

## *International sanctions*

quate explanation; in these cases sanctions are justified as defending accepted international norms and principles in respect of aggression and human rights on behalf of the international community. The problem is that perceptions of right and wrong may differ from country to country and because there is no central authority to review state behavior, pronounce on its acceptability and sponsor an appropriate collective response, the whole process becomes haphazard. Rules are vague and subject to contrary and conflicting interpretation; responses are unpredictable and often uncoordinated; results are uncertain and sometimes unwelcome.

Recently, the denial of technology and financial sanctions have been advocated on the grounds of efficacy, but in the long run it is hard to prevent the dissemination of knowledge, while the freezing of assets and suspension of loans and credits can produce unwelcome effects for the sanctioning group even if they do put significant pressure on the target.

It might seem useful, given the regular use of the veto, to argue that "world opinion" is reflected in a Security Council resolution blocked by one negative vote. This was the argument made by the United States over the Soviet veto of sanctions against Iran. But would the argument hold if the veto were cast by the United States to block sanctions against Israel? And in cases where internal policy becomes the occasion for sanctions, as in South Africa or Poland, is it because these are the worst cases of their kind? Or are these the cases on which some — or most — members of the international community are prepared to back censure with positive measures? If so, what prompts action in these cases and inaction in others?

### **Sanctions as policy tool**

Close analysis of the objectives of those resorting to sanctions identifies three "targets" rather than one — and a cluster of goals relevant to each of them. One expects sanctions to be directed to the wrongdoer to reverse the offending policy or, less ambitiously, to make its continuation more costly and to deter further action of the same kind. Alternatively, the sanctions may be, intentionally, little or no more than gestures of disapproval, for a government imposing sanctions will also have its own public to consider. The object here may be to display competence and strength of purpose in defence of national interest and national honor or to show adequate (but not excessive) support for principles, preferably in a collective framework. Thirdly, there is a wider audience in the world at large — which may include allies of the sanctioning government. Here too, there will be a drive to display and confirm ability to defend national interests and deter future challenges. For super-powers however, there will also be a leadership role. Where they determine that principles are being disregarded, and elect to uphold them through positive measures, they will expect their allies to back them up and will exert pressure if they appear to be dragging their feet.

Satisfying and reconciling these objectives will present dilemmas to policy-makers whose propensity to choose high impact measures, which are likely to be the most costly and possibly the most risky, will be lower where their own country's interests are not directly affected. Gestures

may be considered adequate for satisfying one or more of the above audiences; the Minister of External Affairs described Canadian sanctions against the Soviet Union over Poland as symbolic rather than "substantial in effect." But what if a major ally has a different perception of the priority of the issue and/or the appropriate response? The United States' calls for sanctions over Iran, Afghanistan and Poland produced the unedifying spectacle of the Western alliance in disarray, with the pressure for conformity from Washington seeming at times to be as heavy as the weight of the sanctions themselves. A British Minister explained to a House of Commons committee that the alternative to imposing sanctions on Iran was not to do nothing but to "go back and give the President of the United States a slap in the face." And Britain expected and is now getting more than neutrality from the US in response to Argentina's seizure of the Falklands.

Other complications include the possibility that the message sent to the target, which is presumably aimed at its population as well as its government, is misunderstood or censored; or that the sanctioning state's domestic "audience" supports a stronger set of measures than is justifiable or prudent. Public disagreement of the kind which surfaced in Canada and other Western countries over President Carter's proposed boycott of the Moscow Olympics presents further difficulties. Not only may these three audiences (themselves composed of many different elements) call for different responses to the behavior of other states, but other interests must also be considered. Foreign policy on any one issue is not made in a vacuum; wrongdoers may also be allies and economic interests may be too strong to jeopardize. In a wider context the overriding objective may be to avoid a major war.

### **Telling a win from a loss**

Given this wide range of objectives, predictions of success (or failure) for particular sanctions can be simplistic and misleading. And their consequences, at home and abroad, may be quite different from those expected. In the first place the target government also has a domestic constituency to whom it must appear competent and vigorous. In fact sanctions may stiffen governmental and public resistance. Economic hardship can be blamed on economic sanctions and adaptive and evasive action can help to reduce their impact. Cuba under OAS/US sanctions, Rhodesia under UN sanctions, Iran, the Soviet Union and, thus far, Argentina, have all displayed these reactions. (In the case of Rhodesia the consolidation of public opinion was limited to the white minority.)

Blockade, where feasible, brings war very close but without it trade can probably continue by using suppliers and markets not affected by sanctions or by disguising the origin and destination of goods. A sophisticated network of routes and transactions can be built up which is very hard to monitor or control as the Security Council Sanctions Committee discovered in the Rhodesian case. Non-governmental groups eventually ferreted out the information that "swap" arrangements — to which the British government turned a blind eye — were ensuring that Rhodesia received the oil it needed from South Africa. A British blockade of the Mozambique port of Beira from 1966 to 1975 was a farce.