

ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AS A TOOL OF FOREIGN POLICY: EFFECTIVENESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

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ABSTRACT

Economic sanctions are one of the most commonly used instruments of foreign policy; they are used to influence the actions of states and other actors without using military action. This research paper focuses on the development, effectiveness, and ethical considerations of economic sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy. Using in-depth case studies of North Korea, Iran, and South Africa, this paper assesses the effectiveness of sanctions to achieve their purposes. Sanctions' performance is gauged with both quantitative measures, like GDP decline and trade volume reduction, and qualitative variables such as geopolitical factors and the internal political strength of a country. However, the paper particularly focuses on the ethical effects of sanctions, particularly unanticipated humanitarian impacts and problems of proportionality. Thus the study presents policy recommendations that improve the effectiveness and moral feasibility of sanctions through the assimilation of new tools like AI and Block-chain in sanctioning as well as across multilateral coordination. The paper thereupon adds to the contemporary debate on the role of economic sanctions in global governance, with a focus on innovative approaches and ethical grounds for responses to international challenges.

Keywords: *Economic Sanctions, Foreign Policy, Humanitarian Impact, Multilateral Coordination.*

INTRODUCTION

A crucial tool in modern foreign policy, economic sanctions is used by

both countries and international bodies. Sanctions strive to change a target country's or organization's behavior by applying economic pressure, usually to achieve political goals without using force. Given the rise of global economic interdependence, sanctions have gained traction as a strategic alternative to direct intervention, affecting everything from financial markets to the livelihoods of individuals in targeted nations. Sanctions' potency lies in their flexibility; they can range from targeted measures on individuals to comprehensive embargoes affecting entire economies, as seen in cases from South Africa's apartheid era to ongoing sanctions against Iran and North Korea (Allen 2013).

Modern international relations will see sanctions as a continuous development tool in the world of globalization, and each situation highlights the adaptation of sanctions to the change of political landscapes (Nephew 2018). This adaptation capacity emphasizes the importance of their strategic importance, but also provides moral issues: while sanctions can facilitate foreign policy objectives, they usually create challenges of humanitarian aid and unexpected economic impact and thus incomplete relationships with civilians. Consequently, a central issue in the current discourse is whether sanctions' coercive intentions justify their humanitarian costs. This paper contributes to that discourse, evaluating both the efficacy of sanctions and their ethical implications within the framework of modern international governance.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

International diplomacy has a long history of using economic penalties, dating back to ancient Greece and Rome. Established during World War I as a formal tool of foreign policy, the League of Nations expanded its reach by using sanctions to deter violence and uphold international order (Hufbauer 2007). The 20th century marked a major change, with sanctions becoming an integral part of multilateral activities organized by institutions such as the United Nations, particularly during the Cold War, when sanctions acted as a counterweight to nuclear escalation (Baldwin 1985).

As global goals turned towards advancing human rights, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and punishing acts of aggression without inciting war, sanctions took on new significance in the post-Cold War era (Morgan 2009). One of the rare cases when sanctions had the desired effect without having a major negative humanitarian impact was South Africa, where

they assisted in pressuring the apartheid government to adopt democratic transformation. Even if more recent examples, such as the sanctions on Iran, demonstrate the complex interplay between international politics, economic power, and humanitarian concerns, the financial restrictions imposed by the US and the EU have caused severe economic hardship and political resistance (Nephew 2018).

This study examines how sanctions evolve over time, their ethical implications, and their effectiveness in achieving foreign policy goals. Analyzing key cases such as North Korea, Iran, South Africa, and Pakistan as well as the role of the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations, the study aims to clarify the moral and practical impact of sanctions. With the rise of targeted sanctions, especially in the context of financial and trade restrictions, the role of sanctions in modern governance has evolved, prompting the need to refine policies that minimize humanitarian impact while maximizing political efficacy (Peksen 2019).

