

SUMMARY

The effectiveness of economic sanctions imposed by Canada has thus far received little attention. The purpose of this paper is to address this neglected issue. We will present a brief survey of economic and non-military sanctions and attempt to assess the consequences of Canadian moves against countries guilty of misconduct in the eyes of the international community.

After reviewing specific cases of sanctions imposed in the past, including several involving Canada, we conclude that sanctions are far from being the most appropriate tool in all cases. They often fail to achieve their purpose due to their limitations and problems of implementation.

This being said, there remain cases in which sanctions are the most reasonable practical way to send a signal, not only to the offending country but also to other countries, which may conclude that they could also be the target of coordinated international sanctions if they imitate the conduct or policies of the target country. Sometimes, the mere threat of sanctions is enough to prompt a country to mend its ways, provided its leaders are given time to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of standing up to international pressure.

The few cases in which sanctions have succeeded in altering the behaviour of the target suggest some prior conditions for success.

In most cases, it is important to accurately gauge the target country's ability to withstand the pressure we mean to apply. The reaction of its elites, the level of internal solidarity, possibly reinforced by nationalism, race and religion, the hardships that will result for the population, and the target's sensitivity to international public opinion are also important factors. The target's economic or trade dependence upon other countries and geographic factors (area, landlocked position, etc.) must be considered.

Moreover, the international community's cohesion has been an important factor in all cases in which sanctions have been successful. This is particularly significant given the fact that there is little means by which a country can be compelled to apply sanctions, or prevented from violating sanctions with impunity should political, economic or strategic considerations lead it to defy the sanctioning countries. Consensus on the wrongdoing and on the means to be taken to modify it is essential. The resulting paradox is that the measures are generally reduced to the lowest common denominator — i.e. the wider the agreement on adopting sanctions, the weaker the sanctions tend to be and the less