formal diplomatic ties with a country or significantly downgrading ties from the normal level of diplomatic activity for foreign policy purposes (Maller 2009).

A diplomatic sanction would include denying government officials the ability to travel abroad, requiring them to recall ambassadors, or refusing them access to international forums, such as the United Nations or regional international bodies. For example, the United States and eleven European Nations imposed diplomatic sanctions on Syria in 1986. Here, ordinary citizenry is not directly and intentionally harmed, diplomatic sanctions do not violate norms of diplomatic immunity. Nevertheless, diplomatic sanctions may be more symbolic than substantive and therefore only minimally effective (Winkler 1999).

Analysts argue that the effect of trade and financial sanctions on the sanctioning country in terms of costs is not clear and can change from case to case, the result of diplomatic sanctions is certain to affect the sanctioning country to the same extent as the target country. In the case of economic sanctions, both parties bear the consequences of the sanctions on the basis of their economic capacity and investments in bilateral trade, but because communication is the flow of two-sided information, diplomatic sanctions cut this flow for both parties no matter which one is economically and militarily more powerful.

On one hand, non-engagement makes the sanctioning country less informed about the target state and causes the loss of valuable intelligence, and on the other hand, as a consequence of the loss of communications, the sanctioning country loses its ability to influence the sanctioned country. The Critics of this approach argue that engagement with these regimes is tantamount to appeasement and signals acceptance of behaviour that ought to be condemned.

Sanctions are mostly economic but also political and military penalties introduced to alter political and/or military behaviour. They take the forms of financial restrictions, foreign assistance reductions and cut-offs, export- import restrictions, revocation of MFN status(Most Favoured Nation), asset freezes, tariff increases, investment prohibitions, votes in international organizations, withdrawal of diplomatic relations, visa denials, travel bans and arms embargos, employed from time to time in multilateral and unilateral fashion.

Interestingly, Sanctions are also important tools by which governments dole out rents to special interests, make symbolic statements, send signals to group of allies and indicate to various interest groups in target countries objection to their actions or support for their causes. These are often termed as Positive Sanctions. And, David Baldwin in his book *Economic Statecraft* states that the two types of sanctions positive and negative sanctions are meant to exercise power and particularly to foster cooperation among countries (Baldwin 1985).

Analysts of sanctions theory express that Sanctions have long been an important stage between the 'talking therapy' of diplomacy and the use of 'military force' (Crawford and Klotz, 1999; Baldwin and Pape, 1998; Pape 1997; Gottenmoeller 2012, Chaitkin, 2009). Since 1970s sanctions have gained popularity. But after the end of the Cold War in 1990 this instrument of economic coercion has become a popular tool of response to myriad threats to international peace and security. They are also used because of their being less costly than any military intervention.

Objectives of sanctions are another area of concern for the scholars. These play an important role in assessing the conditions and the success or failures of a sanction. They can broadly be grouped into three categories: Primary objectives, secondary objectives and tertiary objectives (Barber 1979).

There are 'primary objectives' which are concerned with the actions and behaviour of the state or regime against which the sanctions are directed- the target state. These primary objectives are themselves diverse.

There are secondary objectives relating to the status, behaviour and expectations of the governments imposing the sanctions- the 'imposing state'. The purpose of sanctions here is to demonstrate a willingness and capacity to act. The example of this intended showcase of power is the United States controlling of events of South America. Although most studies have concentrated on primary objectives of sanctions and still several authors have turned to secondary objectives to explain why governments have persisted in applying them.

And tertiary objectives, concerned with broader international considerations, relating either to the structure and operation of the international system

as a whole or to those parts of it which are regarded as important by the imposing states. Tertiary objectives are usually directed to defending or further existing structure or organisations.

It is important to note that, when economic sanctions are applied over a lengthy period of time, the relative weight of the different objectives of sanctions may shift. This is clearly illustrated in the case of British sanctions against Rhodesia. Thus, it is widely believed that under the right circumstances sanctions can achieve or help achieve, various foreign policy goals ranging from the modest to the fairly significant.

It is argued that relatively modest goals that do not challenge the vital interests of the target country are more likely to be achieved than are far reaching goals, such as change in the form of government and change in its leadership. The smaller the goal, the more likely it can be achieved. Similarly the lesser the cost of imposing sanctions, the more manageable the policy will be to the implementing country or alliance of countries.

Economic sanctions played an important role in foreign policy throughout the twentieth century. The efficacy of sanctions has been doubted by a number of nations but they are still in use. Thus, it is rightly said that, 'The popularity of sanctions has waxed and waned over the years, but they have never quite gone out of style' (Hufbauer & Schott 1985).

In the realm of foreign policy there are no hard and fast rules, every situation is unique and different from the other and each requires a well-tailored policy response.