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

This research seeks to discuss the evolution and effectiveness of economic sanctions as an important foreign policy tool. A specific objective is to trace:

1. To analyze the economic suction as develop tool of foreign policy
2. To evaluate the humanitarian and ethical implications of suction and the design causes to least harm the civilian population and to be consistent with humanitarian norms in general

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have economic sanctions developed as a tool of foreign policy?
2. What are the humanitarian and ethical implications of sanctions? How might sanctions be designed to cause the least harm to civilian persons or populations and to be consistent with humanitarian norms in general?

METHODOLOGY

The research design in this study is systematic and employs an exploratory style of study to analyze prevailing thought based on the literature. Such an in-depth analysis is in line with the central aims of the research, seeking a deep understanding of the topic. The data for the study are gathered from the secondary sources such as books, research articles, archives, and journals. To

ascertain relevance and accuracy, purposive sampling is used in the selection of the data. The research instruments include internet sources, archives, historical records, and academic papers. The data gathered is analyzed through content and thematic analysis, while other resources are thoroughly examined through an explanatory approach.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In international relations, this work is important for several reasons. Initially, it contributed to the general understanding of economic sanctions as a flexible foreign policy tool, especially at a time when direct military action was sometimes politically costly and diplomatically unpopular. By examining the development, effectiveness, and moral impact of sanctions, this study examines how sanctions function as a tool of “soft power” that uses economic influence to achieve political goals without resorting to armed conflict. This is especially important in today’s international relations, where issues such as nuclear proliferation, human rights abuses, and territorial disputes prioritize non-military means.

This research assumes importance as it focuses on the humanitarian and ethical dimensions of sanctions by discussing people affected by it, how it changes the dynamics of power, and, in the worst case, has causality in the opposite direction against international humanitarian standards. It shows how sanctions imposed on North Korea, South Africa, and Iran further weaken and strengthen international standards on their way to sparking debates over their ethics.

A comprehensive analysis of previous and current sanctions processes does offer some recommendations for the drafting of sanctions that will carry the credibility of strategic effectiveness as well as moral responsibility. Since the international community is indeed aware of the implications of humanitarian relief, the results of this study may just offer an opportunity to call for more focused sanctions in order to avoid losses in the financial sector.

Lastly, further scholarly and political debates will focus on this question of the optimal impact of the sanctions on global governance. This paper demands that all readers worry about long-term efficiency of sanctions by weighing the pros and cons of the old sanction system as measured in the terms of sanctions, morals, and international rights. In doing so, it helps to form crucial opinions about modern foreign policy and international relations.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The main objective of this study is to use the development of financial sanctions as a foreign policy instrument and to assess the effectiveness of the estimated results. This study will investigate the sanction system's case study from current sanctions against Iran and North Korea to determine the trend and failure in various geographical political environment. Global institutions such as the United States, the European Union and the United Nations. Further, it will critically examine the practice imposed by different state and non-state actors since the early 20th century. The study also looks into the major debate concerning the role of sanctions in international governance and the moral and humanitarian implications.

This will contribute to the scholarly discourse and policy deliberations over the optimal design of punishments to maximize their efficacy and minimize their unintended consequences.

RESEARCH GAP

It is this background that the present study tries to bridge some key gaps in extant literature relating to economic sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy. Though there is immense literature on the use of sanctions over time, theoretical formulation, and ethical issues, there remain many limitations and frontiers yet to be explored:

Effectiveness and Long-Term Impact: Although there is still significant work done on the evaluation of the effectiveness rates of economic sanctions (Hufbauer et al., 2007; Pape, 2017), much of the existing literature provides minimal analysis in terms of the long-term effectiveness of sanctions, especially in their effect on political stability and economic recovery in target countries post-sanction. The necessity of recent studies is to understand how sanctions linger for extended periods in target states, especially when their objectives refer to enforcing governance or human rights changes.

Humanitarian Impact and Smart Sanctions: Very few studies were conducted on the humanitarian costs of comprehensive sanctions and their effects on the civilian population. For example, Joy Gordon (2010) and David Cortright (2002) have denounced the blanket effect of comprehensive sanctions on civilian life. Further research is required regarding the humanitarian impact of targeted or "smart sanctions." Though such sanctions target minimal collateral

damage, studies assessing their effectiveness or ethical considerations are nearly unnoticeable. This research will investigate whether targeted sanctions really do reduce humanitarian suffering and increase political elites without touching the lives of the majority of the people.

