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Given their comparatively low rate of success why are sanctions so frequently applied?

Many scholars argue that the success rate of economic sanctions is quite low and as a foreign policy instrument, sanctions are ineffective. If economic sanctions do not work, why do politicians apply them so frequently? This essay claims that the answer lies in a different understanding of the term «economic sanctions», its goals, its targets, and its effectiveness by scholars on the one hand and by practitioners on the other. This paper also claims that the criteria of assessing the success rate of economic sanctions should be reconsidered.

Keywords: sanctions, economic sanctions, effectiveness of economic sanctions, foreign policy analysis, foreign policy tools, coercive diplomacy, international relations, diplomacy, EU, Russia, Ukraine crisis, success and failure of economic sanctions.

Many scholars argue that the success rate of economic sanctions is quite low and as a foreign policy instrument, sanctions are ineffective [1, 2]. Yet paradoxically policy-makers keep imposing economic sanctions.

If economic sanctions do not work, why do politicians apply them so frequently? This essay claims that the answer lies in a different understanding of the term of «economic sanctions», its goals, its targets, and its effectiveness by scholars on the one hand and by practitioners on the other.

This paper agrees with David Baldwin's [3; 81] approach that argues: «whether sanctions 'work' may be separated from the question of whether they should be used». For this purpose, this essay will start by defining the term «economic sanctions» and «success» before moving on to the main part, where this paper argues that economic sanctions tend to have many goals as well as target groups and this fact largely contributes to the explanation of why sanctions are so frequently used by policymakers. Other factors that encourage the use sanctions more often, this paper claims, are the cost-effectiveness of economic sanctions and the limited options of foreign policy instruments that are available to politicians. In the final section, this essay will give a detailed case study of the EU's sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

Defining the term 'economic sanctions'

Let's start with the definition and we will see how the term «economic sanctions» is addressed in the works of academicians. Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott [4] define the term «economic sanctions» as financial or trade restrictions used by a state in order to change another nation's policies in some pre-specified manner. According to Pape [1], economic sanctions seek to lower the aggregate welfare of a target state by reducing international trade in order to coerce the target government to change its political behaviour. Doxey [5] argues that «economic sanctions» are economic measures imposed by a constitutionally authorised international body seeking to compel the target nation to alter its policies in order that they no longer conflict with international norms. As we can observe it is widely believed by many scholars that the main goal of economic sanctions is to change the target state's policy or «bad» behaviour.

Thus, the term «economic sanctions», its target (only one target state), and its goals (only to change a target state's policy) are quite narrowly defined. Economic sanctions have many goals and many targets. By recognising that economic sanctions may involve, as Baldwin [6; 18] points out, «multiple goals and targets of varying generality and significance», we can move beyond the conventional thinking that economic sanctions are totally ineffective. A group of different scholars: Baldwin [6; 3], Lindsay [7], Nossal [8], Kirshner [9], Blanchard and Ripsman [10] and some others started to reconsider this conventional method of thinking by proposing other ways of how to assess economic sanctions' success and how to explain the phenomena of their frequent usage.

The success rate of economic sanctions

If we reassess the notion of success and effectiveness of economic sanctions, we can probably understand why decision-makers keep using them as a policy instrument. What do we mean by «success»? How can one measure economic sanctions' success or failure?

The conventional literature on economic sanctions defines success mainly in terms of their effectiveness in attaining certain goals (as I mentioned above, «goal» is narrowly defined as to make changes in a target state's behaviour) [1; 4]. As Baldwin [6] argues «effectiveness alone is not the only dimension on which to measure success». He goes on and claims that success of economic sanctions should be measured by many dimensions such as: costs to the user of sanctions, costs to the target(s), stakes for the user, stakes for the target(s), and effectiveness as well. The bigger the stake for a target country, the more difficult it is for the user country to pursue its goals. Thus, it means that the results should be similarly weighted: the more difficult the undertaking, the more valuable is the impact of sanctions [6; 87–92]. Baldwin is correct in claiming that measurement of sanctions' success should include other considerations than only effectiveness.

Success is also a relational concept. When one argues that «sanctions' success rates are low», one should ask, as Marc Simon points out, «low compared to what?» [3]. For instance, Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot [4] analysed 115 cases of sanction applications from 1914-1990. They concluded that the success rate was 34 percent of the total. Yet it should be noted that these analyses were criticised by many scholars [1, 11, 12]. Pape [1; 106] challenges this finding and claims that sanctions have been successful less than 5 percent of the time. But the problem with these approaches is that, first, they measure success as a change in the behaviour of a target country; second, 34 percent or 5 percent should be considered in relation to other foreign policy instruments such as war or diplomacy. No one seems to be able to give statistical data on whether war or diplomacy were more effective instruments in pursuing foreign policy objectives than economic sanctions during that period.