### **SHIFT FROM COMPREHENSIVE TO SMART OR TARGETED SANCTIONS**

More Recently, Theorists and practitioners of sanctions have moved towards advocating Smart Sanctions, they are known to address the limitations of the comprehensive sanctions by targeting only the political elites in a way that closes off escape routes for them and forces them to bear the brunt of sanctions. Acknowledging the problem of a lack of discrimination and adverse effects of comprehensive sanctions, Kimberley Elliott and Gary Hufbauer suggests the application of so called "Smart Sanction" (Hufbauer et al. 1990).

Smart sanctions are designed to protect vulnerable groups, preventing 'collateral damage' by exempting products such as food and medical supplies (Tostensen & Bull 2002). They focus more on financial coercion, on putting the punitive strain only on the elites by blocking their bank accounts monetary outflows and arms embargoes.

Former U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali has also talked about this "blunt instruments" called comprehensive sanctions that afflicts vulnerable groups, complicates the work of humanitarian

agencies and causes long term damage to the productive capacity of target nations and even penalizes the neighbour. Comprehensive sanctions impose heavy suffering on the innocents in target countries, hence alternatives to sanctions needs to be analysed.

The concept of Smart Sanctions introduced after the humanitarian crisis in Iraq in the 1990s has been honed through the War on Terror, and sanctions are hitting their targets among corrupt elites more often. The role of smart sanctions is to identify those responsible and to increase the cost to them of engaging in that behaviour found to be objectionable in the sanctioning countries (Kaempfer & Lowenberg 2000).

Sanctions tend to be a blunt instrument that often produces unintended and undesirable consequences. Haiti is a prime example; sanctions imposed on this island caused massive economic distress. Gibbons and Garfield (1990) demonstrated that sanctions resulted in declining incomes, rising unemployment decreased attention to child welfare and education, poor nutrition and family breakdowns.

Humanitarian exceptions should be included as part of any comprehensive sanction, both for moral reasons and because allowing a target to import food and medicine should make it easier to generate and sustain domestic and international support. In most cases, it was found that the sanctions punish the people more than the regimes. The South African Apartheid regime, embargo on Cuba, Libya and Iraq are few examples to illustrate.

Apart from this, smart sanctions are employed selectively, concentrating on a particular aspect of the economy such as oil supplies or unlike earlier cases where they were applied on a much wider basis. The asset freeze and targeting of Iran's oil sector by the U.S.A. is one of the examples of such smart sanctions.

Comprehensive and potentially multilateral sanctions are bound to inflict the greatest amount of economic dislocation on the target country. Sanctions are not merely a matter of inconvenience and shortages, but of business failures and unemployment, energy shortfalls and uncontrolled inflation. Sanctions actually tend to increase the impoverishment and marginalization within target economies, though the evolution of 'smart' sanctions does offer some relief (Patterson 1994).

Since the 1970s economic statecraft has enjoyed resurgence in popularity as an instrument of foreign policy. The Iranian asset freeze that followed the United states embassy take over, the Soviet Grain embargo that followed the military occupation of Afghanistan, the Soviet pipeline embargo imposed in response to the declaration of martial law in Poland are all examples of attempts by countries to achieve foreign policy objectives by manipulating

economic transactions. The increased use of economic leverage as an instrument of the United States foreign policy has triggered the debate globally over its utility and effectiveness.

Economic factors are to a great extent affected by economically relevant political conditions in partner countries. Foreign economic relations are as a matter of course part of foreign policy and security considerations. In recent as well as past history we have seen a series of interventions in trade between nations for the purpose of forcing good political conduct by means of economic pressure. By embargo it is therefore understood a government order influencing economic interaction and supervision of the domestic economy to comply with these policies, which are designed to force the opponent into acceptable political conduct.

Due to familiar waiver of cost effective analysis, embargo policies resemble a Tiger without teeth or claws, a Tiger unable to do more than growl a little (Amerongen 1980). The political opponent is not disconcerted by measures which have not been carefully thought through. Therefore, in the interest of all participants there is an absolute requirement for consultation with economic experts when application of economic weapons for foreign policy and security purposes is under consideration. Many such decisions brought unexpected results in the economic sector and thus have not yielded the expected political success.

Richard Haass has called 'Smart or designer sanctions' only a partial success. He argues that leaders and governments have many ways to insulate themselves and targeting their financial assets is extremely difficult, especially in an authoritarian or totalitarian regime. Moreover he explains that sanctions should focus as far as possible on those responsible offending behaviour in the target nation. Such limited sanctions would avoid jeopardizing other interest or an entire bilateral relationship. And such sanctions would also cause less collateral damage to innocents and make it easier to garner multinational support. Example of such sanction could be U.S. sanction against Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapon (Haass 1997).

