**Forum:** Economic and Social Council

**Issue:** Mitigating the effects on civilians from economic sanctions

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Introduction

In recent years, increasing number of member nations have used economic sanctions as a powerful, popular instrument for their economic and political relations. Sought by the United Nations, economic sanctions can be taken in numerous forms: 1) trade sanctions restricting imports and exports to and from the target country, 2) financial sanctions addressing monetary issues, 3) sanctions against the travel of certain individuals or groups and sanctions against certain kinds of air transport, 4) military sanctions including arms embargoes and the termination of military assistance or training, 5) diplomatic sanctions revoking visas of diplomats and political leaders, and 6) cultural sanctions banning athletes from international sports competitions and artists from international events. Their goal is to simply create economic hardships and chaos in targeted countries. However, economic sanctions have resulted in human rights violations and have been reported to fail between 65-95 percent of the time in achieving intended goals. They caused tremendous civilian pain in various sectors, such as unemployment, demographics, income and savings, health and social affairs, and the overall economic situation in a country. Therefore, to mitigate such effects, countries and organizations should collaborate to help and prevent such consequences.

Definition of Key Terms

Economic sanctions

Economic sanctions are commercial or financial penalties imposed by one or more countries against states, non-states, or individuals. They are used to alter an agent’s behavior, reduce its capacity for maneuver, and criticize those agents that constitute threat to the international peace and security; economic sanctions are an alternative measure to the use of armed forces.

**Civilian casualties**

“Civilian casualties” is a term describing the numbers of civilians killed, injured, or imprisoned by a military action.

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**

The gross domestic product, also referred as GDP, is a measurement of a country's total economic output during a certain amount of time. It is calculated by measuring the monetary worth of a country’s goods and services over a certain period, usually one year.

**Unemployment**

Unemployment refers to people of working age who are actively looking for a job but who are not employed.

**Economic recession**

Economic recession is a significant decline in general economic activity in a designated region that last over a long period. It is a common example of economic decline as it leads to a decline in GDP and a rise in unemployment.

**Sender state**

Sender state simply refers to the sanctioning state.

**Target state**

Target state literally means the sanctioned state. Economic sanctions often results in different types damages within target states.

General Overview

Economic sanctions can be viewed as coercion by sender state against a target state; there are several important direct and indirect consequences of economic sanctions on civilians that must be taken into great consideration.

Civilian casualties: deaths and suicides

Although economic sanctions are meant to be designed and regarded as a non-violent measure, they have been adversely affecting many civilians’ lives, leading to an increase in death and suicide rates. This is because sanction regimes suspend government initiatives and humanitarian aid, which results in a dramatic change in the people’s standard of living. With restrictions banning almost all North Korean-related trade, investment, and financial transactions, many civilians are experiencing a lack of access to necessities. Korea Peace Now, a civil society organization working to permanently end the war on the Korean Peninsula, claimed sanctions against North Korea contributed to more than 4,000 civilian deaths in 2019. An assessment conducted by an international and multidisciplinary panel of independent experts further reported that “3,968 North Koreans died due to sanctions-related delays and funding deficits in 2018, including 3,193 children under the age of 5 and 72 pregnant women (Budryk).”

Adaptation to insufficiencies and failures

Civilians, companies, and even the entire economy must quickly adapt to new measures and lifestyles when coping with sanctions. They must endure great consequences caused by the harmful economy and monetary policies. For instance, the whole population of a state may experience chaos due to the target state’s struggle to secure an abundance of main supplies for its population, including food, energy, water, general medications, and even transport.

*Gender*

Women make up almost half of the world’s population and occupy significant roles in our society. However, due to the prolonged economic recessions, women’s work in North Korea and Syria “extends far beyond the domestic realm to include a high participation rate in various sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, light industries, health care, and education (Peace).” Therefore, women are in a position where they are working in both official workplaces and in social reconstruction, and at the same time, being responsible for obtaining food for the family. There is rising concern that this extra burden will threaten- or even violate- women’s rights to development, protection, and participation.

Emigration

Economic sanctions at almost all times place target states in a prolonged economic recession, resulting in civilians of the target states fleeing their home countries. For instance, since 2006, more than 6 million Venezuelans have left their country due to both international trade sanctions and economic sanctions that caused political corruption, economic mismanagement, and hyper-dependency on oil. This migratory trend has slowly contributed to becoming the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis, an ongoing, largest recorded refugee crisis in the Americas. It is crucial for investigators and member nations to closely observe the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis because “it is certainly not the first crisis of its kind, and it probably will not be the last” (Lopez).

Health and sanitation of the population

Due to limited access to vital resources, economic sanctions hinder individuals from pursuing healthy lives. This is because, despite governmental support, essential life-saving medications have become almost inaccessible to many. Production of drugs manufactured decreases, or in worse case, stop, because of a shortage in raw materials; the price of medications also fluctuates, exerting the highest level of harm to those that are mostly young, old, and vulnerable. According to a 2018 UNICEF report, 200,000 North Korean children suffered from acute malnutrition, and sanctions further placed 60,000 of these children at a high risk of starvation due to disruption in the availability of humanitarian supplies caused by tightening forces of sanctions. Its sender state, the United States, still outright blocks vital humanitarian shipments from entering North Korea, hindering low-income families, particularly adolescents and seniors living in rural areas from accessing medical supplies, food, and fuel. International human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR), the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights of 1966 (ICPCR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of 1966 (ICESCR), support the right to health and access to medicine to all individuals under any circumstances.