Ethical and Legal Considerations in the Digital Age: Sanctions' ethical critiques, particularly under the just war theory framework, are not germane as much to the future cyber sanctions scenario but relate more to the classical approach with traditional economic sanctions. Yet, with cyber sanctions and digital tools for compliance come changes in the nature of ethical and legal considerations. What needs to be weighed then is what these new sanctions take from and add to the already established humanitarian principles and whether such sanctions are legitimate under international law, especially in light of this growing digital and cyber sanctions.

Comparative Analysis of Case Studies: Current literature tends to focus on isolated cases, such as sanctions on Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, without systematically comparing the cases. This research tries to do it by comparing multiple cases in order to identify patterns, common challenges, and outcomes and provide insight into circumstances under which sanctions are most and least effective.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS RESEARCH

It is critical to bridge these research gaps in order to understand better the complex and fast-changing impact of economic sanctions. First, the long-term effects of sanctions explain to policymakers how they may realize political objectives without compounding humanitarian crises. Second, given that the sanction landscape is continually being transformed by technological progressions, it is all the more important to understand the ethical and legal implications of new digital tools used in enforcing sanctions. Lastly, by conducting the comparative analysis of such cases, it will be better understood how sanctions, placed against broader backgrounds of these cases, will respect the best practice among humanitarian and international law principles. Therefore, the research is intended to present an updated, ethically informed perspective on economic sanctions as a mechanism for shaping international relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review will be of economic sanctions as a tool of foreign policy with which exploration concerning issues related to concepts, practice, ethics, and

international law are conducted. The review further speaks to an empirical assessment of the effectiveness with respect to humanitarian impact and international law in the context of sanctions.

Overview of Existing Research and Key Theories

Theoretical Frameworks: Coercion and Deterrence

Coercion and discouragement are the theoretical foundations of economic sanctions, and in the sanctions literature, coercion is a crucial instrument for compelling governments to abide by the regulations. Drezner (1999) asserts that sanctions are a non-military instrument that influences people's cost-benefit analyses by compelling them to adhere to international norms. This strategy is supported by realistic theories of international relations, which maintain that nations must think about the measures necessary to ensure their own security and commonly use sanctions to achieve their geopolitical goals(D. A. Baldwin 2020).

Galtung's seminal work (1967) critiques the logic of coercion, emphasizing the "sanctions paradox," where economic restrictions aimed at influencing political elites frequently end up imposing severe hardships on the civilian population, which can inadvertently strengthen public support for the sanctioned regime. His analysis underlines humanitarian concerns and questions the ethical legitimacy of sanctions as a foreign policy tool, laying the groundwork for substantial scholarship on the unintended humanitarian effects of sanctions(Gordon 2016).

THEORIES OF DETERRENCE

As to the deterrence approach, sanctions not only penalize transgressions of international regulations but also act as a deterrent to future misconduct. Within the paradigm of non-spread, Pape (1997) highlights this viewpoint, arguing that sanctions are employed as punitive and preventative measures to discourage countries like North Korea and Iran from pursuing nuclear programs. Scholars contend that in order to preserve the legitimacy and consistency of law enforcement, punishment must be harsh enough to dissuade targeted from repeating their behavior(Cortright 2000).

Constructivist and Liberal Theories

The constructivist literature operationalizes the normative dimension by pointing out that sanctions are important tools, in the long run, in establishing international norms, since they are used to force countries to comply with norms on human rights and environmental issues(Finnemore 1998). Constructivists

argue that sanctions strengthen the international community's normative framework by signaling shared values and reinforcing expectations around responsible state behavior. The liberal theory further emphasizes the role of multilateral institutions such as the UN in enforcing sanctions, arguing that coordinated, internationally recognized sanctions are more effective because of their broader legitimacy and the combined economic and diplomatic influence of several countries (Kirshner 1997).

