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**INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AND THEIR  
IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the complex tapestry of international relations, sanctions serve as a powerful tool held by countries to enforce political and economic pressure without recurring to armed conflict. As worldwide tensions increase, using international sanctions has become prominent to stop aggressions, penalize human rights abuses, and prevent nuclear weapon development. However, the effectiveness of sanctions as a coercive instrument and their impact on targeted nations remains a subject of intense debate among scholars and policymakers alike.

The first section of the thesis analyzes how sanctions work and their historical use from the 1950s to the present day. The main objective is to follow the development of sanctions as a tool for international policy and to examine changes in their implementation over time. The analysis begins by defining sanctions and summarizing their main objectives. After that it continues on exploring significant historical examples from various eras, from the 1950s until more contemporary examples from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The central part of the thesis has the objective to highlight the effectiveness of sanctions from both an economic and a political perspective, providing some examples of the effects of sanctions toward countries involved and not involved in the sanctions imposed. It focuses also on the sanctions that are more effective providing some data from the Global Sanctions Database (GSDB).

The third and last part of the thesis wants to shift the focus to the sanctions' effects on human rights by analyzing various reports from Amnesty International and providing some information about real case studies of recent days.

The world of sanctions is not simple and linear. Researchers have different opinions and sometimes it is difficult to get the data about the result and the effects of sanctions because some countries don't want to deal with international transparency, especially when a military junta or terrorist are in power. This thesis purpose is to emphasize the history of sanctions with their

political, humanitarian and economic impacts to see if they are a real useful tool to combat international crimes minimizing unintended consequences while maximizing the potential for peaceful conflict resolution.

## **CHAPTER 1,**

### **SANCTIONS THROUGH HISTORY**

Sanctions are described as “restrictive policy measures that one or more countries take to limit their relations with a target country in order to persuade that country to change its policies or to address potential violations of international norms and conventions” (Morgan, Bapat, and Krustev 2009; Syropoulos et al. 2022).

Sanctions have been used for a number of aims, such as promoting human rights and democracy, countering terrorism, and speeding the end of wars. States that impose sanctions often aim to reduce trade or cut off foreign aid to the targeted country. Additionally, they may impose travel restrictions, freeze assets, and prohibit specific individuals or groups from accessing financial institutions (Morgan et al. 2023).

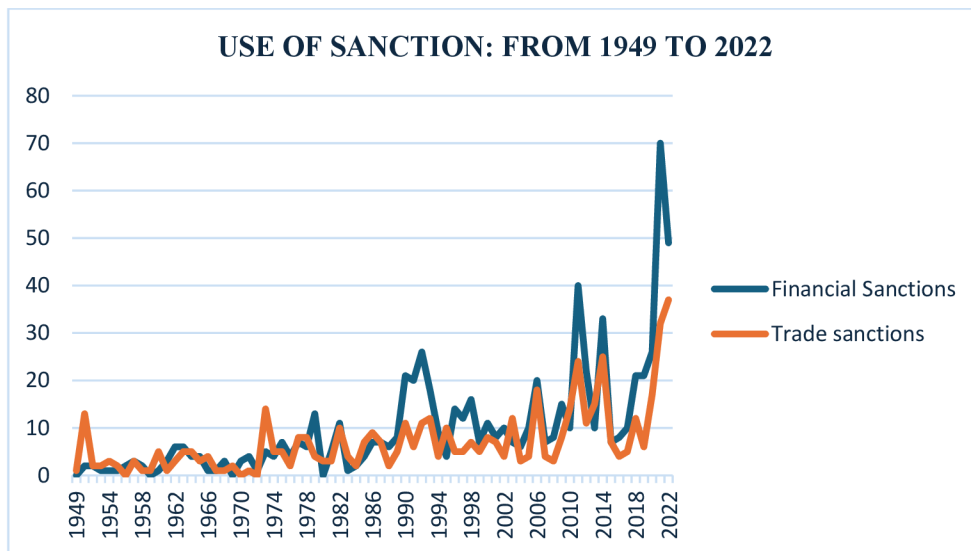
#### **1.1 TYPES OF SANCTIONS**

There are two principal types of sanctions: economic and financial. Economic sanctions are direct measures that impact international trade of goods, including actions like embargoes or limitations on the import and export of specific products. These sanctions have a tangible impact and are readily observable in global trade.

In contrast, financial sanctions are more complex, affecting not the trade of physical goods, but the movement of money and capital. Financial sanctions tend to be the preferred choice over other types of sanctions when the goals include the promotion of democracy and human rights (Felbermayr et al. 2020). In recent decades, a specific form of financial sanction has gained relevance: limiting access to the systems and institutions that facilitate international payments. These sanctions can potentially disrupt all forms of cross-border economic activities that require payment system access, including tourism, remittances, foreign exchange trading, and trade finance (Cipriani et al. 2023).