David Baldwin notes: "setting economic sanctions in the context of choice requires that they be defined in terms of means rather than ends. As tools of foreign policy, they are presumably available to policy makers for a variety of purposes and not restricted to particular foreign policy goals" (Baldwin 1999).

Pape argues that sanctions used in the pursuit of economic and regulatory disputes or "low politics" are different from sanctions used in the pursuit of security and political disputes or "high politics" and explains the three reasons why they are different: first, the option of military force is not on

the table in matters of low politics. Second, sanctions should be more effective in low politics cases because the stakes are lower. Third, states care only about wealth maximization when sanctions are used in low politics disputes; whereas high politics cases involve broader security concerns, drastically lowering the chances for sanctions success. Military force is not an option in low politics cases. Though overall military force has never proved to be a significant factor in generating concessions from the target (Pape 1997).

David Cortright and George Lopez, co editors of *Smart Sanctions* noted in 2002 that "the obvious conclusion is that comprehensive sanctions are more effective than targeted or selective measures. Where economic and social impacts have been greatest, political effects have also been most significant" (Cortright & Lopez 2002).

Sanctions give national leaders the ability to 'do something', while allowing them to refrain from high risk engagements that might result if other foreign policy actions, such as military intervention were used. Sanctions can be effective foreign policy tool when targeted smartly on the ruling class of decision makers (Cortright & Lopez 2002).

#### **SWIFT INCREASE IN SANCTION CASES: RECENT EXAMPLES**

Since the first documented sanctions episode in 432 BC sanctions have remained an important foreign policy tool. Prior to the World War II the use of sanctions was occasional and often acted as a prelude to armed conflict (Duncan 2005). The sudden upsurge in sanction cases as pointed by various studies was on rise after the end of cold war. By far the United States is the leading sanctions-imposing country, out of 116 cases documented by Hufbauer et al the United States either or in cooperation with its allies has deployed sanctions 77 times (Hufbauer et al, 1990). But this upsurge subsided a little after the end of cold war, when sanctions were imposed on nations as a part of superpower rivalry.

Analyst David Lektzian reported that 'since 1990 alone, economic sanctions were used by the United States, Greece, Russia, the United Nations, European Union, China, Germany, Belgium, France, Saudi Arabia, England, the Netherlands, Spain, Japan, the OAU, ECOWAS, MERCOSUR, and Turkey to take on both internal and external problems' (Lektzian 2003). As a consequence of the devastating humanitarian effects of the comprehensive sanctions against Iraq in the early 1990s, senders now almost exclusively utilize targeted sanctions (Drezner 2011).

There are many reasons that have been carefully analysed by the scholars that played a major role in the rise of sanctions episodes as a foreign policy tool. One of the key reasons for the rise of sanctions is the development of the international

economy, the growth of which has exposed new vulnerabilities of nations. The interdependence of international economy means that even the developing countries rely heavily upon international trade to supply raw materials and technological resources. Hence, such interdependence of trade has made the restrictions of trade a more viable method of achieving foreign policy objectives in comparison with other methods of sanctions. The variety and speed of modern communication and transportation have also dictated the reasons for the boom in sanctions episodes.

An important reason why policymakers therefore find sanctions so appealing is also because it allows them to show that they are doing 'something' in the face of some wrongdoing, without having to resort to the more volatile tools in their repertoire, such as war.

Unless the use of force is quick and successful, militarized disputes weaken a nation's resources and create a domestic political backlash against the sender government. As public resistance to military interventions increases, and as foreign aid budgets are slashed, policy-makers are turning more and more to economic coercion as an attractive substitute to advance the national interest (George 1993; Rogers 1996).

Other way of looking at sanctions is to note the number of states involved. The initiative in imposing international sanctions normally rests on one or two particular governments; but to make the sanctions effective they usually attempt to recruit other states and to involve international agencies. Thus sanctions may be employed by a single government- the united states against Iran; or by a group of states- the Eastern bloc against Yugoslavia; or by the international community as a whole working through an international organisations- United Nations against North Korea.

### EVALUATION OF SANCTIONS

Effectiveness is the most difficult aspect of sanctions policy to evaluate. Sanctions are effective or ineffective tools of foreign policy can be assessed after taking a number of factors into account. The decision to impose sanctions is based on both political and economic factors like political environment of the target country, international assistance to the 'target' or cooperation with the 'sender' and duration of sanctions. Countries with multiparty systems, for example changed their behaviour in response to sanctions much more frequently than authoritarian leaders as stressed by David Lektzian (Lektzian 2003).