*COVID-19*

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as coronavirus pandemic, created severe impacts in the world. In fact, the virus seems much harsher in sanctioned countries such as Iran and North Korea. Iran first confirmed its COVID case on February 19, 2020, and spread across the country. But as Iran government entered an economic crisis alongside the U.S.-imposed embargo, “this outbreak became the latest contention between the U.S. and Iran.” Under U.S. sanctions, Iran still experiences lack of proper face masks, gowns, eye gears in hospitals; they also have limited access to an abundance of COVID test kids, protective equipment, ventilators, and medical supplies. Under UN sanctions, North Korea has closed down its boarders to prevent entry of COVID viruses. There is little information regarding this, but the outbreak still somewhat appears to be serious, amid a food crisis and lack of support from international communities.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has been implementing economic sanctions on several different countries such as Afghanistan, North Korea, Iran. However, due to the sanctions’ damaging effect on civilians, the UN has been somewhat active in mitigating and advocating the effects on civilians from economic sanctions. Recently, in December 2022, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2664 (S/RES/2664) as an important milestone to minimize the consequences of sanctions on humanitarian actions. Specifically, the Resolution 2664 aims to create a carveout across the ongoing UN-imposed sanctions regimes that protect humanitarian assistance and other activities that meet basic human needs; through this resolution, the UNSC hopes to enable unimpeded delivery of food, medical supplies, and humanitarian aid, while upholding robust sanctions. It has also promised assistance against abuse and evasions by establishing an obligational reporting system in target states. The United Nations, as well as several other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Care International, World Vision, and Save the Children are working to aid civilians in target states.

Timeline of Events

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| **Date** | **Description of event** |
| 1948 | Economic sanctions were first put into action in 1948 during the Cold War, and gradually became a key strategy of multilateral and national foreign policy; they are still used to address international challenges such as ending internal conflict and territorial aggression to thwarting nuclear proliferation, massive human rights violations, and terrorism. |
| 1991-2003 | The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed economic sanctions on Iraq by adopting and enforcing United Nations Security Council Resolution 661. |
| March 2013  March 2016  February 2022 | In hopes to shut North Korea out of the international financial system, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2094 imposed sanctions on money transfers.  The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2270 to further strengthen the existing sanction. It was passed in March 2016, in response to North Korea’s 4th nuclear test.  The U.S. have imposed economic sanctions against Russia to restrict Russia’s access to advanced weapons and technologies. |

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

* The Sanctions & Security Research Project

The Sanctions & Security Research was first introduced in 1990 in response to a growing interest in sanctions prompted in large part by the new, unprecedented cases of the United Nation sanctions on Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Haiti. The project investigates the economic means of peacebuilding and the control of weapons of mass destruction through law and peaceful settlement of disputes of international norms and institutions. The scheme is funded by the Fourth Freedom Forum, the United States Institute of Peace, and various foreign ministries of Canada, Sweden, Finland, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium, Japan, and Germany. Its recent project includes a conference report on Sanctions, Incentives, and Human Security: Economic Statecraft and Humanitarian Crisis.

* The Adverse Consequences of Economic Sanctions on the Enjoyment of Human Rights; 21 June 2000; Resolution number: E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/33

This is report implemented by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It tackles the issue of economic sanctions, specifically in their effects on human rights. It further recognizes the direct and indirect consequences and limitations of economic sanctions, as well as their theories and efficacies.

* Sanctions and their Impact on Children

The “Sanctions and their Impact on Children” is discussion paper implemented by United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF); it investigates the various influence of economic sanctions on children such as bad health conditions, lack of clean drinking water, and prolonged exposure to bad sanitation.

* The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Due to the increased concerns of humanitarian consequences of sanctions, many humanitarian organizations- including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)- have been supporting civilians in target states. The ICRC is one of the largest, most influential humanitarian networks in the world with a presence and activities in almost every country. Regarding the issue of economic sanctions, this organization protects victims of armed conflict and promotes understanding and respect for international humanitarian law.

Possible Solutions

* Carefully designing sanction regimes

As economic sanctions heavily impact civilians of the target state, major sanctioning powers must take consideration in their approach to conceiving and planning sanctions, choosing and adopting truly targeted action that provides “humanitarian exceptions.” These “exceptions” may include the prohibition of starvation, the promise of humanitarian assistance, and the right to the people of target state; the measures should never restrict people’s enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights. Additionally, the regimes must consider who the intended targets are, as most of the current sanctions have the greatest impact on the weak, low-class civilians, not the power elites.

* Monitoring sanctions

Although this measure is as crucial as designing a friendly sanction regime, international communities have done little work in strictly monitoring the economic sanctions. Therefore, member states, particularly the sender and target states, must establish guidelines for good practice in assessing the impacts of sanctions. The guidelines may strictly focus on coordinating the standards that members use to assess sanctions compliance and sanctions enforcement strategies. Additionally, organizations must investigate the various impacts of economic sanctions, such as economic conditions (level of economic development, dependence on imports and exports), humanitarian changes, and migration. Sending UN peacekeepers to sender states for much valid, reliable information also seems crucial.

* Improving standard of living

Although improving people’s standard of living takes time and is difficult to achieve, this is one of the most important, direct solutions in mitigating the effects on civilians from economic sanctions. To achieve this, member nations can collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or governmental bodies to support the most vulnerable individuals living in rural areas with basic necessities such as water, food, and medical care. This aid must be specifically focused on less-economically-developed countries (LEDCs) where resources are scarce. Improving the education of youths may also help mitigate this issue, as effects of economic sanctions last long, even after they are lifted.

* Lifting UN sanctions

One of the most effective short-term solutions would involve lifting all UN sanctions that are in violation of international law and human rights norms applicable to the UNSC. Removing these regimes will mitigate the effects on civilians as the sender states’ economy would gradually recover.

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