The majority of international payment communications are transmitted via the network of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). The SWIFT was founded in 1973 by 239 banks from 15 countries with the goal to create a data processing and messaging network that would be shared among banks worldwide, with standards collectively designed by private companies for community purposes (Scott and Zachariadis 2014). This nonprofit financial institution ensures a smooth flow of standardized information, and, although it doesn't transfer funds itself, plays a key role in enabling secure and efficient communication between banks worldwide, thus becoming essential for the implementation of financial sanctions. Given the limited alternatives to the SWIFT system, sanctions that restrict access to this network impose substantial costs on the entities targeted by these sanctions.

Over the decades, there's been a marked increase in the use of sanctions, rising from just 52 instances in the 1950s to 257 in the 2010s. The composition of these sanctions has also evolved significantly. In the 1950s, the proportion of sanctions that involved both financial and broader economic impacts rose from 12 percent in the 1950s to 42 percent in the 2010s. On the other hand, the use of sanctions focused exclusively on economic measures has seen a decline, falling from 73 percent in the 1950s to 41 percent in the 2010s (Felbermayr et al. 2020; Kirilakha et al. 2021). Notably, sanctions primarily targeting financial aspects were most common in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching their peak in the 1990s when they constituted 32 percent of all sanctions (Cipriani, Goldberg, and La Spada 2023).



*This graphic shows the evolution in the type of sanctions imposed from 1949 to 2022.*

*Note: the graphic is constructed using the data from the Global Sanction Database (GSDB).*

## 1.2 USE OF SANCTIONS

In the period following World War I, there was a widespread interest in adopting economic sanctions as a non-violent alternative to military conflict (Morgan et al. 2023). However, this approach, considering the two main examples of the use of sanction in this period, had controversial result. The first example is the League of Nations' sanction against Italy in 1935 in response to its invasion of Ethiopia (Morgan et al 2023). Such action was not effectively supported by major powers like Great Britain and France due to geopolitical considerations (Morgan et al 2023). In fact, Italy was seen as the counterpart of Germany in the WWI. These sanctions ended up being largely ineffective and even damaged the League's reputation. Similarly, the United States imposed heavy trade sanctions against Japan to stop its military expansion in East Asia. This measure was unsuccessful because unintentionally pushed Japan towards a more aggressive position that led to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Boudreau 1997; Hosoya 1968). These instances highlight how sanctions, rather than avoiding conflict, sometimes accidentally escalated tensions.

After WWII the use of sanctions increased significantly for the same reason that made the use of sanction rose after the WWI: they could be used as an



alternative to war. Hirschman's seminal "National Power and the Structure of International Trade" (1945) provided the theoretical basis for believing sanctions could provide that alternative. Hirschman's theory suggests that although international trade generally enhances economic well-being, it also results in unequal power relations between nations. In scenarios of economic interdependence, the country less dependent on trade can use its trade policies as a strategic tool. This approach strengthens its position, allowing it to gain an upper hand in broader geopolitical disputes or negotiations (Morgan et al. 2023).

After WWII most of the high-income nations needed to rebuild their industries, except for the United States. Additionally, the Cold War gained a central role in international politics. In this context the US frequently used sanctions, in particular arms and trade embargos, as a part of its Cold War strategy (Barber 1979). Considering this situation is easily understandable that most of the sanctions after 1950s were imposed by the United States.

One of the major examples of those years are the United States' sanctions against North Korea in response of its invasion of the South Korea in the 1950. After only three days from the beginning of the war the US imposed an embargo which prohibited any financial transaction between North Korea and the United States, making them illegal for US residents (Chang 2006). China, aligned with North Korea during the war, was also subject to the same restrictions (Cipriani et al. 2023).

The goal that the United States wanted to meet with these sanctions was to win the Korean war. At the end of the conflict in 1953 there was not a clear winner but the US signed an armistice which helped stop the spreading of the North Korea communism throughout Asia.

Another case that it's interesting to analyze is the one regarding the US sanctions against Chile in the 1970s. During the 60s the United States gave significant financial support to Chile, so that in 1970 almost 60 % of Chile's debt was held by the US (Helwege 1989). In the same year a new president of Chile won the election, Salvador Allende. He initiated policies on both the domestic and international fronts that were in contrast with the interests of the US. In response of this, the US implemented a series of economic strategies

known as “the invisible blockade” against Chile, targeting the destabilization of the country and the removal of Allende from power (Petras and Morley 1975; 1978). Beyond trade restrictions, there was a marked downturn in financial interactions between the United States and Chile, both in the official and in the private sectors (Olson 1979).

But, as in the case with North Korea, the US was not interested in targeting the infrastructure of financial transactions, the aim was to reduce the possibility of lending to Chile in order to disrupt its economy.

This pressure on Chile ended only after the overthrow of the Allende’s government in 1973 (Cipriani et al. 2023).

One important case, involving sanctions from both the US and Europe, is the one against Myanmar in the 1990s and 2000s.

