

3. Sanctions in Practice

3.1 Food Exports to the Target State

The targeting of food, as an attack on public health, is the most obvious way of giving economic warfare a high public profile. In response to the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 661 (2 August 1990) banning all trade with Iraq and occupied Kuwait, both imports and exports, with the exception of medicines and foods required for humanitarian relief. Resolution 670 extended the controls to the airways, and resolution 678 made it clear that "all necessary means" might be employed to enforce the sanctions. A sanctions committee, the "661 committee," was established to determine when exceptions should be made to the comprehensive sanctions regime, but it was a cumbersome body which worked by a unanimity rule that prevented its having much impact on the conduct of control operations. The proviso that food for humanitarian purposes should be permitted to pass was eliminated by the hard policy of coalition states which led to the adoption of resolution 666 limiting the distribution of food to United Nations approved agencies, which did not in fact have access to Iraq.

The study made by Mancur Olson published 28 years ago, however, showed how poor a target food is for economic warfare.¹⁰ Direct and indirect substitution can reduce import requirements to a low level. Famine is only likely to overtake a substantial state as a result of its administrative failure, as happened in areas of Germany in the winters of 1916 and 1917, and in Japan in 1945. In contrast, the British government proved itself adroit in two world wars in managing the problem of consumption control and substitution. Even when famine has resulted from food control, historic precedent does not suggest that its political results will be useful. Famine alone was not enough to persuade the Japanese government to surrender to allied forces. It is because blockade of food

¹⁰ Mancur Olson Jr., The Economics of Wartime Shortage, (Durham N.C., 1963). The British official historian of the blockade of Germany in the First World War, A.C. Bell, was convinced that food shortages in Germany was the factor that led to the collapse of the Kaiser's government and the decision to seek an armistice. The Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Maurice Hankey, ensured that Britain made no concessions during the interwar years which could reduce the right of belligerents to employ navies to strangle the economic life of nations. The evidence does not really support the thesis that Imperial Germany was defeated by the "hunger blockade," although there is plenty of evidence that it was formative of Hitler's determination to smash the democracies and occupy the Ukrainian wheat lands. A.C. Bell, A History of the Blockade of Germany 1914-1918, (London, 1937), p. 689; PRO CAB 21/307, Maurice Hankey's Memorandum on Blockade and the Laws of War, Appendix; W.N. Medlicott, The Economic Blockade, (London, 1952), II, p. 641; and my own Attack on Maritime Trade, (Macmillan and University of Toronto Presses, 1991), pp. 143-8.