Game Theory and Economic Models

Game theory and economic models provide analysis tools to control the strategic interaction between the sender and the target state. Lektzian and Souva (2007) believe that sanctions and targeted countries such as rational agents are like rational agents and evaluate costs and potential benefits before promising sanction policies or answers. Sanctions are only effective if their credibility can be established based on the game theory. A sanctioning party may relax or withdraw some or all the penalties too early, making the target nation believe this is possible and reducing the deterrent effect of the penalties. The other possible impact of sanctions on the economy of the targeted nation can also be predicted based on some economic models which will provide numerical measures to analyze their effectiveness (T. C. Morgan 1997).

Critical Analysis of Previous Studies and Theoretical Frameworks **Effectiveness of Sanctions: Successes and Failures**

Empirical research shows that mixed successful sanctions Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott (2007) have done an in-depth analysis, reviewed more than 200 cases, and discovered that sanctions had about one case policy objective. Pape (1997) disputes this conclusion, claiming that the Hufbauer et al. study is too positive and that the threat of military intervention often has more impact on effectiveness than sanctions do. Additionally, Pape contended that punishments might, in the case of authoritarian regimes, improve state control by externalizing guilt for internal suffering and occasionally result in negligible compromises.

Other scholars, for instance, Drezner, argue that the success of the sanctions depends on many variables like the sanctioning state's economic interests in the target state and the level of international cooperation toward the implementation of the sanctions regime. According to Drezner, unilateral sanctions, especially when there is not much great international cooperation, often create weak pressure on the target since it is the case in the meager success witnessed from US sanctions against Cuba and sanctions against

North Korea that operated unilaterally(Drezner 1999).

Targeted vs. Comprehensive Sanctions

In the last decades, ever-increasing worries over the humanitarian implications of the sweeping application of economic sanctions culminated in the development of targeted prohibitive measures. As seen by Gordon (2016), wide sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s were associated with colossal civil suffering. It was out of this trend that politicians developed a package of more targeted policies, namely travel bans, asset freezes, and arms embargoes so as to maximize. Targeted sanctions are said to be more effective than general sanctions because they have a direct impact on the policymakers and do not adversely affect the public at large, especially when used with diplomatic and other coercive means(Brzoska 2003).

The Role of International Cooperation

International cooperation is part and parcel of sanctions, in general, and it has been proven to be much more effective in the framework of a multilateral sanctions regime than in a unilateral one. Kirshner states that the risk of target states exploiting economic ties with non-participating states to breach sanctions could be minimized and effective action could be made stronger with multilateral sanctions. Still, the situation becomes significantly difficult if countries possess strategic or economic interests with the target and refuse to impose sanctions. For instance, China and Russia avoid sanctions on North Korea(Haggard 2017) and Turkey's non-adherence to Western sanctions against Iran(Katzman 2018).

Humanitarian and Ethical Concerns

These criticisms have increased more than threefold, with a humanitarian twist to arguments by the academia that they constitute at times a form of collective punishment that contravenes international humanitarian law. According to Gordon, the disparate impacts of sanctions on vulnerable groups raise moral concerns over whether they meet the discriminating and proportionality standards advanced by the just war theory. Like in economic warfare, Court right and Lopez 2000, also criticize sanctions and urge policymakers to consider alternatives that would achieve state objectives without causing disproportionate harm to people.

Sanctions and International Law

Sanctions compliance with international law is still a subject of debate, especially about humanitarian obligations. International law requires that sanctions respect humanitarian principles; in other words, they should not

cause unnecessary suffering to civilian populations. This view has resulted in changing the UN sanctions policies into more targeted sanctions to ensure that they meet the requirements of the legal and ethical standards that international humanitarian law enforces.

CASE STUDIES

North Korea

North Korea is among the hardest sanctions cases in history. They have been used extensively since the 1990s, mainly to curb its nuclear weapons program and the violation of human rights. Though this regime still exhibits strength and ingenuity for dodging sanctions, and its neighbors are now aggressively driving their respective geopolitical agendas, the challenge is extremely challenging.