The United States and the European union imposed a number of sanctions on Myanmar in reaction to the military junta, which was in power in those years, that consistently violated the nation citizens’ human rights (Cipriani et al. 2023). First Europe imposed trade sanctions, arms embargo and a visa ban on Myanmar officials and in the 2000s it added a financial element and reinforced the existing economic penalties by freezing the money that the individuals covered by the travel restriction had kept overseas (Giumelli and Ivan 2013). Similar prohibition on foreign investment in Myanmar were put in place by the United States (Martin 2012).

In 2004 the Human Rights Watch requested SWIFT to remove banks owned by the military junta from its network. In this case, SWIFT declined to cut off the banks in order to preserve its apolitical stance, citing the argument that no EU law prohibited Myanmar from using their network (Wong and Nelson 2021).

One case, that has also implications nowadays, can be seen in the EU and US sanctions against Russia in 2014, after the conflict with Ukraine for the illegal annexation of the Crimea region and the continuous violations of Ukrainian sovereignty. The EU has enacted three types of sanctions. These measures focus on freezing the assets of individuals and organizations that threaten Ukraine's stability and completely banning the import of goods from Crimea or Sevastopol into the EU (Oxenstierna and Olsson 2015). The US has

imposed sanctions which involve freezing the assets of certain individuals close to Vladimir Putin and prohibiting Americans from dealing financially with them. These sanctions also apply to state-owned banks, energy companies, and arms producers, restricting financial transactions and exports to Russian businesses particular sectors (Oxenstierna and Olsson 2015). These sanctions, which have been in place since 2014, have aimed to isolate Russia, weaken its economy, and discredit its leadership (Hosoe 2023; Nivorozhkin and Castagneto Gisse 2016). While the effectiveness of these sanctions in achieving their political goals is debated, they have been seen as a potent tool in international statecraft.

In more recent days, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the US, Europe, and many other countries imposed new economic sanctions on Russia. These sanctions represent some of the most severe and impactful penalties ever imposed against a major economy since the Cold War era (Cecchetti, Schoenholtz, and Berner 2022). Their implementation was rapid, extensive, and garnered unprecedented global support. The core of these sanctions is financial. Among these are the effective freezing of assets owned by the Russian central bank and certain Russian commercial banks abroad, along with the removal of many Russian financial institutions from the SWIFT system (Cecchetti, Schoenholtz, and Berner 2022). Additionally, there's a broad range of other sanctions, including the confiscation of overseas assets owned by specific Russian oligarchs and political figures, as well as restrictions on exporting technology to Russia. The US prohibited importing energy from Russia and the EU significantly cut its energy imports from Russia (Snower 2022).

### **1.3 SANCTIONS AND TERRORISM**

During the 1990s, international sanctions were used extensively, marking this era as the “sanctions decade,” (Cortright and Lopez 2000). Despite the high frequency of their application, the nature and focus of these sanctions experienced notable shifts.

The period did not see a significant increase in trade sanctions, suggesting a stable or slightly reduced reliance on restricting trade. In contrast there was a marked rise in the utilization of financial sanctions, which targeted the economic and financial structures of entities, and sanctions on arm transfers aimed at limiting access to weaponry and military support (Morgan et al. 2023).

The 1990s experienced a shift away from using sanctions primarily to enforce regime changes. Instead, there was a heightened focus on promoting democratic values and human rights. This indicates a strategic pivot towards influencing internal governance and societal norms (Morgan et al. 2023).

A significant development was the increase in sanctions imposed through collective international action, particularly by the United Nations and the European Union. This trend highlights a move towards global cooperation in the use of sanctions, contrasting with earlier periods dominated by unilateral actions.

This era reflects an evolution in international policy, with sanctions becoming a more nuanced tool aimed at encouraging political and social change, emphasizing democratic principles and human rights, and favoring multilateral efforts over unilateral impositions.

One of the best known examples of this period are the economic and financial sanctions against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan enforced by several countries and international organizations. The sanctions imposed on the Afghan government were designed as a strategic measure to force the regime to cease its support for terrorist groups. The sanctions targeted various aspects of Afghanistan's economy, intending to weaken the financial stability and operational capabilities of the government and, by extension, the terrorist organizations it supported (Cipriani et al. 2023). Beyond broad economic measures, these sanctions were also personalized, targeting specific individuals within the Afghan government or associated entities who were believed to play crucial roles in supporting or financing terrorist activities (Cipriani et al. 2023). By focusing on these individuals, the sanctions aimed to disrupt the networks that facilitated terrorism, cutting off access to financial

resources, restricting travel, and limiting the ability of these key figures to operate internationally.

Following closely, in the early 2000s, the UN Security Council implemented two series of sanctions against the Taliban regime (Council Resolutions 1267 and 1333). These measures by the Council consisted of travel restrictions, an arms embargo, and a prohibition on the export of acetic anhydride, which is essential for heroin production, a field where Afghanistan was recognized as the leading global supplier. Most critically, the sanctions entailed the freezing of funds and financial assets owned, whether directly or indirectly, by the Taliban Osama bin Laden, and those conducting transactions with him (Cipriani et al. 2023). A primary objective of these sanctions was to pressure the Taliban into surrendering Osama bin Laden. Nevertheless, the success of these sanctions remains a subject of discussion, given that the Taliban did not turn over bin Laden, and al-Qaeda's terrorist operations continued unstopped.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, sanctions on Afghanistan were intensified. On September 23, 2001, aiming to cut off al-Qaeda's financial resources, US President George W. Bush signed an executive order that broadened the roster of individuals and organizations targeted for asset freezing, including organizations involved in fundraising (Hardister 2002).

