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SANCTIONS: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS? EVALUATION IN LIGHT OF SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

ABSTRACT: *This research is focused on the effectiveness of sanctions based on measures applied against large states, such as Russia, which are more than capable of mobilizing financial and human resources and of finding alternative routes to avoid or counteract sanctions, dampening their effectiveness. Objective: The study aims to assess and analyze the effectiveness of sanctions policy. The impact of sanctions imposed by the West on the Russian economy, as well as how it affects its foreign policy towards Ukraine. The study aims to assess and analyze the effectiveness of sanctions policy. The impact of sanctions imposed by the West on the Russian economy, as well as how it affects its foreign policy towards Ukraine. Theoretical Framework: Political realism and game theories are used to analyze international relations theory and geoeconomic factors and explain current geopolitical problems and processes. Method: Based on the objectives of the research, the selection of the methodologist was carried out according to the requirements of the mentioned article. In particular, data analysis and case study, content analysis, comparative research method, and political analysis method were used, the results of which were researched and analyzed in the background of the current war between Russia and Ukraine. That is, what impact did the sanctions have on the Russian economy and political processes, as well as on security? Results and Discussion: In the final part, the importance of the economic sanctions factor as one of the most central levers for stopping Russia's aggressive policy is discussed. It is also emphasized that it is important to use the synergy of measures, where sanctions play the main, but not the only, role. Research Implications: The results of the research contribute to raising awareness of the sanctions imposed against Russia and their effectiveness during the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as to the accumulation of knowledge that enriches political science with theoretical and practical value.*

KEYWORDS: Sanctions; Russia-Ukraine War; Effectiveness; Measures; Synergy.

1. Introduction

In the modern interconnected world economy, the importance of trade has concomitantly engendered renewed scholarly attention thereon, not just as a repository of possibilities for mutual enrichment, but also as an instrument of influence and coercion and even, as some would aver, as an instrument of conflict. International economic sanctions leveraging this very trade factor, in particular, have quickly risen to become one of the principal means of exerting pressure on a given state or entity. Its history may go as far back as antiquity, with some citing the ban of Pericles on the importation of Megarian goods as the first instance of economic sanctions enacted by the state in 432 BC (Thouvenin 2020, 83). Still, for quite some time, sanctions

were considered more of a corollary to primary coercive actions, chiefly diplomatic negotiations and the most destructive of all options – war. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that up until the 1920s economic sanctions were not practiced widely by states (Alexander 2009, 9).

With the creation of the United Nations and the extraordinary growth of global trade during the 20th century, this has drastically changed, and sanctions have become so pervasive that they have permeated the media and public consciousness, far beyond heated debates in academic circles and the corridors of power. Economic sanctions have likewise evolved, from full-on trade embargoes to measures targeted meticulously at specific natural and corporate entities (Giumelli 2016, 38). However, even the most all-encompassing and wide sanction regimes once implemented against belligerent international actors, such as Iran and North Korea, have been overshadowed by recent sanctions against the Russian Federation in light of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The sheer magnitude and scale of sanctions caught the attention of the public, as in this instance the entire weight of all types of sanctions, from complete removal from vital international financial systems (like SWIFT) and the eventual ban of Russian oil and gas, to minute personalized sanctions against every entity even remotely connected to the leverages of power in Russia, was applied towards a single (even if a large and economically capable) country by a significant portion of the globe. However, nearly two and a half years later, the results have been rather sluggish, with some arguing that the Russian economy is doing better than expected, although signs of a serious economic downturn cannot be ignored. And just as economic sanctions have followed a track of rising popularity, with some saying they have reached their apex in current policies towards Russia, so the questions about their impact and, most importantly, effectiveness, that can be dated to the early 1970s (Losman, 1970) remain. In light of the apparent lack of impact on the Russian economy, they have again regained their prominence: are sanctions effective? Will they have an impact on a large regional actor such as Russia? These discussions, as one author remarks, have been mired in a "scholarly limbo" (Baldwin 2000, 80).

