

The rationality of sanctions policy is also impaired by the Council's failure to tailor its actions to the type of regime which it is attempting to influence (e.g., sanctions which prove influential when employed against a fragile democracy may prove ineffective against a strong dictatorship.) This irrationality is compounded by political cleavages among Council members, which make it difficult to form a consensus around strong measures, or to arrive at a concerted strategy which employs sanctions as part of a broader diplomatic démarche.

Participants also observed several recent trends in the Council's attitude toward sanctions, trends which are germane to the issue of sanctions reform. First, even as instances of sanctions proliferate - as do the issues to which they are applied - there is an increasing sense of pessimism regarding their effectiveness. In addition, there is growing interest (at least at the rhetorical level) in making sanctions more humane. Accordingly, states have begun to view comprehensive economic sanctions with increasing distaste, while they have expressed enthusiasm for targeted sanctions.

In general, participants agreed that UNSC sanctions are highly problematic instruments of statecraft, and that they are unlikely to prove effective (in the sense of bringing about desirable policy change) very often. However, it was agreed that UNSC sanctions will nonetheless continue to be used frequently, and that they represent valuable means of bolstering international norms and deterring other (i.e., non-target) states from pursuing objectionable policies. Therefore, it is important that Canada use its influence in an effort to steer the discourse and practice of sanctions in more constructive directions.

2. Toward a Canadian approach to UNSC sanctions

Participants agreed that Canada's UN sanctions policy should give priority to three tasks: discouraging the use of sanctions wherever more constructive and humane alternatives exist, ensuring that the needs of innocent civilians in target states are given due consideration in the design and implementation of sanctions, and developing the capacity of the international community to design and administer strong, targeted sanctions where appropriate.

Participants also emphasized the idea that the most severe sanctions do not necessarily produce proportionate policy dividends. This lesson must be reinforced in the minds of Security Council members. Sanctions policy must be guided by the desire to identify measures that are both effective and humane, rather than those which seem intuitively 'strong' and politically palatable.

3. Considering sanctions: a case-by-case approach

Participants identified three 'baskets' of issues which Canadian policymakers must address when faced with decisions pertaining to UNSC sanctions: a) whether to support the use of sanctions, b) what sort of sanctions (if any) to promote, and c) how to ensure that Canada's voice is heard during Council debates concerning sanctions.