The US “war on terrorism” involve a secret surveillance of international financial transactions through the SWIFT network (Connorton 2007). In fact, the US Treasury initiated a confidential program, later called the “Terrorist Financing Tracking Program” (TFTP) but more widely recognized as the “SWIFT Program”. This program allowed the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to serve subpoenas on the SWIFT data processing center located in the United States (Koppel 2011).

The specifics of the amount and type of data accessed by US authorities are not publicly known.

The program was revealed to the public in 2006 through a sequence of reports in leading US newspapers. Despite being lawful under US legislation, it provoked debates in both the United States and the European Union due to concerns about privacy and civil rights (De Goede 2012). Negotiations between Europe and the US led to a restriction on the use of data by US authorities and allowed EU officials to monitor the program (Connorton

2007; Koppel 2011). Furthermore, pressure from the EU prompted SWIFT to enhance its data protection practices and establish two separate message-processing regions: a European zone (with centers in the Netherlands and Switzerland) and a North American zone (with centers in the United States and the Netherlands), effectively dividing EU and US data traffic (Sechrist 2010).

The surge in sanction implementation for roughly a decade after 2001 was unprecedented (Morgan et al 2023). This escalation predominantly took the form of financial, travel, and various sanctions directed at particular individuals and businesses. Although the application of sanctions to advocate for human rights has seen a continuous increase, their use to foster democracy has stabilized. During this time, sanctions have rarely been employed to induce regime changes, yet their utilization to counteract international terrorism has seen a significant rise (Morgan et al. 2023).



## **CHAPTER 2,**

### **SANCTION EFFECTIVENESS**

Sanctions are tools used in foreign policy with experts debating their effectiveness from different angles. Economists focus on the economic damage sanctions inflict, while political scientists assess if sanctions meet their political goals. There's a challenge in evaluating success due to hidden agendas and changing political objectives over time. For instance, sanctions against Russia initially aimed to prevent an invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but as goals evolved, they aimed to punish Russia, support Ukraine, and weaken Russia's military capacity (Morgan et al. 2023).

We can split the effects of sanction into two categories, to clarify, "economic impact" refers to the economic damage and costs of sanctions, and "political success" means achieving the stated political objectives. Although these aspects are related, in fact sanctions are meant to pressure the targeted country into changing its behavior by imposing economic costs, it's not always correct to assume that significant economic impact guarantees political success or that a lack of success means there was no economic impact (Morgan et al. 2023). Understanding sanctions requires examining the interplay between economic and political effects.

#### **2.1 ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SANCTIONS**

Economists generally agree that sanctions have big effects on economies. These effects can happen in the country being sanctioned, can also happen in the country that started the sanctions, if the targeted country responds with its own sanctions, and, additionally, can happen in third party nations.

Regarding targeted nations, researchers have studied how sanctions impact countries using different data and methods. Historically economic studies have not focused much on the impact of sanctions, especially when compared to political science (Felbermayr et al.2021). This might be because sanctions



were hard to model theoretically or because the field was more drawn to the broader trends of globalization over the last fifty years (Eaton and Engers 1992; 1999). However, with the development of better databases for sanctions and an increase in their use, there's been a resurgence of interest from economists in this area.

This issue has been addressed in different research articles which take, in fact, advantage of new methods and detailed data to look at how sanctions affect countries and companies in different ways. These papers broadly cover the recent shifts in sanctions, like the increase in "smart" sanctions, and measure the economic effects of these sanctions on the countries.

The paper by Ahn and Ludema (2020), for example, look at how these targeted sanctions work by creating a protective “shield” around crucial firms in the targeted countries using detailed individual and firm-level data (Felbermayr et al.2021). Besedeš et al. (2021) take a closer look at financial sanctions, examining their impact on the countries that impose them, their effect on broader economic activities, and using detailed, high-frequency data from German non-financial companies affected by sanctions imposed on 23 countries between 1999 and 2014 (Felbermayr et al.2021).

Crozet et al.'s paper (2021) investigates how sanctions influence French firms' decisions to trade with sanctioned countries, leveraging recent developments in econometrics and comprehensive monthly data on French exporters (Felbermayr et al.2021).

These studies lead to a few key insights. Firstly, sanctions often harm businesses and people in the targeted countries across various sectors. Secondly, these sanctions negatively affect the overall economic health of these countries, including their trade, investment from abroad, growth, poverty, and political stability. Thirdly, the damaging effects of sanctions on economic growth and trade can last a long time, even after the sanctions are lifted. Lastly, the impact of sanctions varies greatly depending on the type of sanction, whether it's done by one country or many, and the specific circumstances of each case (Morgan et al. 2023).

