

refuse credit sales. In 1979, for instance, neither Canada nor Great Britain agreed to ban export credits to the Soviet Union following the invasion of Afghanistan.²⁸

3.4 The Limited Impact of Sanctions on State Behaviour

The limitations to the coercive capacity of economic sanctions which were evident in the League action against Italy in 1935, the American government's export controls on Japan in the period 1939-1941, and the United Nations actions against Rhodesia and Iraq, must be accepted as a norm. The exceptional success of the fiscal pressure put on Great Britain during the Suez crisis is at least partly explained by the facts that the British government was offered a way out of its dilemma, and that it was dependent upon an electorate which was sensitive to moral argument and to threats to their wealth. More typical was the experience of the Kuwait crisis. Secretary of State James Baker's statement to the United States Senate, in December 1990, that sanctions, to be valuable, would have to "hurt Iraq so much that Saddam Hussein changes his behaviour and withdraws from Kuwait," indicates that he was formulating his policy in the belief that economic pressure directed indiscriminately at a target state should have the power to coerce hostile governments. The progress of the Kuwait crisis, however, did not substantiate his expectation. Economic pressure did not, and perhaps could not in the Iraqi case, obviate violent resolution of the crisis.

The weakness of sanctions as a coercive force is that it depends upon a concept of the state as an organic whole that would have satisfied 17th century constitutional theorists but which is imperfectly represented in the real world. The capacity of the general public to determine the behaviour of their governments is limited even in countries with representative democratic constitutions, and is very limited in governments controlled by a social oligarchy or a totalitarian political party. At the same time, however, even despotic governments depend for survival upon a balancing act between the powerful forces within society, and are not fully free to develop policies which do not find some level of approval by consensus amongst the elite, and even in the street. They may have little capacity to get unpopular policies carried out, and they may risk violent revolt if they demand compliance. Perhaps most ironically, in the case of foreign-imposed sanctions, they may be unable to pursue policies which are tainted by their origin outside the state: the concepts of race and sovereignty are still so strong that people are extremely unwilling to accept the demands of institutions or governments which are alien.

²⁸ Sergio Roca, "Economic Sanctions Against Cuba"; Peggy L. Falkenheim, "Post-Afghanistan Sanctions"; and Paul Marantz, "Sanctions in the Polish Crisis", all in David Leyton-Brown, ed., The Utility of International Economic Sanctions, pp. 87-130.