Geopolitics Dynamics

The sanctions against North Korea have exposed as sheer hypocrisy the very divergent interests of regional and global powers involved in the issue. China, for example, remains North Korea's largest trading partner, thus playing a pivotal role both in enforcing and undermining sanctions. Beijing supported some UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on North Korea while its economic aid to stabilize the regime has often prevented a collapse that might eventually have brought about a refugee crisis at its borders. For example, the fact that China still imports coal from North Korea even after sanctions speaks volumes about its balancing between adhering to international pressure and national interest. Similarly, South Korea oscillates with a mix of being hardline and engagement-oriented in an instinctive quest for dual priorities: denuclearization and reconciliation. (Revere 2019)

Methods that Helped Avoid Sanctions

As a regime, North Korea's methods for avoiding sanctions naturally present it as resourceful. Some major methods of evasion include:

Cryptocurrency Heist: According to the United Nations, in a report issued in 2020, North Korea, through cyberattacks, hacked more than \$2 billion in banks and cryptocurrency exchanges and used this money to fund its nuclear program. Such acts also undermine the international community's efforts toward locking the regime down economically. (United Nations 2020.)

Maritime Trafficking: North Korea has carried out ship-to-ship transfers of oil and other proscribed goods, largely under flags of convenience that mask origin. Such a ruse assists the regime in keeping access to lifeline resources despite very strict sanctions.

Humanitarian Consequences

Sanctions have brought humanitarian consequences and are badly impacting civilians. In the report given by Human Rights Watch in 2019, it was stated that the sanctions were strictly impacting the country's food insecurity condition. More than 10 million North Koreans faced malnutrition. Sanctions have also restricted the activities of humanitarian organizations and have made vulnerable groups suffer more. (Human Rights Watch 2024)

Effectiveness

Despite these failures, there have been a number of successes in restricting the flow of critical technologies and financial resources to North Korea by means of sanctions. Nonetheless, the continued development of the regime's nuclear ability, along with its corresponding economic adaptability, exposes the shortcomings of a sanctions-alone strategy.

Iran

Sanctions on Iran have mainly targeted its nuclear ambitions and its influence in the region. The complexities of the Iranian political system as well as its inclusion in the global economy make it a very interesting case for understanding the various effects of sanctions.

Economic Effects

Sanctions on the exports of Iranian oil and on the country's banks have brought harsh economic impacts. For instance, sanctions by the EU and US in 2012 jolted Iran's GDP to shrink by about 9%, and a fall in oil exports from 2.5 million barrels per day to fewer than 1 million barrels per day. These impacts have significantly exhausted the foreign exchange reserves of Iran, compelling the government to reduce subsidies and increase the price of consumption goods, which elicited citizen discontent (K. Katzman 2021)

Domestic Political Effects

Sanctions have led to normalization in Iran's hardline politics, within which the groups see the Western powers as enemies. The sanctions simultaneously triggered public anger, which took shape in the fuel price-protest movements of 2019. With these two effects, it is clear that the impact of sanctions is a double-edged sword that indeed harms the government but also empowers the government to blame external sources for internal suffering. (Alimardani 2020)

Pre-and Post-JCPOA Dynamics

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was, in a word, a watershed

in Iran's history with regard to sanctions. This was an agreement signed in 2015 that temporarily removed most of the sanctions imposed on Iran for the limits set to be placed on its nuclear program. Its economy improved during that time as there was growth from foreign investments and oil revenues. However, when in 2018, the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and restored sanctions on Iran, all these achievements were erased, and economic hardship was welcomed along with deepening tensions in the region.(Geranmayeh 2020.)

South Africa

Sanctions against apartheid South Africa are a rare example of sanctions where there was success in putting pressure for political reforms. This sanction had strong support from multilateralism and careful targeting to avoid causing harm to civilians, while the situation is different with North Korea and Iran.