To reduce the negative impacts of sanctions, countries facing sanctions frequently shift their trade and investment towards third countries not involved in the sanctioning.

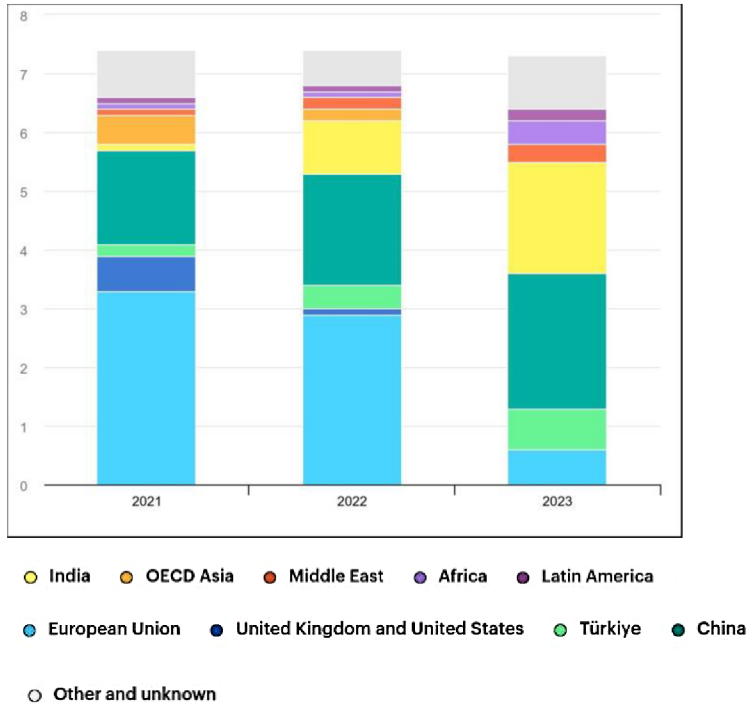
In studying the effects of sanctions, a common challenge is the issue of endogeneity (Guttman et al. 2020). This means that the events leading to a country being sanctioned, such as internal or international conflicts, or human rights violations, could also influence the economic outcomes observed. Studies like those from Gutmann, Neuenkirch, and Neumeier (2020) have addressed the problem of endogeneity, for instance by utilizing flexible tools related to laws and regulations in the countries imposing sanctions that are chosen for their independence from events occurring in the countries being sanctioned (Morgan et al. 2023). Kwon et al. (2020) suggest using an instrument that measures the aggressiveness of sanctioning countries that can be applied to examine various outcomes of both bilateral and unilateral sanctions (Felbermayr et al. 2021).

The effect of economic sanctions on the countries that impose them has been small because, often, the countries that set sanctions are much bigger economically than the ones they target. While these bigger countries try hard to make sure the sanctions don't hurt their own economies too much, some studies (for example, Farmer 2000), have found that sanctions can lead to less business between the countries imposing sanctions and the ones being targeted (Besedeš, Goldbach, and Nitsch 2021). However, these negative effects aren't usually big or long-lasting for the countries that impose the sanctions. But, this doesn't mean that sanctions wouldn't be costly for these countries if they were targeting larger and more powerful economies.

Sanctions not only impact the countries imposing them and the ones being targeted but also affect other countries. There are two main ways sanctions can influence these third countries. First, there's a direct negative impact, known as the "extraterritorial" effect, where third countries can face consequences for doing business with the sanctioned nation (Morgan et al. 2023). For example, if a country like the US threatens or takes action against companies in a non-sanctioned country, like Germany, for their involvement with a sanctioned country, like Russia, this is the extraterritorial impact. On the other hand, sanctions can also lead to indirect positive effects for third countries. When sanctions disrupt business between the sender and target

countries, third countries might step in to fill the gap, leading to increased trade and financial activities with them.

A real-life scenario of this was seen when India and China increased their oil imports from Russia after sanctions were placed on Russia in 2022.



The figure illustrates Russia exports by country and region.

Source: IEA, Average Russian oil exports by country and region, 2021-2023, IEA, Paris.

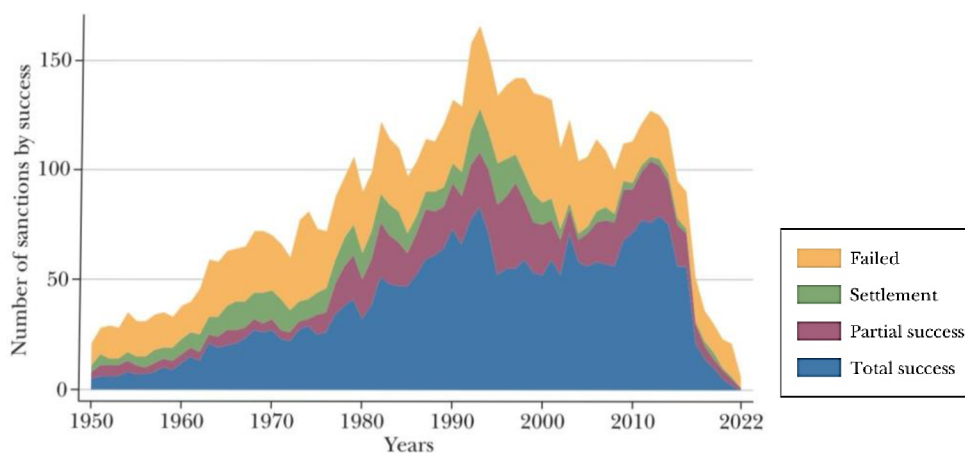
The graphic shows that in 2021 and 2022, before the war with Ukraine, Russian exports were prevalently with European Union and China. In 2023 after the imposition of sanctions, Russian export with China and India increased significantly, while those with EU decreased in order to comply with the sanctions.