Other questions arise over whether scholars who study sanctions have too strict criteria in assessing the sanctions' success rate or whether they, in general, underestimate the effectiveness of sanctions.

Thus, as we can see, one of the reasons why sanctions are so frequently applied depends on how we assess «success». For some scholars, economic sanctions are ineffective tools because they assess «success» by narrow definition and they link the sanctions' success rate to only one goal — whether a target state changed its policy behaviour. For politicians, the sanctions' success rate is not directly linked to achieving only one narrow goal; success rate is linked to many goals and also to the questions such as: «If not sanctions, then what other foreign policy instruments do I have? Do I have so many alternatives?»

Many goals and many targets

In this part, I will try to demonstrate that the success rate of sanctions can vary depending on the goals they pursue and the target(s) that they are aimed to influence. As I mentioned earlier, economic sanctions have many goals and also many targets. This is one of the reasons why state leaders keep applying sanctions.

Kirshner [9] and Lindsay [7] both agree with the fact that economic sanctions are not limited to only one goal. If for Lindsay economic sanctions have such goals as: compliance, subversion, deterrence, and symbolism, either international or domestic; then Kirshner defines sanctions' goals as follows:

The full range of goals refers to the fact that a state may initiate sanctions not simply to compel action on the part of the target, but to *communicate its preferences, support allies, deter others* from engaging in similar activity, and *dissuade the target* from expanding its objectionable activity. Sanctions may also be designed to *punish, weaken, distract, or contain* the adversary. Thus sanctions may fail to move the target, but may be successful along a number of other dimensions, complement other policies, and remain an appropriate policy instrument [9; 34].

A quite interesting fact is that with different goals there are different rates of success. According to Lindsay [7; 154], sanctions generally demonstrate ineffectiveness when the goal is compliance, subversion or deterrence, but they often succeed as international and domestic symbols. When a state uses sanctions as an international symbolism, it has simultaneously more than one target state or audience. By imposing sanctions on the main target, one can send signals and messages to the others. As a response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the US imposed sanctions on grain export to the USSR. According

to Lindsay [7; 165], the Carter administration hoped that this embargo would demonstrate American leadership.

As to the domestic symbolism then it is argued that economic sanctions can be used to increase domestic support for the initiating government. Sanctions against Iran during the hostage crisis helped to increase Carter's approval rate from 32 percent to 61 percent [7; 167].

Another case of domestic symbolism is when elites react to their citizens' demand «do something» in relation to some international events [7; 8].

Given the fact that sanctions can have many goals and target groups, we can argue that probably this is one of the reasons why they are still frequently imposed.

Cost-effectiveness and alternative foreign policy instruments

During the process of decision-making, leaders try to choose the most cost-effective option in pursuing foreign policy objectives. Economic sanctions, as one of the methods of coercive diplomacy, are relatively cheaper than undertaking military action.

George [13; 6] claims that «coercive diplomacy is an attractive strategy insofar as it offers the possibility of achieving one's objective in a crisis economically, with little or no bloodshed, fewer political and psychological costs, and often with less risk of unwanted escalation than does traditional military strategy». Baldwin [3; 102] also agrees with this logic and argues that policymakers do not necessarily use economic sanctions because they think they are the most effective technique of statecraft; they use them because they are more cost-effective.

However, it is surprising that despite the fact that importance of costs for politicians is very high, scholars of sanctions tend to ignore this point. Even during my selective literature review, I could not find any comparative statistical analyses on the cost-effectiveness of different policy instruments including economic sanctions. Only some scholars such as Baldwin [3] and George [13] tackle the cost-effectiveness issue.

Another issue with the literature on economic sanctions is that while scholars are mainly preoccupied with discussing the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions, they do not offer any alternative policy instruments that can successfully substitute economic sanctions or, as Baldwin [3; 84] points out, «one must show that some other policy alternative is better». In his book *'Economic Statecraft'*, Baldwin defines four categories of foreign policy techniques: propaganda, diplomacy, economic statecraft, and military statecraft. It should be admitted that this list of foreign policy tools demonstrates that policymakers do not have a wide range of options and, probably, the limited character of foreign policy means predisposes decision-makers to apply sanctions more often.

Case study: EU sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine crisis

The ongoing Ukrainian crisis that started in 2014 has caused major tensions in EU-Russian relations.

According to the information from the official websites of the EU institutions, the EU has imposed sanctions on Russia as the response to Russia's policy and actions in Ukraine such as: violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia; inflows of fighters and weapons from the Russian territory into Eastern Ukraine; and aggression by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian soil [14].

The EU sanctions include:

- Diplomatic measures;
- Sanctions targeting certain individuals and entities (asset freezes and travel bans);
- Restrictions for Crimea and Sevastopol;
- Measures targeting sectoral cooperation and exchanges with Russia («economic measures», including banking and financial activities) and;
- Suspension of the implementation of some cooperation programs [15].