Targeted Measures

Sanctions on South Africa included arms embargoes and general trade restrictions, as well as cultural boycotts, like banning South Africans from participating in international sports. This was in tandem with grassroots campaigns that had corporations and governments divest from South African assets. (Hufbauer 2007)

International Unity

The wide basis of support for the sanctions against South Africa, involving governments, international organizations, and civil society, permitted a strong onslaught against the regime without leaving too many loopholes for evasion.(Mazrui 1995)

Lessons Learned

South Africa's experience provides several lessons: First, multilateral efforts are useful for getting broad-based actions against certain regimes of concern. Second, targeted measures can be effective by focusing on people and the economy rather than the people only. Third, sanctions should be integrated with broader diplomatic efforts so that sanctions do not get relegated to the bottom of the rank of priorities.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Effectiveness of Sanctions

In detail, on both qualitative and quantitative analyses, it can be determined

whether economic sanctions have been effective or not. Even though widely applied to discourage certain undesirable actions, like the proliferation of nuclear weapons and violation of human rights, the effectiveness of sanctions remains largely debated. There is a critical need to evaluate them with regard to the achievement of the planned objectives by a set of sanctions, and other economic and political aspects.

Quantitative Indicators

This can be defined by several metrics in terms of success or failure. One integral measuring the success or failure of sanctions is GDP contraction. For example, the sanctions levied in the 2010s on Iran shocked its economy, causing it to contract by an astonishing -6.6% in 2012 (K. Katzman 2021). In North Korea, a similar contraction is also evident, where, even under sanctions, the country's economy is able to continue through alternative sources of revenue generation, such as cybercrime and contraband trade.

Some of the quantitative indicators involve trade volume reduction, which is very evident, as in the case of South Africa under the apartheid regime. International isolation of the country resulted in sharp cuts to exports and imports, thus restricting access to technology, capital, and markets. Success, however, depends on the capability of persistent enforcement of such measures on different states and actors.

Reportedly managed to limit access to luxuries and high-tech arms in North Korea but still did not allow it to stop its nuclear weapons program. The case of the export decline is stronger with figures reaching 90% in some sectors, whereas North Korea displayed great creativity in finding other routes and other resources.

Qualitative Factors

Political factors rather than economic ones are critical for telling why sanctions succeed and fail. Sanctions will be more successful in their intentions if the target nation is politically vulnerable or already experiencing domestic upheavals. A prime example lies with South Africa: where international sanction accumulated with an intrinsic and stronger force against apartheid, it eventually led to change in the political atmosphere. The UDF and ANC employed sanctions as a way of leveraging the government to have demands and end apartheid. This consequently led to the dismantling of apartheid (Hufbauer 2007).

On the other hand, in North Korea, with entrenched leadership, the sanctions have had limited political impact as the regime could frame the international pressure as an external threat to national sovereignty. If there is one thing on which Kim Jong-Un's rule has demonstrated success, it is in domestic control. Sanctions can be rallying calls for national unity, not incentives to comply with international norms in this case. Therefore, political transformation-the disarmament of nuclear capabilities, for example-is beyond reach.

Unintended Consequences

Among the major adverse effects of sanctions, perhaps one of the most significant is the unintended consequences that sanctions usually create. These usually fall disproportionately on civilian populations. Sanctions lead to economic hardship, tend to exacerbate humanitarian crises and even foster internal political solidarity around authoritarian regimes. In Iran, sanctions have generated high inflation and unemployment levels rising thereby with poverty in a country whose most vulnerable sections of society face all these proportions. Similarly, the North Korean sanctions have led to malnutrition and a little health system, which destroys millions of innocent civilians.

Besides, sanctions can sometimes strengthen the targeted regime. Reimposing U.S. sanctions after the United States pulled out of the JCPOA in 2018 from Iran was further strengthened more and more anti-Western sentiments, providing hardliners with solid ground in the political arena, as Geranmayeh (2020) mentioned. The rise of nationalism and resistance to this kind of intervention can make things even more difficult for international players to maneuver influence over the political elite through sanctions.