Undoubtedly, if the military receives a significant amount of public spending, GDP will increase. The fact that Russia has been massively financing its military forces may help to explain why the country's GDP hasn't dropped much. In the short term, that boosts GDP, but in the long term, it can be a very dangerous strategy. Russia's national debt, or the total amount of money the country owes, will only increase because conflicts are typically costly. It's unknown if this can be sustained. However, a lot will depend on how long China and India continue to buy natural resources from Russia, considering the country's significant exports. Maybe Russia will be able to afford this military spending if it continues in that manner. These measures may eventually have the desired effect of forcing Russia to stop funding the war effort, but it will probably take a long time for penalties to do so on their own.

This article will provide a brief discussion on the issue of the effectiveness of sanctions and will analyze them through the prism of sanctions applied against the Russian Federation imposed throughout 2022. It will not touch upon the ethical side of sanctions, which is, in and of itself, a subject for an entirely different article. The first chapter will offer a brief definition, history, and typology of sanctions, followed by an analysis of their effectiveness. The second chapter will offer a case study of Russia via the lens of discussions advanced in the Article so far. The final chapter will offer conclusions and some final thoughts on the subject matter.

2. The perennial question of the nature and efficiency of sanctions

The idea of looking for the glimmer of any kind of logical process has been, to put it mildly, highly controversial in the world of international relations, which is full of verbal abuse, diplomatic blunders, and even military conflicts. Many irrational actions may raise questions about whether there are any rules, procedures, or methods behind international processes at all, even if it would be wise to believe that individuals in charge of managing states would, at the very least, be rational actors. However, many academics point out that although states frequently engage in illogical behavior and that it may be deceptive to demand perfect rationality, these behaviors are still sensible enough to warrant careful examination (Kapitonenko 2022, 9).

Historically, sanctions, as an established international tool for coercion, emerged gradually following the end of World War Two, with economic integration often seeming a bulwark against the sort of harrowing conflict that shocked the world twice, and international trade grew fast (Strange 1998, 171). This didn't mean the full elimination of protectionism, but undoubtedly it dampened enthusiasm for restrictive nationalistic measures. With it came the increased importance of trade and adjacent economic leverages that could be applied to a state for several reasons. Hence, one can say that modern international sanctions were born. Excluding numerous state-to-state applications, classical exemplification of such measures would be UN sanctions against South Africa and Rhodesia, brutal white supremacist states that heavily impinged on the rights of Indigenous majorities (White 2021, 75). After 1990, it had been noted that UN sanctions had also increased in their frequency (Thouvenin 2020, 86-87).

Sanctions are often thought to be representatives of coercive economic methods, akin to embargoes, blockades, and full-on "economic warfare" (Aladashvili 2011, 101). They are measures aimed at achieving concrete results, but exploring their effectiveness in general is a tricky issue. Empirical research may be influenced by powerful selection bias (Blake, Klemm,2006). What counts as sanctions? Should the more lenient, soft sanctions which do not bear any realistic chance of affecting the targeted party's actions be counted? Others turn to more in-depth theoretical analysis based on game theory (Tsebelis, 1990).

What is the primary goal of enforcing these expensive coercive measures before asking about the efficiency (or, more precisely, "effectiveness"; see below) of sanctions? Pressuring the sanctioned party to change its behavior pattern is the main goal of sanctions (Pala 2021, 246). "Infliction of economic pain" is the strategy (Giumelli, 2016, 40). Even though this objective may appear ambitious, it raises the question of how practical it would be given that economic suffering is rarely one-sided and rarely simply affects the political elites of the targeted actor: targeting the state likewise self-inflicts pain as well. The central issue is the sufficiency of such economic pain to exert pressure and force the targeted state to cave in, at least partially, to demands.