The EU stipulates as the condition for lifting the sanctions: first, the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements and the second, active contribution from the Russian side without ambiguity to finding a solution to the Ukrainian crisis.

How successful are these sanctions? Do they «work»? The answers to these questions depend on how we, in general, define and look at these sanctions. The scholars that are preoccupied with criticising the ineffectiveness of sanctions will undoubtedly claim that economic sanctions against Russia failed since: 1.

The Ukrainian crisis is still ongoing; 2. Russia has not changed its foreign policy towards Ukraine; 3. We do not see the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

But if we look at these sanctions from another perspective we will be able to find some positive shifts.

1. *Any alternatives to economic sanctions?*

Do the European policy makers have foreign policy options other than economic sanctions? What should they have chosen instead of sanctions? Researchers from Centre of European Policy Studies claim that the EU's foreign policy instruments are limited to "soft power" and this is the main reason why the EU's reaction to Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine has consisted primarily of the imposition of economic sanctions [16; 1].

2. *International symbolism*

According to the document «European restrictive measures» [17] — clarifies where, when, how, and under what circumstances sanctions should be applied — economic sanctions can be imposed on any target group «to promote the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): peace, democracy and the respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law». Thus, it should be noted that the imposition of any sanctions pursues, first and foremost, normative goals. This point demonstrates a sign of «international symbolism», sending the messages and signals not only to Russia but to other countries as well.

3. *The costs of sanctions*

For the Russian economy, the EU economic sanctions are argued to have helped exacerbate the economic crisis Russia was already facing. The combined effect of the drop in oil prices and economic sanctions caused major pressure on the devaluation of the Rouble and increased capital flow [18]. According to recent data from the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) [19], Russian GDP decreased 3.7% in the full year 2015. On the contrary, the EU's sanctions against Russia had a very limited impact on the EU economy [16; 4].

As we can observe these sanctions have many other goals than only to make changes in Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine. As a sample of international symbolism and inflicting damages to the Russian economy, the European sanctions demonstrate some effectiveness.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that there are several reasons that encourage politicians to use economic sanctions as a foreign policy instrument more frequently. First, sanctions can simultaneously pursue more than one goal and target audiences: they can be used as a policy tool that sends signals about the intentions of a user state — «international symbolism»; sanctions can serve as a policy instrument to satisfy the domestic audience or increase the approval rating of politicians. Second, the cost-effectiveness consideration of any policy instrument is taken into account by policymakers. Third, policymakers are usually constrained in their choices due to the limited options of foreign policy instruments available to them.

This paper has also argued that the criteria of assessing the success rate of economic sanctions should be reconsidered. If scholars offered more specific recommendations and a clear alternative to economic sanctions, it would be possible to evaluate these alternative options in greater detail and give more fair analysis on whether the economic sanctions are effective or not.

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М. Сыздықбекова

Халықаралық қатынастарда экономикалық санкцияларды кең қолданудың себептері

Санкциялар — бірқатар мемлекеттердің сыртқы саясатында кең қолданылатын құралдарының бірі. Алайда сыртқы саясатты жүзеге асырудың құралы ретінде санкциялардың тиімділігі мәселесі даулы болып қалуда. Мақалада экономикалық санкцияларға қатысты «тиімділік» пен «жетістік» концепцияларына сараптама жасалып, жан-жақты есеп берілді, жалпы экономикалық санкциялардың тиімділігін бағалау критерийлерін қайта қарастыру ұсынылып, жасап, қазіргі халықаралық қатынастарда санкцияларды кең қолдану себептеріне терең талдау жасалды.

Кілт сөздер: санкциялар, экономикалық санкциялар, экономикалық санкциялардың тиімділігі, сыртқы саясат, талдау сыртқы саясат тетіктері, қысым көрсету дипломатиясы, халықаралық қатынастар, дипломатия, ЕО, Ресей, Украина дағдарысы, экономикалық санкциялардың жеңісі мен жеңілісі.

М. Сыздықбекова

Причины широкого применения экономических санкций в международных отношениях

Санкции являются одним из самых часто используемых инструментов внешней политики многих государств. Однако эффективность санкций в качестве средства ведения внешней политики остается спорным вопросом. В работе разносторонне проанализированы и оценены такие концепции, как «эффективность» и «успешность» в отношении экономических санкций. Предложено пересмотреть критерии оценивания эффективности экономических санкций в целом, а также глубоко рассмотреть причины широкой применимости санкций в современных международных отношениях.

Ключевые слова: санкции, экономические санкции, эффективность экономических санкций, внешнеполитический анализ, инструменты внешней политики, дипломатия принуждения, международные отношения, дипломатия, ЕС, Россия, украинский кризис, успех и провал экономических санкций.

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