Challenges of Enforcement

One of the significant challenges to effective sanctions is enforcement. Since the world's economy is so interdependent, then always an inconsistency exists between enforcement of sanctions and multi-actor cooperation needed in enforcement of such sanctions. A case in point of geopolitical considerations undermining sanctions enforcement is China's role in North Korea. China has continued providing North Korea with key supply needs including energy sources since they were restricted by the UN (Revere 2019). This selective nature of enforcement dilutes the impact of sanctions and underscores the need for a more holistic, integrated program of sanctions compliance.

Ethical Considerations

Economic sanctions have profound and multifaceted ethical implications.

Conceived to target elites and political decision-makers within a country, economic sanctions most severely hit the general population. On this account, economic sanctions raise poignant questions as regards collective punishment, proportionality, and humanitarian impact.

Collective Punishment

Economic sanctions usually punish the entire population of the targeted nation, without consideration of their individual involvement or responsibility for the policies that lead to the sanctions. Questions of justice and fairness arise, because the most vulnerable civilians, women, children, and the elderly, suffer under the weight of the economic pressure. The UN's "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights" stresses the duties of governments not to engage in activities causing damage to the civilian population. Sanctions, however, bring suffering throughout all strata of a people.

Sanctions in the case of North Korea have denied access of mostly children and elderly people to staple items like food and medicines. As stated by a 2019 Human Rights Watch report, the food insecurity in the country had reached a point of alarm because more than 10 million North Koreans were suffering from malnutrition (Human Rights Watch 2024). In such circumstances, sanctions appear to place a stamp of collective punishment rather than punishing decision-making elites responsible for the nuclear weapons program.

Proportionality

Another issue of ethics is proportionality. Sanctions are usually criticized for being overly harmful to civilians, especially in such situations where the intended political purposes are not achieved. For instance, while the sanctions do appear to have incapacitated the Iranian economy, they cannot demonstrate an overwhelming modification in the nuclear program of that country. Under these circumstances, one may ask, "Are the harms inflicted on civilians proportionate to the political objectives pursued?"

South African experience does, however demonstrate that with a considerable amount of sensitivity, sanctions could work without causing unduly disproportionate harm. Far from holding the majority of the population responsible for the apartheid regime, sanctions against the government were only designed to extract pressure by causing little suffering or scolding of the general population, as in the case of the arms embargo and financial

divestments, cultural boycotts against the state rather than the individual.

Humanitarian Impact

The impact on humanitarian needs demands careful consideration. Sanctions have pulled health systems down, cutting access to medicines and equipment for the treatment of public health threats, in North Korea and Iran. For example, in Iran sanctions led to a serious shortage of crucial medicines for cancer patients, badly aggravating a situation already desperate. The ethical question is whether these humanitarian consequences are ever justified by the political goals of the sanctions. Some argue that, when they fail to do so, sanctions are an ineffectual tool that causes more harm than good.

Policy Recommendations

AI-Based Enforcement: Implementing artificial intelligence to monitor transactions for sanction evasion.

Block chain for Transparency: Humanitarian aid is delivered correctly by using block chain technology, so it reaches the required persons;

Smart Sanctions: Target them with sanctions on elites and core sectors to minimize civilian suffering.

CONCLUSION

Economic sanctions are still a flagship tool of the international policymaker, but their effectiveness is contested. Sanctions on North Korea, Iran, and South Africa are examples that demonstrate sanctions can work to attain the desired political objectives in many cases, but could also lead to serious unintended, mainly humanitarian, consequences. Of course, there are connected with sanctions very important issues of collective punishment and proportionality, raising quite serious ethical concerns.

Sanctions will certainly never disappear from the toolkit of foreign policy. However, the design and implementation of sanctions are obvious enough to require some fine-tuning. Integration of technological innovations like AI and blockchain and orientation towards targeted and more multilateral approaches will contribute to making sanctions more effective and ethical. In any case, it is up to the international community to develop economic sanctions further and make them fit for new goals: global peace, security, and human rights.

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