Even the legal definition of the umbrella term "coercive measures" (for a thought-provoking discussion on the nature of coercion in general, see Himma, 2020), often preferred in scholarly circles, leaves lanes wide open to give the interpretation of a sanction to a whole array of possibilities. Broadly speaking, they may involve everything from subtle actions to direct military confrontations, but often they signify something in the middle – actions that are a far cry from bayonets and artillery, but are not quite subtle and symbolic either. In a vacuum, simple quantitative restrictions on the import of products may hardly be considered a direct confrontation. Yet, within the appropriate context, if such imports are crucial for the exporting state it may downright cripple the economy and make the state far more pliant and eager in accepting the coercer's proposals.

From the outset, sanctions should be firmly distinguished from retorsions, fully legal measures a state can enforce to put pressure on other states (Tzanakopoulos 2016, 67-68). Similarly, even the use of the word "sanction" still remains illusively ambiguous, with often words "measures", "countermeasures" and others being favored (Subedi 2021, 19-20). Others note that re-torsions and countermeasures could be considered as two subtypes of sanctions, with the third – so-called "punitive sanctions" being what often is meant under the "classical" conception of sanctions (Alexander 2009, 58-65). The primary challenge international sanctions face in the legal realm is their legality. As they are, in essence, quite distinct from the mere acts of self-defense, it means that (at least from the viewpoint of legal theory), the mandate of some international organizations, like the UN, is necessary (Doxey 1983, 276-277).

Sanctions may pursue a myriad of objectives ranging from simple retribution and punishment to maintaining peace and stability (Alexander 2009, 10). The more often-cited triple paradigm of "coercion, constraining, signaling" offers a more robust and multifarious take on what sanctions may strive to achieve (Giumelli 2016, 45-46). The number of political goals for economic sanctions actually swells up to as much as eight with several scholars (Heine-Ellison 2001, 84-85). Apart from political and economic actions, sanctions may even extend to the cultural field, by banning artists and other cultural personas from entering the targeting state (Jentleson 2022, 10). Both states and other quasi-state actors often spring to mind as subjects of sanctions, though international companies, nominally private, but often instruments of governments, as well as purely

natural entities, may also become targets.

Some clarifications should also be made about terms. The fact that some languages do not clearly demarcate between "efficiency" and "effectiveness" may cause confusion. Efficiency, at the end of the day, concerns cost-to-benefit ratio, and effectiveness measures the accomplishment of pre-established goals (Pala 2021, 244). In that context, it becomes quite certain that when speaking of sanctions, effectiveness – the capacity to achieve the goal of pressuring and exerting influence on the actor – is the primary objective.

One should also keep in mind to distinguish the impact of sanctions from their effectiveness. Surveys of sanctions enacted have shown, without a doubt that their impact is real and often severe, but they may still fail to achieve, or achieve only partially, the one objective they were set out to do: coerce the state actor to alter its behavior (Heine-Ellison 2001, 89). This thorny issue has prompted some scholars to reconsider the very question and call for a more diligent and scrutinized approach to many factors that may affect the empirical research on sanctions, e.g. selection bias (Blake, Klemm 2006).

For the effectiveness of sanctions to be increased, it stems to reason, that the dependence of a targeted state on a targeting country is a major factor. If such dependence is one-sided, i.e. there is a very significant imbalance, then sanctions, applied with all the harshness and rapidity, may prove to be more effective (Heine-Ellison 2001, 90-91). Still, often it's quite nebulous to determine, in reality, what contribution sanctions made to this or that (even positive) outcome or if such contributions did actually take place. Were the financial and economic pressures even enough or did other factors play a role?