## 2.2 POLITICAL SUCCESS OF SANCTIONS

Political scientists have been exploring the effectiveness of sanctions in achieving their stated goals. According to studies, sanctions fulfill their political objectives around 25% to 33% of the time (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot 1990). Despite their limited success rate, the use of sanctions continues to grow. This paradox has led experts to consider other benefits of sanctions

beyond their official aims. Some suggest that sanctions might serve domestic political needs, act as a symbol, or send specific signals to other countries (Kaempfer and Lowenberg 2007; Lindsay 1986; Schwebach 2000). Furthermore, even a modest success rate for sanctions could be viewed as preferable to inaction, particularly if sanctions are less costly or damaging than alternative measures (Morgan et al. 2023).

Researchers think that by looking at certain factors, it's possible to understand why sanctions costs increase for the countries they target and figure out when sanctions don't work and how to improve their effectiveness (Morgan et al. 2023). For instance, if the targeted country is already struggling economically and has unstable politics, sanctions are more likely to work (Attia, Grauvogel, and von Soest 2020). Also, sanctions tend to be more effective against democratic countries than autocracies. This is because democracies are more likely to respond to the pressure of sanctions since they care more about the impact on their citizens (Allen 2008; Lektzian and Souva 2007).



*This figure illustrates the evolution of sanctions' Political success from 1949 to 2022*

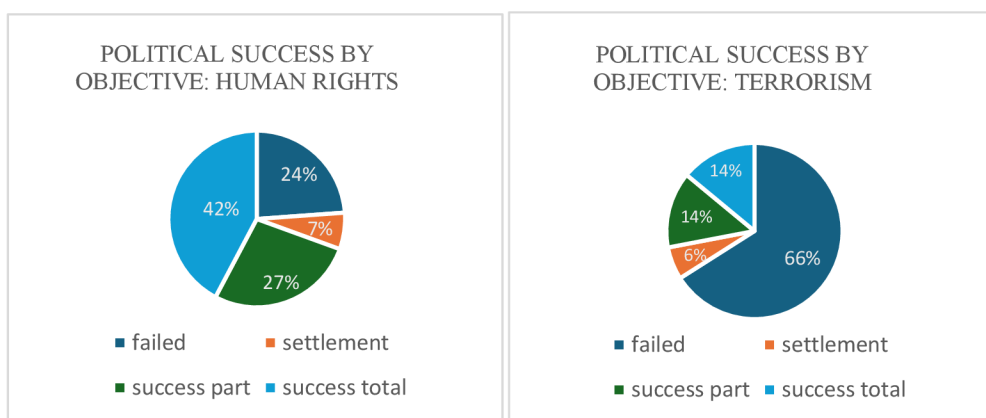
*Ongoing sanctions are not included in the data used in this graphic.*

*Source: Morgan, T. Clifton, Constantinos Syropoulos, and Yoto V. Yotov. 2023. "Economic Sanctions: Evolution, Consequences, and Challenges".*

The graphic shows that sanctions success has continued to rise until the 1990s and has reached another peak in the early 2010s but has fallen since then. We can conclude that in periods marked by big downs, like the early and late 2000s recessions and the recent COVID time, the number of sanctions that worked well dropped noticeably.

It is also interesting to analyze which sanction objective are more successful than others. Researchers have found that the more effective sanctions, in terms of political success are those with the objective of democracy and human rights, while the sanction on terrorism have a low rate of success (Morgan et al. 2023).

In particular with an analysis of the Global Sanction Database (GSDB) it is possible to find the percentage of political success of sanctions with these goals. The graphics shown below illustrate a situation in which the sanctions imposed for human rights purposes are successful (partially or totally) in 69% of the cases, while those imposed to combat terrorism are effective only in 28% of the cases. Furthermore the database does not comprehend the sanctions targeting specific individuals, in fact, in those cases the success rate is even lower, since specific terroristic organization or people who don't have a direct or openly recognized connection with the government tend not to follow international laws, as can be seen in the case of Osama bin Laden.



*These graphics illustrate the political success of sanctions by objective for human rights and terrorism from 1949 to 2022.*

*Note: Graphics are constructed using data from the Global Sanction Database (GSDB). The Global Sanction Database classifies an outcome as settlement when the sanctioning and sanctioned parties agree to settle a conflict with negotiations.*

### **2.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF SANCTION, ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE**

The low effectiveness of sanctions imposed to defeat terrorism can be viewed also in another perspective, that is the one of international law.