Sanction theory analysts, over the years have also noticed various factors that are responsible for the success or failures of sanctions. They stress that it differs from case to case based on the factors like duration of sanctions, stability of target country, international assistance etc. Careful analysis of the

many sanctions regimes, the multitude of outcomes and the varied circumstances under which sanctions were imposed seemed to suggest that sanctions are most likely to work when the sanctions regime is structured in accordance with the goals set out for it. Also, the likelihood of the sanctions success depends a great deal on the extent to which sanctions are appropriately accompanied by other tools (Sullivan 2010).

Sanctions further affect a nation in two types: retributive and rehabilitative. Sanctions may be imposed on a state to express disapproval, are called Retributive Sanctions. Whereas, Sanctions imposed to change the behaviour of the target nation, are called Rehabilitative Sanctions. The various governments impose sanctions as a form of punishment, irrespective of whether they can change the policy of the target states (Sullivan 2001).

International economic sanctions will never have a uniform impact on the citizen of a target country. More often than not, the imposition of sanctions and the economic distortions and dislocations they bring about will lead to gain for some small set of target policy (Selden 1999). Poorly implemented sanctions also tend to fail. Hence, comprehensive sanctions that are widely targeted against an entire economy and society bear a heavy moral burden, because they impact vulnerable groups- women children the poor and elderly- but leave the political elites largely untouched.

Klaus Knorr, a distinguished scholar of International Relations, while analysing twenty two cases found that sanctions "clearly failed" in thirteen cases because the target turned to alternative sources for the embargoed good. He also noted that the sanctions increased the target's political will to resist foreign pressure (Knorr 1977).

The empirical evidence that exists on the successes and failures of sanctions seems to show that there is some positive relationship between the amount of economic damage and the success of a sanction in attaining its political objective (Hufbeaur et al. 1990).

Margaret Doxey defines economic sanctions as "penalties threatened or imposed as a declared consequence of the target's failure to observe international standards or international obligations." In a general survey of sanctions, Doxey concluded that 'in none of the cases analysed in the study of economic sanctions succeeded in producing the desired political results'. Rather, she argued, international isolation reduced the chances of a settlement by limiting the channels of communication and by making understanding more difficult (Doxey 1980).

Interestingly, the largely ignored fact about the sanctions policy is their impact on human rights. Michael P. Malloy of the Centre for Human Rights

and Humanitarian Law, Washington talks about the balance between the deployment of economic sanctions and the effects regarding human rights concerns. Sanctions, whether imposed to achieve the broad policy objectives or in response to human rights concern, they usually involve an immediate human cost within the target state. The human cost of sanctions even those mobilized for legitimate reasons, is therefore a cause of concern.

To conclude, Sanctions, boycotts or embargoes are economic measures which should not be adopted until all political and diplomatic means have been exhausted, even when the past measures have never led to the political objective. But few scholars have argued that sanctions are also imposed even if the sanctioning government expects them to fail, the reason being just to satiate public pressure for action in a crisis or to direct benefits towards rent seeking coalitions (Drury1998; Kaempfer 1988).

Political coercion marked by breaking diplomatic relations and isolating the target country internationally has its own drawbacks. A complete break in diplomatic relations establishes a hostile atmosphere and undermines the political leverage available to influence the policies of the target country. The Relations between Iran and the United States is one such example.

The US sanctions on Iran provide an interesting case for examining these arguments and can shed light on how the sanctions' effectiveness could be improved. The effectiveness of US sanctions on Iran has been specifically investigated in a number of studies.

Military intervention may work against certain small and even medium-sized countries (Grenada

and Argentina), but it often seems too dangerous in instances where the threat of big-power confrontation creeps around (Poland and Afghanistan), and military intervention often proves ineffective and very costly for both the sender as well as the target country. Hence, sanctions are considered a better tool to achieve foreign policy objectives.

But it can be easy to impose sanctions, but not so easy to know when to lift them up. Sanctions can kill and cause wars, just as much as preventing them. It should also be understood that sanctions are not a substitute for policy and that sanctions can hit those citizens in a country who are tried to be helped. They can bring untold suffering to the population of the target nation. In addition to being ineffective and costly, economic sanctions are questionable in terms of ethics.

Over the past few decades, the United States has used sanctions as a means to force other countries into reducing trade barriers, discourage the proliferation of weapons of mass destructions, promote human rights, respecting core labour standards, thwart drug trafficking, protecting the environment and oust governments. The basic idea is that the burden of economic hardship imposed by sanctions will become intolerable to the citizens of the target state, who in turn will pressure their leaders to change undesirable policies.

Overall, the spectrum of instruments of choice is not always as clear for a nation's foreign policy as it is for domestic options, and the range of potential effectiveness serves to reflect that. Under the right circumstances, sanctions can achieve, or help achieve, various foreign policy goals ranging from the modest to the fairly significant.

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