To imagine such an application, a theoretical case study would illustrate this better: if there are two countries, country A and country B, and country A wishes to impose sanctions on country B, it may choose to look at the trade portfolio for vulnerable spots. If country B imports key food articles, (e.g. food staples like grains), which are vital for the economy and well-being of citizens but are negligible for country A, this makes it a potential subject of sanctions (Alexander 2009, 36). In the case of EU-Russia relations, it is quite straightforward: natural gas is the chief commodity on which Europe overwhelmingly relied on Russia for decades, while the Russian budget is largely dependent on oil revenues, an important but not critical commodity to the EU. In the last few years, the EU managed to reduce the dependence on Russian gas from a staggering 56% in September 2019 to less than 12% today (European Council, 2024). The EU has imposed 14 significant sanctions packages since February 2022 in an effort to make it more difficult for Russia to attack Ukraine. More than 2100 people and organizations have been subject to EU sanctions, along with €200 billion worth of Russian state assets, 61% of EU imports from Russia before the war, and 58% of EU exports to Russia prior to the war (in 2021 dollars). The EU has been progressively severing its ties with Russia over the last two years, with 2023 seeing the most impact. The amount of EU exports to Russia decreased by 57% to €38 billion last year, while the value of imports from Russia decreased by 69% to €51 billion from pre-war 2021. Additionally,

the EU has made significant strides toward lowering its reliance on Russian oil, steel, iron, and natural gas. It must be noted that the linkage between trade and sanctions success (effectiveness) has come under question too, with less obvious and clear dates to demonstrate such a connection. The issue of the effectiveness of sanctions in such "dependence" scenarios has often been questioned by simple admittance of even the supporters, that these measures should be corollary, complementary. That, while they may accomplish some goals, nothing short of pure dependence on the sanctioning party of the sanctioned may lead to accomplishing the goal of coercion.

The fact that Russia's economy did not collapse as a result of the sanctions is frequently used as justification for negative assessments of the measures (Willis and Preble, 2024). Apart from the fact that sanctions were never intended to accomplish this, in recent memory sanctions have never caused a state's economy to collapse. Consider instances that have been extensively covered in the literature since the end of the Cold War: sanctions by themselves did not push North Korea or Iraq to the verge of economic collapse in the 1990s (Giumelli, 2024).

Aside from the legal and economic aspects of imposing sanctions, the purely human dimension should not be forgotten. When crippling sanctions were applied to Iraq in the 90s, many noted it scarcely touched the ruling Hussein family, instead damaging already impoverished and destitute Iraqi citizens (Thouvenin 2020, 87). Moreover, due to the extensive power that the dictator wielded, they managed to mobilize the country against sanctions and in essence, shift the blame from themselves to the states sanctioning them (Pala 2021, 249).

In addition to withstanding the weight of sanctions and mobilizing resources, the other central issue is the existence of third states, which are capable of supplanting the targeting states. When Iran was sanctioned following the Iranian Revolution and consequently, during the ghastly Iran-Iraq War, several states, such as China and North Korea stepped in to provide assistance. In many ways, that is what is happening with Russia, which is capable of, to some degree, evading sanctions, with the help of a few states, again China and North Korea in particular, which not only provides a breathing room for battered Russian finances, but also equipment and arms.

Another question that should be asked is what is the metric to even measure the effectiveness of a given sanction? That the pain will be assuredly inflicted on the targeted party is all but certain, but will it achieve the desired outcome? Previous experiences, particularly with North Korea, have clearly demonstrated that more often than not the answer to that question is no (Jentleson, 2022, 22-23). And yet perhaps this question is in itself incorrect. Perhaps the effectiveness of sanctions should be measured in degrees and such a radical dichotomy of "yes-no" is untenable. Alternatively, a good balance would be to state that just as the

incapacity to accomplish its primary objective shouldn't lead to automatic denunciation of sanctions as a failure, so even the minutest effect should not be hailed as some type of unimaginable success. (Jentleson 2022, 23). This approach may prove to be useful in the following case study below.