In fact, the enforcement of international law norms against terrorism is a complex issue, with various legal tools being used, including military force, asset freezing, and national security measures. However, the EU's practice of listing and sanctioning individuals suspected of supporting terrorism has raised concerns about procedural and judicial protection, as well as the infringement of fundamental rights (Quiròs-Fons and Kruiper 2023). The sentencing of individuals convicted of terrorist crimes has also been a topic of debate, with calls for a statutory basis to guide courts in determining appropriate punishment. The legality of targeted killings of suspected terrorists has been examined in the context of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, with the conclusion that such killings may be lawful under certain conditions.

The method of identifying terrorist organizations, individuals, and entities has faced criticism for being arbitrary, excessive, counterproductive, and inadvertently harmful. There's a lack of global agreement and consistency in the criteria for designating terrorist groups, both within and outside the United Nations system (De Goede and Sullivan 2016). The UN imposes sanctions only on groups that adopt extremist Islamic ideologies which clash with the global state system and that have clear tactical or ideological connections with the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, or ISIL. Groups that pursue communist, separatist, or other non-Islamist objectives do not face sanctions from the UN (Kruiper 2019).

In both the cases of Al-Qaida and ISIS, over 90% of deaths attributed to terrorism occurred after their designation by the UN. This trend also holds for Al-Shabaab (listed in 2010), Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (listed in 2011), and Boko Haram (listed in 2014), with their most lethal activities peaking post-listing (Quiròs-Fons and Kruiper 2023). This suggests that the UN's listings

might either demonstrate remarkable foresight or inadvertently promote these groups.

Furthermore, the practice of blacklisting has had collateral effects on humanitarian efforts. The compliance obligations tied to asset freezes and the blacklisting of banks, businesses, and NGOs have led to excessive caution and self-imposed restrictions (Moret 2022). Notably, in Syria and Iran numerous global banks have severed financial ties, leaving citizens without banking services and complicating the operations of humanitarian NGOs (Neumann 2017; Gordon et al. 2018). Similarly, the fear of being associated with terrorist entities has led NGOs to avoid working in specific areas or with particular communities, risking their reputation in the process (Daher 2020).





## **CHAPTER 3,**

### **EFFECTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

Economic sanctions on trade and financial activities, can have different impacts, as it is shown above. They can have, for instance, an economic impact or a political one. These actions can also lead to unintended bad effects on human rights protection (Morgan, Bapat and Kobayashi 2021).

Moreover, many studies show that when a country faces sanctions, its human development, which includes health, education, and living standards, tends to get worse (Akter and Hossain 2023). Economic sanctions can cause a lot of problems for the countries they target. They can lead to worse law and order situations, with more chaos and fights between different armed groups or rebels (Hultman and Peksen 2017). Sanctions can even cause more violence between ethnic groups, as some people might take advantage of the situation (Lv and Xu 2017). Support for local militia groups can increase, making terrorism and crime worse in these countries (Altmann and Giersch 2022; Balanov 2017). Because of these issues, leaders in sanctioned countries might become more oppressive to keep control, sometimes even supporting violent groups to suppress protests (Wood 2008).

It is also important to consider what it is said above, if a country has been listed, by UN, US, EU or other countries, for terroristic acts it will have more difficulties in getting access to humanitarian funds. This implies that the population living in a country already with an unstable government and with an high poverty rate cannot receive help from other nations. Sanctions, in this perspective, not only attack the government, or specific military and terroristic figures, but they also have a big impact on the citizens.

#### **3.1 THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN**

An example is the case of Afghanistan. In 1999 the United Nations Security Council slapped sanctions on the Taliban in reaction to al-Qaeda's bombings

of US embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. As part of the UN sanctions, Ariana Afghan Airlines was compelled to halt all international flights. Afghanistan's state-owned aircraft had been the principal mode of transportation for humanitarian aid and medical supplies entering the nation (Dorsey 2024). The financial assets of Afghanistan's central bank were blocked, making cash unavailable to the country's population. Worse, the 1999 UN sanctions coincided with an extreme drought in Afghanistan. Food insecurity increased dramatically when sanctions cut off the NGO food supply line and the humanitarian catastrophe deteriorated.

Women were particularly vulnerable as a result of the historic drought, severe cash and food shortages, and authoritarian Taliban-imposed laws that made it difficult for women to earn a living working outside the home (Fathollah-Nejad 2014). This perfect storm made it practically hard for women-led households to obtain the resources to buy the minimal food that was available. Two years after the UN sanctions were originally imposed, and less than a month after the al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001, the US military invaded Afghanistan with international support. It is estimated that 46,319 Afghan civilians have been killed since 2001, which only includes those killed as a direct result of armed conflict (Dorsey 2024). This is most likely an underestimate, because it does not include those died because of the sanctions imposed concurrently with drought, hunger, and conflict. Around the US invasion of Afghanistan, there was widespread discourse that presented Western engagement as a method to end the Taliban's terrible abuse of women. However, Western intervention, whether through sanctions or armed war, was often counterproductive to its goal of defending women (Dorsey 2024).

