

Do sanctions work?

by Margaret Doxey

On four occasions in the last three years, Canada and other Western countries have resorted to sanctions by placing restrictions on normal political, economic and cultural relations with other states. The most recent and extensive set of sanctions was adopted in the wake of the Argentinian occupation of the Falkland Islands on April 2. Canada banned arms sales to Argentina immediately and on April 12 followed the example of the European Economic Community members by embargoing all imports from Argentina as well as prohibiting new Export Development Corporation credits to that country. The British government, of course, had already severed diplomatic relations with Argentina, frozen its assets in Britain and barred all imports of Argentinian origin and dispatched a naval force to the Falkland Islands. Sanctions were also directed at Iran during the 1979-80 Tehran hostage crisis; against the Soviet Union following its invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979; and against both the Soviet Union and Poland after General Jaruzelski imposed martial law in Poland last December. The United States adopted a mediatory role between Britain and Argentina but in the other three cases it took the lead in imposing retaliatory measures, chivvying its allies to follow suit. In none of these cases, however, were Western governments under any formal obligation to react, whereas the comprehensive international sanctions against Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) imposed by the Security Council from 1966 to 1979 and the arms embargo against South Africa ordered by the Security Council in 1977 were mandatory for all UN members.

As a general rule and for good reason governments are reluctant to disrupt established patterns of foreign trade and investment on political or moral grounds. It is obvious that economic sanctions are double-edged in effect and can carry considerable costs for those imposing them; nor does the record show that they have been particularly successful in bringing rapid changes of heart and policy on the part of target states. Canada's position is similar to that of other western powers: we are prepared to limit or ban sales of strategic goods to governments with whom we are not on friendly terms, and to adopt condemnatory stances on certain moral lapses, but we prefer to trade in peaceful goods with all countries, regardless of political considerations, unless ordered not to do so by the Security Council.

How then can one explain the flurry of "voluntary" sanctioning in recent years? It is the purpose of this article to focus on the multiple roles played by sanctions in inter-

national politics by looking closely at the motives which prompt states to impose them and at some of the foreseen and unforeseen consequences which may follow.

Why sanctions?

It was part of the original UN philosophy that aggression and other threats to the peace should be met by a firm, collective response. While the use of military force remains optional, diplomatic, economic and other non-military measures can be made compulsory by Security Council resolution — provided none of the five permanent members casts a veto. But from 1945 onwards consensus on international wrongdoing and appropriate measures to deal with it has been extremely rare at the UN, fractured as it is by East-West and North-South cleavages. One can safely predict inaction in almost every case. Most recently, Argentina was called upon to withdraw from the Falkland Islands by the Security Council, but the Soviet Union and China abstained from voting and sanctions were not imposed. Even Iran's flagrant violation of time-honored international law protecting diplomatic personnel and property escaped mandatory sanctions thanks to a Soviet veto. Nevertheless, stalemate at the UN does not rule out the possibility of some international response to wrongdoing and it is realistic to expect that where governments see their interests threatened they will resort to self-help. They may also seek — or even demand — support from friends and allies. The UN Charter confirms the "inherent right of individual and collective self-defence" to meet armed attack. Additional legitimation for retaliatory measures may be provided by a Security Council vote of censure (even if it stops short of ordering sanctions), by General Assembly condemnation and recommendations for sanctions, or by support from a regional body such as the Organization of American States (OAS).

It is clear that the US was directly harmed by the Iranian government's failure to protect American diplomats and that Britain's interests are adversely affected by Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands. But what is the basis for US-led sanctions against the Soviet Union on account of Afghanistan or Poland? Self-help is not an ade-

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