3. Case study: Western sanctions against Russia

The unprecedented scale of the sanctions regime against Russia for its unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine has garnered the attention of multiple scholars. While February 24, 2022, is the date of full-scale invasion, it should be emphasized that the invasion of the sovereign territory of Ukraine commenced in February 2014 after the fall of Yanukovych's government (Arel, Driscoll 2023, 100-120). The following sanctions regime from the West was quite light, half-heartedly enforced, and easily evaded (Jentleson 2022, 38) considering that Russia's full annexation of Crimea, a sovereign territory of another country, and all, but clear-cut support of the "separatist" movement in the Donbas region amounted to an invasion and partial occupation of another state not seen in Europe since World War Two. Some scholars even went as far as to describe EU sanctions as "focused on a symbolic and communicative level" (Veebel, Markus, 188) or EU "posing" as sanctions, instead of them being ones. (Bělín, Hanousek 2021)

The full-scale invasion in 2022, however, prompted a plethora of such all-encompassing sanctions, that they, in all likelihood, surprised even the Kremlin in their ferocity. The freezing of assets was followed by removal from the SWIFT system and the exodus of dozens of the largest conglomerates. The scale and intensity of sanctions have affected Russian currency, migration patterns, wages, and employment. The final stroke was the import ban imposed by the EU on crude oil from December 2022 and petroleum products from February 2023, a supposed death knell for the Russian economy (see in general OECD report, Assessing the Impact of Russia's War against Ukraine on Eastern Partner Countries, 2023, 14-17).

Since the introduction of sanctions against Russia, according to data for 2023, the Russian economy has not suffered significant damage. Accordingly, it has significant financial resources to continue its aggressive war against Ukraine. The economy, even under the direst estimates (IMF, OECD), contracted by a mere 2-3% (European Council, 2023), is less severe than the economic downturn in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. The collapse of the Ruble in August 2023 may be a sign of impending financial collapse or a temporary crisis that the economy can still weather relatively unscathed. On one hand, this was to be accepted – sanctions take years to fully realize, and in the case of Russia – a gigantic, continent-sized country spanning eleven time zones, a sizeable population of 144 million people, and replete with natural resources – even this unparalleled sanctions regime would take some time to take hold. On the other hand, many have noted, that "the Russian economy has weathered the sanctions better than many expected" (Nelson R., 2022). Those forecasts, that

prognosticated severe economic depression or even outright economic collapse, have proven to be wrong. This shouldn't be taken as evidence that economic sanctions are worthless and should be lifted – the complete effect of sanctions will take years, at minimum, to fully materialize. Rather it shows the still limited nature of sanctions, capable of affecting predominantly one vital sector of the targeted state – the economy, and even that not fully, as the targeted state, particularly such as Russia, can mobilize, adapt to circumstances, and deploy countermeasures. It is possible that, as time goes on, Russia, its government, and its people will feel the full weight of sanctions, causing dire economic hardships. However, as a complete collapse seems unlikely, these powerful soft measures need additional "hard" leverages to fully follow up on this soft pressure.

It would have been naive to believe that sanctions alone could force Russia to halt its unlawful war against Ukraine and give up its larger ambitions for dominance, not just because it was going broke but also because it was receiving help from its allies. A well-thought-out, firm, and multifaceted plan for reestablishing and maintaining global peace and security is necessary in place of sanctions. But to guarantee that the plan has the biggest possible impact, they have to be included. A few different elements must be included in this method. First and foremost, Ukraine needs prompt military assistance. Second, to create procedures for holding Russia and its war criminals accountable, the international community should keep collaborating with Ukraine. Third, additional means of applying pressure on Russia to abide by international law, such as the seizure of its sovereign assets, must be supported by States (Tkachova, 2024).