### **3.2 ANALYZING AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORTS**

The situation surrounding the effects of international sanctions on human rights is complex and multifaceted, with several aspects to consider.

According to the *2022-2023 report by Amnesty International*, there have been instances where sanctions and international responses have shown striking inconsistency and hypocrisy. An example is the differing responses of Western countries to crises in Ukraine compared to those in Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya. Notably, while Ukrainian refugees were welcomed openly in many European countries, refugees from other crisis regions did not receive the same treatment, highlighting issues of racism and deep-rooted discrimination.

Furthermore, Amnesty's analysis highlighted how sanctions can sometimes be applied selectively, depending on the political and economic interests of the imposing states. This selective approach questions the universality and effectiveness of international human rights norms, as some states can avoid condemnation for serious violations simply because they are of strategic or economic interest to certain powerful countries.

Amnesty International has highlighted what it sees as significant double standards in the global response to human rights crises, particularly in the context of sanctions and international reactions. Their concerns center on the international community's robust and swift response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which starkly contrasts with more muted or inconsistent actions towards other global crises.

The organization points out that the decisive actions taken against Russia, such as economic sanctions, international investigations into war crimes, and the open arms policy towards Ukrainian refugees, set a precedent for how massive human rights violations could be addressed (Ridgwell 2023). However, this level of response has not been consistently applied to other crises around the world, including in Palestine, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, leading to accusations of hypocrisy and double standards. Amnesty International has criticized the international community for its selective outrage and action, arguing that similar levels of solidarity, condemnation, and support should also be extended to other regions facing severe human rights abuses and humanitarian crises. For example, while millions of Ukrainian refugees were welcomed in Europe, individuals fleeing from Syria, Afghanistan, and other conflict zones

encountered harsher treatment and closed doors, highlighting a racial bias in asylum and refugee policies (Siddiqui 2023).

Moreover, the organization emphasizes that such disparities in response not only undermine the global human rights framework but also embolden countries with poor human rights records by showing that international condemnation and action can be evaded or ignored based on geopolitical considerations or international dynamics

In sum, Amnesty International calls for a renewed, consistent, and equitable approach to addressing human rights violations worldwide, suggesting that the international response to the Ukraine crisis could serve as a model for action in other situations. They argue for the universal application of human rights standards, devoid of political expediency or double standards, to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their nationality or the geopolitical interest of their homeland, receive equal protection and support in times of crisis.

### **3.3 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

Amnesty International also emphasized the role of companies in conflict situations, such as the use of their products or services in human rights violations. An example is the role of Meta in amplifying content against the Rohingya, facilitating the actions of the Myanmar military against this minority in 2017. The Amnesty international report “*The social atrocity: Meta and the right to remedy for the Rohingya*” (2022) explain how in Rakhine State, Myanmar, the security services launched a ruthless campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslim population starting in August 2017. In addition to raping and inflicting various forms of sexual assault against Rohingya women and girls, they also burned down hundreds of Rohingya communities and unlawfully slaughtered thousands of Rohingya, including small children. Over 700,000 Rohingya, which were more than half of the group residing in northern Rakhine State at the start of the crisis, were forced into neighboring Bangladesh by the violence.

Countless instances exist of Facebook posts that were made both before and after the 2017 massacres in Northern Rakhine State that targeted the Rohingya

people. Numerous UN agencies, non-governmental groups, and media outlets have documented a portion of the massive volume of anti-Rohingya propaganda that was shared on Facebook prior to and during the 2017 massacres. This content included encouragement to violence, discrimination, and genocide. Before August 2017, there was a lot of content on Facebook in Myanmar that propagated demeaning, hateful, and discriminatory sentiments towards the Rohingya, frequently depicting genocidal intent. A wide range of actors, including senior government and military officials, well-known civilian hate groups and figures, including radical Buddhist nationalist groups like Ma Ba Tha, as well as "news" pages, groups, and other accounts with sizable followings, posted this content, which encouraged and justified violence and discrimination against the Rohingya.

Overall, the issue of international sanctions and their impact on human rights requires careful and ongoing analysis, with a focus on respecting the universal principles of human rights and avoiding double standards and inconsistencies in the application of sanctions.

There is strong evidence that economic sanctions have worsened both the economic and human rights conditions in the countries they target (Lektzian and Mkrtchian 2021; Carneiro and Apolinario 2016). However, some researchers disagree with this connection. They argue that previous studies might have mistakes in their methods, due to the endogeneity problem, and suggest there is no link between sanctions and human rights issues (Gutmann, Neuenkirch, and Neumeier 2020). Other studies have found that economic sanctions can have positive effects on human rights in neighboring or similar countries (Peterson 2014; Carneiro 2014). This is because the negative consequences and serious troubles caused by sanctions make leaders in nearby countries more aware and cautious.



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