This overview clearly shows that soft measures, such as international economic sanctions, even taken to their absolute limits, may still be incapable of exerting enough pressure, at the very least, in short timeframes. In this particular instance, as the imposition of sanctions was precipitated by the initiation of the second, far more devastating phase of a war of aggression, it would be preferable to offer full support to the victim of such violence – Ukraine – with arms and financial support as well, if the objective is for this war to stop. Increasingly, this is the case, with Western arms and training flowing into Ukraine. Whether international sanctions alone would have been enough to cause the economic collapse of Russia is uncertain and, in the face of direct evidence available, analyzed, and extrapolated, ambiguous.

4. Conclusion

Economic sanctions have come to dominate the discussions on the international stage. They capture the imagination of the modern public with promises of bloodless coercion, which holds quite the allure for humanity, whose history is awash with bloody conflicts. Yet, the materialization of these promises into actual reality has been tenuous and unclear at best. Leaving the quite muddy legal grounds aside, when it is hard to label a sanction even legal and just, multiple times the efficiency of sanctions has come under scrutiny. General

sanctions have been shown to affect the local populace, often not complicit in crimes that prompt the enactment of sanctions in the first place, far more directly and heavily, than they seem to affect the political and economic elite. These elites are not only well-entrenched and well-connected but also quite adept at evading sanctions using various methods and tricks at their disposal. More importantly, the economies too have proven to be far more resilient than initially thought. While the impact on the economies of North Korea and Iran, and, for the purposes of the present article, of Russia, has definitely been devastating, it did not cause these states to crumble, as they were able to mobilize their resources and population and employ ample countermeasures. Despite this, sanctions against Syria and North Korea still managed to significantly erode economic potential and affect the power wielded by the Assad and Kim families. They were far from fruitless.

Perhaps, at the end of the day, the very chaotic nature of the world precludes us from passing a final judgment on the efficiency and justness of sanctions amidst a multitude of variables in world affairs and the complex and intricate machinery of national economies. In certain circumstances, sanctions do work well and may be understood so by the targeted party, which may back down from the mere threat of sanctions. In another case, an outcome opposite to what was intended is also quite possible.

Perhaps a good way to envision sanctions is to think of them in conjunction with other measures. Sanctions alone are unlikely to cause a full-on "capitulation" or caving-in of the targeted state, but in no way does it signify that they are meaningless. Their impact has certainly been assessed as quite severe and more than likely effectiveness is the question of degree, rather than of the binary dimension of either "effective" or "ineffective". Even if sanctions may not achieve their primary or even secondary objectives, they still chip away, quite unrelentingly and diligently, at the foundation of modern economies. While the ruling class may be unaffected for a brief period and the nation can be mobilized under nationalistic fervor, the dynamics indicate that as long as the scale of sanctions, tenacity, and dogged determination remain within the targeting country, the economy will eventually come under serious pressure.

The timeframe for this will invariably differ. The extremely oil-dependent Iraq, with its limited resources and population, could sustain its state structures only under the most brutal of authoritarian regimes. Meanwhile, Russia, spanning eleven time zones and a population of more than 140 million, despite also relying heavily on oil, has far more resources and reserves to call in, even if they are far from being bottomless, and has no less authoritarian power structure than Hussein's Iraq. With regards to sanctions against Russia, despite their unparalleled scale and tenacity, scholars do agree they should be deployed in combination with other instruments to affect the change of course (Meister, Jalilvand, 2022).

In conclusion, sanctions alone are unlikely to decisively affect the outcome, but in conjunction with other soft and hard measures, they represent a powerful tool to achieve the desired outcome. For the aggression against Ukraine to end, the sanctions regime must be maintained and tightened as much as possible, but

Ukraine must be provided with everything necessary to win the battlefield as well. The overview of the political situation allows us to summarize that Russia, as much as it may be hurting from sanctions, is still too large, too capable of dipping into its deep pool of resources, to be brought to its knees by sanctions alone. In this case, to restore peace in Europe and to guarantee the safety of the continent for years to come, a myriad of measures must be deployed by the EU and the West, in which economic sanctions must form one of the most central, but far from the only pillar.

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